

MIRANET Annual General Meeting: March 2, 2011

2010 Municipal Election Subcommittee Report

Delivered by Ivan Sack: Past-President, WLPCA

MIRANET's Municipal Election Committee was very active during the lead up to the October 25, 2010 Mississauga municipal election with a total of 12 representatives active in various capacities. As an organization of volunteers committed to being non-partisan, our objective, simply stated, was to help increase voter awareness of, and interest in the campaign and the platforms which the candidates were advancing.

An average of only about 24% of eligible Mississauga voters cast ballots in each of the past seven municipal elections. This was substantially below the levels of voter participation in provincial and federal elections during this same period.

One of MIRANET's biggest goals was therefore to increase the level of voter turnout during Mississauga's last municipal election. While a number of reasons explain why this happened, we were very pleased to see that 34% of eligible voters cast ballots.

The committee's first thought with regard to its actions in the lead up to the October election was to approach all candidates for mayor, city councillor, and school board trustee. We thought that we might post their election platforms on our website and also host a series of debates across the city. Given the large number of candidates running for office, and the time required to approach and follow up with each candidate, we therefore opted instead to encourage our member associations to hold their own local debates with Council and trustee candidates and, working with Rogers Cable TV, to host a city-wide mayoral TV debate.

We are pleased that many of our member associations chose to hold their own all-candidate Council and trustee debates, or to do this jointly with neighbouring associations. Given the general absence of all candidates debates across the city, these events were well attended with attendees expressing thanks to the organizers for the opportunity to meet the candidates.

The mayoral TV debate was taped on October 5th in front of a live audience at UTM. This 2 hour programme was subsequently rebroadcast seven times prior to the October 25 election, which meant that a significant cross-section of Mississauga ultimately had the opportunity to view it.

Before I continue, our committee would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support we received from UTM and, in particular, its offer that we hold our debate in its Council Chamber. UTM's involvement brought added credibility to our initiative and I am glad that Deep was here tonight to receive our thanks.

To the extent possible we sought to have a serious Mayoral debate on such themes as: transportation, neighbourhoods, development, business & employment, public spaces, social supports, environment, governance, fiscal management, and regional government issues.

One of the questions which attracted the most attention was that which concerned the creation of the position of Deputy Mayor. All candidates, including the winner, agreed that this position should be created, with the Mayor McCallion mentioning a task force to deal with this issue at

Council's November 24, 2010 meeting. We are also of the view that, as many other large city councils have done, Mississauga City Council should designate one of its members as Budget Chief.

To ensure fairness in the debate we did not consult any candidate with regard to its format. All 17 candidates were sent identical information packets and all asked to confirm their participation by a pre-set date, and time. They were each also asked to e-mail us their biographies and maximum 500-word platform statements for posting on our website.

Six candidates chose to participate in the debate with another six opting to not participate in the debate but to post their platforms on our website.

All candidate questions prior to the debate were considered by the committee with our answers then e-mailed simultaneously back to all candidates.

We wanted a real debate - a debate where the candidates not only recited their positions, but where they were also expected to challenge one another.

The thought was that this would not only make the debate more interesting, but more importantly, would give the TV viewer a better sense of how candidates reacted under pressure, and when challenged to defend their positions. From an internal housekeeping perspective, our committee also wanted to model and test an approach which we intend to use should we host other political debates – including a Mayoral debate in 2014.

To give all candidates the opportunity to challenge one another, our format included a round-robin series of mini-debates between subsets of the candidates – 3 candidates at a time and in different combinations on topics drawn by lot. Questions which we had not seen were also asked by UTM Political Science students.

While MIRANET was the sponsor, organizer and manager of this debate, we want again to express our thanks to Rogers Cable TV which produced and distributed the debate, and again to UTM.

I need not tell you that we had a mixed bag of candidates for mayor. Some were experienced and serious while others appeared more intent upon self-aggrandizement and upon disrupting the event with endless and pointless questions. With particular recognition to our debate moderator, Dorothy Tomiuk, we not only persevered, but overcame. We were very pleased by the extensive coverage which the debate received from local and national media.

The *Toronto Star* said the debate made for 'a healthier campaign' while the *National Post* described the event as a 'rare and welcome televised debate'.

In addition to the October municipal campaign, this committee also made a representation to City Council on Democratic Participation and Renewal, as presented by Don McVie.

In his April 14, 2010 presentation, Don spoke to a report which had been prepared by the City of Vaughan's Task Force on Democratic Participation and Renewal. In particular this task force urged that Vaughn invest more resources in promoting the election process and, perhaps

most importantly, that the city make a greater effort to explain itself to its citizens. This is particularly relevant in Mississauga where many have little understanding of the distinction between city and regional responsibilities, for example.

Even though the October election is over, MIRANET's Election Committee will continue to be operational during the coming year. In particular, we intend to look at such issue as campaign financing, and the advantages and disadvantages of Internet voting.

With a provincial election to be held October 6, 2011, we intend to consider how we might use the experience gained with our Mayoral Debate to perhaps host debates with candidates running in Mississauga's six provincial ridings.

Thank you.

Roger Coote
Andrew Gassmann
Mike Douglas
Simi Kapur
Don McVie
George Podbereski
Ivan Sack
Sue Shanly
Michael Spicer
John Walmark
Alan Willis
Dorothy Tomiuk