

No knockout blows: Peace River candidates discuss hot topics in campaign '04 [CA-AB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Peace River riding hopefuls took the opportunity to voice their views and intentions on some hot topics during Tuesday's all-candidates forum.

The forum featuring Conservative Charlie Penson, the NDP's Susan Thompson, Liberal Lyle Carlstrom and the Green Party's Ben Pettit, provided the media and public a chance to grill candidates face-to-face about issues.

Hosted by the Grande Prairie and District Chamber of Commerce at the Grande Prairie Inn, the forum drew approximately 250 audience members.

The topic of federally funded child care raised a few eyebrows and created a buzz throughout the audience. Each candidate responded to questions from the floor as to how their party plans to provide adequate child care for middle- and low-income families.

Carlstrom responded by telling a story about an older day care in Beaverlodge in need of additional funding, additional space and a new building. The constituents of Beaverlodge approached Carlstrom in hopes he'll persuade the federal government to pay attention to their application for funding.

"I will continue to advocate for them because that sort of situation should never occur where you have sub-standard day cares for children. Our party doesn't believe that tax cuts are the solution. Sometimes we have to invest government money into our young people to make sure they have the best possible start," said Carlstrom.

"The Green Party supports child care programs," said Pettit. "Raising benefit levels for parents under the employment insurance act, create tax incentives for businesses who implement flexible schedules and on-site child care, create a national network that links child care services across all three levels of government and fund local child care initiatives and facilities. That's (the party's) position."

Penson thinks day care should be an individual responsibility.

"I believe if the government were to get off the backs of working families they would have money, if they choose to work, to be able to have their children in day care and as far as having a certain standard, I don't have a problem with that," he said. "This government has been so heavily taxing Canadians that it's forced people to work. Now, if people choose to work they should choose what day-care system they want and they should pay their own way as we have to do in all aspects of life."

Thompson believes Canada needs a national day care system.

"I really believe that we need to offer choices to women. We need to give women a chance to have a career. I don't think we need to assume that the woman's place is in the home," said Thompson, who got the biggest crowd response of the night when she added she believes the place for more women is in the House of Commons.

"Child care costs can be extremely expensive, prohibitively expensive to the point where women actually have to stay home because they cannot afford child care," Thompson said. "We need a national child care system, there's no question."

- reprinted from the Herald-Tribune

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