

Fringe candidates target Guelph seat in elections

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GUELPH — Karen Levenson doesn't expect to win the Guelph seat in the upcoming federal election.

When she ran in this riding in 2008, only 27 people — or one tenth of one per cent of those who went to the polls — cast a ballot for her.

But this year, she'll be at it again. "Yes, I will be running," the local candidate for the Animal Alliance Environment Voters of Canada Party confirmed Monday, adding she plans to "bring up issues that most likely will not be discussed by the other parties," such as animal rights.

Levenson is one of six so-called fringe candidates who ran in 2008 with little funding and often less hope of winning. Some of them will run again ahead of the May 2, 2011, election.

For Levenson, an activist with the group Animal Alliance, running for office is a way to skirt election laws restricting the activities of third-party interest groups to have a bigger influence on the vote. In 2008, for example, she had a hand in Liberal Party candidate Frank Valeriote's decision to take a stand against the seal hunt, she said.

At the same time, Levenson chipped away at the Conservative platform — something she intends to do again.

"The last thing Guelph needs, the last thing the environment needs, the last thing wildlife and farm animals need, is a Conservative candidate," she said Monday.

Reached Monday, perennial fringe candidate John Turmel said he has not yet decided whether to run this year in his home riding of Brantford or in Guelph, which he called a "slightly more democratic" constituency.

"I got treated more fairly there than I ever did in Brantford, so that's one plus, even though I did get taken away by the police a couple of times," he said. "But in Brantford I got arrested four times, and in Guelph I only got arrested two times."

During the 2008 election, Turmel and Marijuana Party candidate Kornelis Kleverling were escorted from a local high school after showing up uninvited to a candidates' debate. Kleverling, who finished fifth in Guelph with 172 votes in the last election, will not run this year because he is away in Thailand, party leader Blair Longley said.



Turmel considers Guelph candidacy. 2008 Guelph Green Party candidate Mike Nagy listens as Independent candidate John Turmel speaks at an all-candidates debate at Our Lady of Lourdes High School in 2008. Mercury file photo Source: Mercury file photo

Turmel is said to hold the world record for number of elections contested and lost, 72, and has never been in public office. Asked about his top concerns heading into the 2011 decision, he said he believes fallout from damaged nuclear power plants in Japan is irradiating the west coast of Canada, and the only way to protect people is to legalize marijuana, which he said contains anti-cancer agents.

"Within the next year, we're going to see a lot of miscarriages and child deaths, and a real upsurge in cancers," he said, adding he would like to "make the Bank of Canada work like PayPal" and have it give out interest-free loans.

After collecting 159 votes in 2008, Erin resident Philip Bender will once again be the Libertarian Party of Canada candidate in Guelph.

"It's not likely that we are going to be elected," Bender admitted. "See, I'm not a skilled politician. A skilled politician would have a spin to put on that."

He said he intends to put the libertarian philosophy on the table, "exposing people to it through the election process."

But it's getting harder for fringe parties to survive, the Marijuana Party's Longley said.

Due to changes to election financing rules instituted in 2004, parties that win less than two per cent of the popular vote now run their campaigns at a loss.

"We're allowed to survive, but we couldn't possibly grow," Longley said. "Money's the mother's milk to politics. It's the oxygen to the fuel."

The party had more than 70 candidates in the 2000 and 2004 elections, but that number has plummeted in succeeding elections. Longley said the party might have just four candidates this year, adding "all the small parties are in the same predicament as us."

After the nomination process closes on Monday, April 11, Elections Canada will publish a complete list of candidates for the Guelph riding.

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