



The University Students' Council Presents:

Interviews with the London North Centre Federal Election Candidates

Peter Fragiskatos

Carol Dyck

Susan Truppe

German Gutierrez

Please note that responses have been shortened. For full transcripts, please contact communications@westernusc.ca. For more information on voting locations for students, please visit www.westernvotes.ca.



Peter Fragiskatos


Liberal

What are your thoughts on youth apathy and how do you think you'll address youth voter turnout?

Let's take a look at the issue of apathy in general. Yes, perhaps young people are not voting in high numbers, the data certainly does suggest that, but that does not mean that young people are apathetic. Young people care about their community, they just have a different way of expressing themselves. Voting is one way to express a view, but it's not the only way. I know that Western and campuses across this country are home to vibrant student presences. I've had the chance to volunteer with a number of non-profits in this city and I constantly come across students from Western and the affiliates who are interested in making London a better place, whether it's students volunteering around issues that relate to homelessness, to literacy, to mental health. I've met students in each of those areas trying to make a difference. So I think this idea that students are apathetic really needs to be questioned.

How do you see this particular government interacting directly with youth? Do you think young people see government to be relevant to their interests?

I'm disappointed with the approach taken by Mr. Harper and the Conservatives – they have not shown themselves to be terribly open to youth. You have to actually engage. There are a few things we suggest as a party in terms of the policy making process. Mr. Trudeau has talked about young people serving in an advisor capacity. There would be a group of youth who would give him advice as a prime minister and we're not seeing that right now. Trudeau himself has worked with young people. He was a teacher, but he's worked with young people in other capacities so I think he's very serious when he says things like this. Beyond that, at the local level I want to make sure that I'm the kind of Member of Parliament who is reaching out with the University Students' Council. You're the university in my riding so I have the responsibility to do that, but there's also the Youth Advisory Council that's been working with city councillors here in London. I've met with some of the youth counsellor to discuss issues and get a sense of where they were coming from. I want to make sure that continues. The Youth Advisory Council should be allowed to speak with not just municipal politicians but also provincial and federal politicians to give them a sense of what matters to young people in this area.

In your opinion what role does the federal government play in post-secondary education?

It plays a very important role. There's the issue of the transfer payments – let's make sure that we have a strong economy to make sure that transfer payments given to the province can remain strong and sustainable. Beyond that, we have to make sure that education is affordable and transfer payments are part of that. On a personal level, I think that the way loan structures currently operate are a bit unfair. I look at countries like Australia where the repayment of loans is done according to income. I don't think we can expect a recent graduate having a tough time finding a job to repay a loan in a big way. Conversely, if someone has landed a job on Bay Street there's a chance they can probably contribute more towards loan repayment. I'm thinking specifically of the Canadian Student Loan, which is under the purview of the Canadian Government. Beyond that, we have to make sure that after students graduate they find

meaningful employment and I'm not talking about jobs – I'm talking about careers. We have to make sure that the youth unemployment rate is dealt with. It's currently at 13% and it's as high as it was in the early 1980s. This is not acceptable. We're committed to a plan where after their four years of school we would have 40,000 positions open for young people. That's largely through the Canada summer jobs programs by increasing funding to that and also by opening positions for students pursuing degrees in business, engineering, mathematics and related areas. We have specific policies that would help employers cover a quarter of the cost up to \$5,000 to provide incentive for hiring students.

How do you and your party plan to improve the economy or what problems you can already identify that you'd like to move forward on if elected?

We want to invest in infrastructure. In a declining economy the only way you can move forward is if governments take bold steps to climb out of recession. This means looking at the interest rate, which is at a historic low level and our infrastructure has not seen significant investment on a national level since the 1960s. We've called for a 10 year plan that would see a hundred billion dollars put towards improving roads, bridges, transit networks, facilities for seniors, for child care, and the construction of affordable housing. This infrastructure plan matches what students have been pushing for at Western and across the country, which is transit. I went to Western and nothing has changed since I graduated back in the early 2000s. Buses are as packed today as they were back then and I remember being passed by buses. It was an absolute nightmare. Transit reform is on the books for London right now as the result of huge community engagement and a real democratic process. Let's allow Londoners to decide which particular form of transit we're going to go with and the federal government can play a role in this by helping with the costs.

I want to go to Ottawa for many reasons, but one of the primary reasons is to secure transit funding for this city. It's outrageous that in July Calgary received 1.5 billion dollars in transit funding and the conservatives have done nothing, absolutely nothing, to steer transit funding through London. I know my opponent Ms. Truppe has told stakeholders in this city that transit is not her priority or her party's priority. In fact, she's on record as saying that the federal government has no role in helping municipalities with transit funding which is absolutely false. Less congestion means greater economic productivity because goods get to market. Of course these things cost money but they're investment, they're not expenses. An investment is something that there is return on and there's a huge return on investment when it comes to transit. In a declining economy this is our only option if we're serious about generating revenue. As the other parties have said, their primary focus when it comes to the economy is balancing the budget. Balanced budgets are very important, but if you don't have revenue coming in you will balance the budget by making cuts.

Do you have any comments about the demographic makeup of post-secondary institutions currently?

Diversity is a very important thing. We have to make sure that students who are of diverse backgrounds feel comfortable in a university setting. There are many services on campus geared towards this and they need to be better supported. Students who have come from overseas or who are born here but are of diverse backgrounds need to feel at home. When I was a student I belonged to the Greek Student Society at Western and I've acted as a faculty advisor for them on campus. There's so much diversity on the campus and I've been proud to be a part of that as a student, as a faculty member.



Carol Dyck



green
PARTY OF CANADA

What are your thoughts on youth apathy and how do you think you'll address youth voter turnout?

My experience so far has been that there isn't a lot of youth apathy. I have had more youth reach out to me than your average middle-aged person. In terms of youth engagement, one of the problems does have to do with current electoral system, so first past the post. You're going to have a lot more youth caring about social welfare issues so, and I'm generalizing, leaning more towards your NDP and Green candidates, but they might feel their voices aren't going to count because of the way it is set up. The other thing is when youth do vote and you do get a Green Candidate then the older generation blames the youth by saying "see what happens, they don't know what they're doing or who they're voting for." Their voices aren't counting like they have legitimate concerns. That is going to contribute to youth apathy if they're thinking no one is listening anyways. Issues do matter to youth. I'm also going to a talk at the children's museum for grade fives and, although they can't vote, I understand that you can actually get involved at a young age just to prepare kids and get them excited when they do reach eighteen.

How do you see this particular government interacting directly with youth? Do you think young people see government to be relevant to their interests?

At the moment I don't think the government is doing a very good job of interacting with youth. Knowing what I studied, international relations at the University of British Columbia, I definitely felt like the government wasn't interacting with us well. We had situations on campus where we protested and the response by the government to our peaceful protest was to bring in snipers. That is not good interaction with students - that's saying you're not allowed to have a voice and have concerns. We were considered security threats and this seems to be continuing on with Bill C-51. There's that and there's generally ignoring the concerns about underemployment and unemployment. I know the troubles of underemployment. I got three masters degrees and each time I didn't get to use my degree, I sold wedding dresses or I worked in a coffee shop. You have very qualified graduates going out there and taking a job at Foot Locker while also trying to volunteer and get internships. Also, the fact that federal government still has unpaid internships is not addressing the problem.

In your opinion what role does the federal government play in post-secondary education?

The federal government should be doing a lot more to promote and boast post-secondary education but it's more than just that. We have a really educated population so it's about creating jobs after that so you don't have to go from undergraduate to master's to PHD and still not find a job. Free tuition would go a long way, debt forgiveness would go a long way, skill-building will go a long way towards promoting a more educated population but also streamlining it and having ideas towards moving the country in a direction that you want. This includes more opportunities to work with green technology and skills training for green manufacturing.

There are many ways we can save money and then streamline that towards post-secondary education. First, cutting subsidies to fossil fuel industries will save us about one billion dollars and that money could go towards skills training. Putting money into municipalities to hire youth and offering opportunities to

actually to have valuable work experience. There is a plan to put in legislation so you no longer have unfunded internships at the federal level and then we would work with provincial governments to also do away with unpaid internships at the provincial level.

How do you and your party plan to improve the economy or what problems you can already identify that you'd like to move forward on if elected?

First of all, we would take away the expansion of the tar sands. That is absolutely the wrong way to go because it is an over reliance on a primary resource. We are not even refining it, we are shipping out as diluted bitumen which is extremely dangerous. At least refine the oil we have at home so we create more jobs we are not exporting jobs and we're also not shipping diluted bitumen. Money taken from oil divesting and cutting the oil subsidies will go towards building bridges, roads and expanding our broadband. The current government is focusing way too much on primary resources but to really stimulate our economy we need to put more money into research and development and more money into green technologies, reducing our energy costs so we can have a more streamlined, stronger economy.

Do you have any comments about the demographic makeup of post-secondary institutions currently?

I would certainly like to see more First Nations students in universities as well as Inuit and Metis, as that is an issue that is particularly important to me. You want to offer education that is also culturally sensitive but it is about striking a delicate balance, but I would like to see more opportunities for First Nation students. I also think there can be better male-to-female ratios and that should tie in more opportunities for lower income individuals. That will really bring a lot to the dialogue in classrooms if you start having people coming from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. I think that free tuition will really help that, and I think it will help bring minorities to universities because in a lot of situations a lot of minorities, especially if they are newcomers to Canada, will be at a lower socioeconomic level.

Is there anything that you would like to add?

Students should know about proportional representation and that the NDP and Greens are the only ones supporting proportional representation. This is important to note because students should know the electoral system needs to change because we can't continue on with this first-past-the-post system. Too many people don't end up voting because they think it doesn't matter because "my vote isn't going to count." What we really need is to increase voter turnout and the only way to do that is to make every single vote count. If we had a mixed proportional system, maybe along the lines of Germany, it might really benefit everyone. There would be more representation in parliament representing minorities and women, and the more voices the more dialogue we have. The other thing they need to know is that the green party is the only party that does not whip votes. I am running my own election and I can say and do what I want. I'm allowed to say what I want because Elizabeth May says that for a parliament to be effective you need to go on the strengths of the individual candidates and what they know. You should never vote against what your constituents want just because that is what your head of the party wants. Elizabeth May would not be my boss, she would never be my boss. My boss would be the people who for voted me: the riding. They are the ones that are in charge of me.



Susan Truppe



What are your thoughts on youth apathy and how do you think you'll address youth voter turnout?

When I knock on the doors of student homes, I asked some of them whether they had voted before to see if I could get them engaged in voting and the majority of them had voted. These were third or fourth year students who would have had opportunities to vote federally or provincially. I think it is important to engage the youth to make sure they are interested, because they really should have a say – whether you are youth or not. It's hard to complain about something if you haven't voted - you almost don't have the right to complain if you haven't voted. I think everyone should go out and do some research on each candidate or party. I also think what your council has done to engage students is great. We try to get them engaged here or on campus, and knocking on doors so that we can talk to them, because if we don't we're not hearing their concerns.

How do you see this particular government interacting directly with youth? Do you think young people see government to be relevant to their interests?

Students are very articulate with such bright minds. They know what the government is doing or not doing so I think it's very important for government to interact and engage with youth. I've held many round tables, I've had more of them than any other MP on my side of the house, so I've had lots of different students at the round tables because as parliamentary secretary I've also had round tables regarding violence against women and girls. We had one for entrepreneurs, skilled trades and how to get more women into engineering. I think it's important that government talk to not only adults regarding the topic of discussion but also to engage the students and I've had at least one or two students at my round tables and I think that is important. Sometimes they come up with better ideas than the other people. They think of things out of the box that adults with experience don't think of.

In your opinion what role does the federal government play in post-secondary education?

Post-secondary education is important to get jobs here or anywhere. We've provided tax credits as well as the savings programs for parents and I think that is very helpful for a lot of families. The government has a big role in terms of savings because it is very expensive and not everyone can go to school. The government has a role in terms of making sure there are tax credits so that it's not that expensive. I don't think it will ever be that the government pays for tuition even though the Green party has said that they were going to pay, but only for certain incomes. We should all do our part, as we just did with doubling the credits, to make sure that it is affordable - both federally and provincially. We'll also provide programs for training. We have a lot of apprenticeship programs and grants, and we've made a lot of programs for matching youth with youth with employers. I think it is up to us to come up with different programs to find new jobs. We don't actually create the jobs, but we create the environment for those jobs.

How do you and your party plan to improve the economy or what problems you can already identify that you'd like to move forward on if elected?

We're keeping taxes low, which is huge. People ask me "how is this going to affect my paycheque? Is this going to affect the economy?" I explain to them that we're the government that has never raised taxes. We've reduced the taxes almost 200 times, especially during the recession. If the Liberals were to put the payroll tax in, for example, most of the businesses are small businesses where money isn't fluid. If that happens, then you'll have a bunch of people out of jobs and then they won't be spending money either. Overall, the economy is doing very well. London's unemployment has gotten a lot better. I think it is because of our government and the Prime Minister. Regardless of whether people like us or like him he has done a great job for Canada. We had a big deficit in 2008 but we did keep in mind balancing the budget once the recession was done. The budget is balanced now, which makes for a good economy and there are jobs out there to be had.

Do you have any comments about the demographic makeup of post-secondary institutions currently?

Western is currently one of the top schools as far as international students go. It is so great that people see Canada's institutions as so great that they actually come here as opposed to other countries. Not only are they paying tuition but they are renting apartments, they're buying food, spending money and stimulating the economy. We want them to stay here after graduation. They are spending money and stimulating the economy and a lot of times we have shortages in certain areas - and it could be very helpful if we can get them to stay.



German Gutierrez



NDP

What are your thoughts on youth apathy and how do you think you'll address youth voter turnout?

Rather than youth apathy, what I see is a lack of consultation with youth and a total disregard for the opinions and perceptions of youth that is both frustrating and disappointing. As I have always done during my more than two decades in the classrooms of colleges and universities, I will promote and engage in meaningful conversations with the young Canadians of London North Centre, whose voices are not only invaluable but also caring, inspiring on many occasions and most often very engaged.

How do you see this particular government interacting directly with youth? Do you think young people see government to be relevant to their interests?

Ideally, government is of the people, by the people, for the people. This sentence has always reflected the full strength of what democracy is all about. As an age segment of the population, youth are and must be an essential part of government. That is why the NDP has so many young members of parliament. Like so many other essential elements of growth and discovery during the human journey through life, government becomes relevant through participation. As our many youthful members of parliament bring their ideas and their initiatives for the participation of the younger generations we will see meaningful, innovative and practical new invitations from our party to this long ignored sector of our community to participate in our democratic processes.

In your opinion what role does the federal government play in post-secondary education?

A more educated national population in all sectors of economic performance, including health, science, technology, industry, finance, transportation and the housing industry, will lead to greater development, improved performance, and greater advances in the areas of infrastructure, culture, science and technology. A more educated population must be a priority for any government. In the case of Ontario and London specifically, post-secondary education has been a matter for the attention and engagement of provincial governments. That being said, it is important to understand that during the last decade of Conservative administration, the provinces and territories in Canada have had a very poor and lacking partner in the federal government and thus many visions, concrete plans and investments in potential shared Federal-Provincial initiatives have been lost.

Today, under Liberal administration, Ontario's post-secondary education system relies heavily on burdening students with debt and providing families with tax benefits that are more valuable for higher income families. The federal government has a much larger spending and revenue generating capacity, and as a good partner of the provinces, it should play a much larger role in ensuring that everyone has access to a college or university education in Ontario. Through proper compliance and a number of progressive changes to the tax system, the province could generate an additional \$9.5 billion annually that could be dedicated exclusively to education. Investing in education is not only about economic prosperity, but also a key component of creating a more just and equitable society. I am firmly convinced that post-secondary education plays a fundamental role in a Nation's ability to address inequality.

How do you and your party plan to improve the economy or what problems you can already identify that you'd like to move forward on if elected?

In a nutshell, the NDP proposal contemplates a direct platform that will kick-start the economy and at the same time build much needed infrastructure. The plan starts by cutting taxes for Canada's job creators by reducing the small business tax from 11% to 9% and is then followed up with concrete measures that include supporting innovation and investment in companies that are creating jobs in Canada, with an early focus on the aerospace, automotive, forestry and mining sectors. Creating additional immediate jobs and building our economy with \$1.5 billion per year in new infrastructure funding to municipalities to fix roads, bridges and water treatment systems. Investing another \$1.3 billion per year in a national strategy to improve transit and reduce gridlock. Supporting regional economic development in support of Municipal development. Helping retrofit over 50,000 homes and apartment buildings Canada-wide and investing in flood mitigation and disaster preparedness.

Do you have any comments about the demographic makeup of post-secondary institutions currently?

Canadian post-secondary institutions should be more open to a wide-range of the population that is currently excluded from the opportunity to engage in furthering their education. Every dollar spent on post-secondary education generates \$1.36 for the Canadian Economy according to estimates from the Conference Board of Canada. Canada's post-secondary institutions generate over 55 billion dollars of economic activity and generate close to 680,000 direct and indirect jobs across the nation. University degree holders earn one hundred and thirty eight dollars for every one hundred earned by a person who has a high school diploma. The estimates of the enormous economic movement do not include the economic impact generated by the potential commercialization of research and development conducted by these institutions, which could lead to great direct benefits to the surrounding communities that are impacted by the presence of these colleges and universities.