



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*For Immediate release*

**Wednesday, September 16, 2009**

### **Board of Trade comments on Mayoral debate**

The St. John's Board of Trade hosted the three Mayoral candidates in a public forum to further inform the local electorate of the views and priorities of the people campaigning to lead the City.

"We all have a responsibility to be informed of issues that affect us, our families, our neighbours, and our employers because we are collectively a community," said Board Chair Bruce Templeton. "Our entire municipal issues campaign has been conceived and implemented to help build just that, an informed community."

Mayoral candidates Dennis O'Keefe, Ron Ellsworth, and Mark Wilson spent last night at the D.F. Cook Recital Hall answering questions from a panel and from the general public attending the event. Board of Trade representative Donna Stone posed three questions to candidates:

1. Will you commit to mil rate adjustments which are proportional between residents and businesses, and will you commit to dropping the mil rate enough to save all taxpayers from this potential windfall for the City?
2. What is your plan for the downtown, in terms of transit, parking, building and heritage, and economic revitalization?
3. Identify the single most important issue that you will need to address in your first 12 months as Mayor and your plan to address it.

The Board specifically asked the first question because members have been voicing their concerns about facing a potentially large increase in their municipal tax bill. Small businesses, for example, make up approximately 75 per cent of the Board of Trade's membership. The Board is calling on the next Council to ensure fairness in the tax system and ensure that every tax payer benefits from a lower mil rate by proportionally lowering the mil rate for both residents and businesses.

Mayoral candidates differed on their commitment to lowering mil rates proportionally and ensuring fairness for all tax payers; however, the Board will be advocating strongly and clearly to the successful candidate that this is a necessary step for the new Council.

The other two questions from panelist Donna Stone were voted on by members of the St. John's Board of Trade as the questions they most wanted to pose to Mayoral candidates, and some strong ideas came out in the answers.

“The Board of Trade urges the individual elected to not throw out any of the excellent ideas that all three candidates showed they had, simply because the other two were not elected,” said Mr. Templeton. “No one has the monopoly on good ideas. That was shown by the diversity of the more than 30 questions written by the audience, ranging from snow clearing to immigration to financial management to youth issues. We equally hope that the two unsuccessful candidates continue to put their energy into community initiatives and serve the city in various ways.”

“We urge people to exercise their right to vote, as it is the most direct way most people will participate in democracy,” said Mr. Templeton. “Everyone has a voice, everyone must use that voice and that way we will get the representation we want. Ballots are in people's homes – make sure you fill yours out and return it.”

The St. John's Board of Trade is a non-partisan, business advocacy organization that is the principal voice of business for over 700 members in the St. John's area. Its mission is to improve the local business climate, enhancing its members' ability to do business through advocacy and member services.

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