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## DAVENPORT DOES THE MATH

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BY TAWNYA ZWICKER | **BLOGGER**

Writer, Davenport

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**THE MARK**

"I have not had the opportunity to do the math. My first priority has been getting out and meeting people, talking to people," stated Liberal candidate Cristina Martins to a rousing chorus of "shame" from the 200 plus people in the crowd at the September 29th all-candidates debate at the Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre.

Martins was responding to a simple challenge from the Bread and Bricks Whychwood Action Group to determine how much it actually costs to live modestly in the city of Toronto.

"We wanted the candidates in Davenport to understand that social assistance and disability payments are inadequate compared to the actual cost of living," explained Mark Woodnut as he and other members of the action group set up an information booth and protested outside the debate. "An average one-bedroom apartment is \$1,000 per month and food is about \$250. Yet, people on social assistance receive only \$593 per month and those on disability take home \$1,053 per month."

Poverty is not an issue foreign to Davenport. On average, salaries here are considerably less than elsewhere on the city. The number of people relying on The Stop, a local food bank, rose by 30 per cent in just two short years. The riding is also diverse - with both crushing poverty and high incomes, marginalized groups and privileged people living side by side. Gentrification is slowly creeping into Davenport, prompting long-time residents to wonder if there will still be a place for them as change comes and the upwardly mobile and middle class people come shopping for affordable homes, driving up property values and prices.

But, getting back to the math. Both the NDP candidate, Jonah Schein, and Green candidate, Frank de Jong, did the math, much to the relief of the debate attendees (who showed their appreciation through cheers and encouraging words). De Jong felt that, "at least \$2,000 per month is needed to live a dignified life in Toronto. Two thousand dollars would pay rent, allows one to eat healthy food and pays for a rare, small indulgence like a movie rental." But, according to de Jong, the issue goes much deeper than just the numbers. He is concerned that social assistance and disability payments don't allow people to better their lives because they're busy trying to survive, let alone thrive.

Schein, with his background as a social worker in Davenport, used his first-hand experience to complete the survey, agreed with de Jong. But he also added, after Martins trotted out that the Liberals raised social assistance rates seven times since 2009 that, "You can't spit in people's faces and tell them it's raining. It's disrespectful of the people of Davenport when you (Martins) come here and say things are better now. Just saying things are better doesn't make them better. It's disrespectful to come here and lie to people." While the Liberals have indeed raised rates since 2003, they have yet to increase payments up to the level that were cut in 1999 under the Harris Conservative government.

Unfortunately, the PC candidate, Kirk Russell did not participate in the debate, so he was unable to weigh

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in on the issues facing Davenport residents. His decision not to participate was noted at the beginning of the debate, to jeers and shouts of "shame" from attendees. Schein made it a point to note Russell's absence, stating, "Conservative social assistance cuts ensure that Conservatives will never get elected in Davenport." If the cheers of the crowd that supported that comment were any indication, Schein is looking like the one to beat.

Whether it's about the issues, the Leaders or the voting process, Speak Your Mind to get the conversation started.



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