



Fantino a no-show at Vaughan debate

By Caroline Grech

November 24, 2010

Many of the more than 300 residents who attended a Vaughan byelection debate hosted by The Vaughan Citizen Tuesday night left feeling disappointed that the perceived front-runner didn't turn up.

Instead, federal Conservative candidate Julian Fantino was attending a one-year memorial service for a family member at Villa Colombo, a long-term facility in Vaughan.

The service, which started at 6:30 p.m., was in honour of residents who died the previous year.

Mr. Fantino had participated in an in-studio Rogers TV debate earlier in the day, but told a Citizen reporter earlier in the day why he couldn't attend the public debate that evening.

"It's a very simple issue. There's a previous, long-established commitment that involves my family and other people that are attending a memorial mass, not only for my in-laws, but (there's) an anniversary involved here that friends of ours at a seniors residence where my wife and I and my family volunteer and have volunteered for a long time," Mr. Fantino said. "It's unfortunate, but that's the way it is."

But many Vaughan citizens, some of whom said they attended specifically to see Mr. Fantino debate the issues, were unhappy with his decision.

Resident Peter Laroque was one of the disappointed.

"I've lived here for years and it's been a Liberal stronghold," he said. "I want to see Fantino, see what he's all about."

"Maybe it's time for change, but I don't know. I'm disappointed."

Meanwhile, Mr. Fantino took aim at his critics, saying he would never judge others on their priorities.

"My critics can exploit the situation all they want, but I can tell you something I will never ever do, and that's get into bantering and passing judgment on others people's priorities in life. This happens to be a priority for my family and that's what I'm going to be doing."

Federal Liberal candidate Tony Genco told the packed house that he was supposed to take his daughter, Marilena, to the Justin Bieber concert that night for her 13th birthday, but he opted to attend the debate instead with her blessing and in the interests of respecting the democratic process.

Mr. Genco's statement received loud cheers from the crowd.

Other invited candidates, including NDP candidate Kevin Bordian and Green Party candidate Claudia Rodriguez-Larrain, offered their views on issues such as the role of MPs, the lack of federal government presence in Vaughan and the declining income of new Canadians, among other issues.

This article is for personal use only courtesy of yorkregion.com - a division of Metroland Media Group Ltd.