

NDP candidate meets with voters in Bancroft



By Nate Smelle

With the federal election fast approaching candidates across Canada have been busy professing their passion for politics to the people. As the New Democratic Party's (NDP) candidate in the Hastings-Lennox and Addington (HLA) riding Betty Bannon is ready to dedicate her time and energy to the welfare of the people and the country. On Monday, June 29, Bancroft This Week had the chance to catch up with Bannon at her meet-the-candidate event at A Place For The Arts in Bancroft.

A member of the Royal Canadian Legion for the last 31 years, Bannon says she was motivated to run after becoming angry with how the Conservative Party has repeatedly disrespected Veterans.

"I often get mad with how this government treats Canadians, but the straw that broke the camel's back is what they are doing to our veterans," she says.

"The changes to their pension and benefits are unacceptable. When they stood up in court and actually said that this government has no obligation to veterans...I nearly lost my mind."

Since taking office with a slight majority after the last election, she says, the Harper government has been waging a war against Veterans, individual rights and privacy, public service workers and the environment.

A long-time activist for the working class, Bannon is the first woman to serve as national president of the Union of Taxation Employees—a position she held for 12 years. She also has more than 39 years of experience working with the Canada Revenue Agency.

Pointing to scandalous track record of the Harper government Bannon says the NDP is the only party who has consistently stood up for all Canadians. If elected she promises to do everything she can to improve the quality of life of working class people in the HLA riding. The financial betterment of the middle-class is at the core of the NDP's platform, she says. To make this objective a reality, Bannon says the NDP will enact a Federal minimum wage of \$15 an hour.

The Conservative's plan differs in that it would continue to give tax breaks to the wealthiest Canadians, says Bannon, while letting low income families, senior citizens and others living on a fixed income suffer. The current Conservative government's decision to raise the limit for the Tax Free Savings Account (TFSA) to a yearly maximum of \$10,000 from \$5,500 is a good example of this.

"This will be beneficial to only the wealthier citizens. The stats do not reflect a need for this change other than to give the wealthy a tax savings paid for by the rest of us," Bannon says. "Forty per cent of those eligible to contribute to a TFSA do so and only 6.7 per cent of those contribute to the maximum and that figure is dropping each year. Almost doubling the TFSA limits will cost in lost taxes, yet 93 per cent of Canadians get no benefit from it but will end up paying for this tax shelter."

When parents are having to choose not to work because the cost of childcare is too high, Bannon believes it is unfair and unwise for the government to provide bonuses to the rich while neglecting those who need it most. If elected the NDP will ensure that there are one million affordable childcare spots at a cost of no more than \$15 a day.

Another important issue that Bannon says needs to be addressed this election is the environment. She sees the beautiful lakes and rivers surrounding Bancroft as a fundamentally important component of the local economy. Not protecting them as the valuable

resource they are, she says would be foolish. Under Harper's guidance the Conservatives have systematically dismantled environmental protection in Canada, Bannon says this need to change.

?They are part of the reason that the tourists come to the area,? says Bannon.

?They are bountiful with fish and provide many hours of enjoyment by everyone who lives or visits the area. However, prior to the current Conservative government there were 2.5 million lakes and rivers protected by legislation. Now, there are only 159 protected in the entire country. Proposals for big pipelines and interprovincial power line projects will no longer have to prove they won't damage or destroy navigable waterways in Canada.?

The new navigation protection act put in place by the Conservatives replaces one of the country's oldest laws, the Navigable Waters Protection Act. Established in 1882 this legislation was designed so that no one could block, alter or destroy any water deep enough to float a canoe without federal approval. Bannon says the new legislation put in place by the Conservatives does little to nothing to protect Canadian waters.

Stepping up to protect the environment, Bannon says the NDP will restore protection to our valuable lakes and rivers. The party will also take action to fight climate change, which she says is a very important issue that the Harper government has never taken seriously.

?The current Conservative government has ignored the effects of Climate Change, muzzled the scientists, ignored fact-based information provided to them and is virtually doing nothing on this issue. Ignoring this issue will not make it go away,? says Bannon.

?The NDP knows and acknowledges that Climate Change is real and progressive solutions must be found. Our carbon footprint must be diminished to make any headway on this issue. We must find ways to be a greener and cleaner Canada. We will work with the Provinces and Territories, as well as, municipalities like Bancroft to make this happen. We will listen to the Scientists.?

Before voting in the upcoming election this fall, Bannon asks that voters throughout the riding do one thing...that being to question the voting record of this riding's current MP Daryl Kramp to see if it fits with what they value personally as Canadians.