

Don Durant

He/Him • Saint John Lancaster • NDP

Candidate #10

1. Why are you running in this election?

I'm running in this election because in a number of different aspects of my life I have filled a demographic that I don't feel is properly being represented in Fredericton. I am not only LGBTQ but I grew up living in poverty. I work in the public service sector in healthcare. I also am married to an individual who is working in the education sector. So that's just a few of the different demographics that, in my life, I have fit into that I don't feel are properly being respected, that I don't feel are properly being listened to. And I also don't feel that we are properly represented by individuals who have lived experience in the same situations that myself and many people in our community lived through. So there comes a time when they say you can only complain for so long without actually taking action. So at this point I feel that it's time that I stood up and made a statement and my statement was to go out for leadership.

2. Describe how the time living in your riding has informed your qualifications as a candidate.

So I'm running for Saint John Lancaster and I grew up in my riding. I grew up in between lower West Saint John and Fundy Heights. And then as I got older, I moved away for a little bit, but then when I came back, I moved back into Fundy Heights. I now live Upper West and throughout all my experiences living in the West side or in Lancaster I've seen some absolutely fantastic development, both in business and in the population, but one thing that I've really experienced living in this riding as an adult and as somebody who is, what I would like to consider more informed of the issues than when I was a teenager, or definitely more focused on youth issues, is that there is a large portion of our population that struggle day to day. And that's one thing that I've learned, and one thing that I've been able to become more aware of, as someone living in the riding is that there's a lot of things that could be made better with very simple decisions and very simple solutions and that is one of the main things that I've learned and one of the main things that I've been able to experience being in the riding.

3. Describe how your time living in New Brunswick has informed your qualifications as a candidate.

So I've had the lucky opportunity to be able to live elsewhere in Canada for short periods of time. So I've experienced different provinces and different cities both large and small, bigger and smaller than Saint John. Living in New Brunswick has really put into perspective how much we have, how much of a community we have, how much of a population that is dedicated to one another. And it's something that you don't experience anywhere else, but also it's something that you don't feel the passion anywhere else. One thing about New Brunswick that has particularly taught me is that kindness goes a long way, and that being an active member of your community can make a huge difference in a population as small as New Brunswick.

4. How does your experience (ie. education, lived experience, workplace) contribute to your qualifications as a candidate?

Well, as I mentioned before one thing that I have experienced over the past 10 years is working in the healthcare sector. So I've had the humbling experience of being able to work with not only acutely ill patients, but I've also been so proud to be able to say that I've worked with our geriatric and our elderly population in nursing homes. And most recently working in mental health and addiction with people that are struggling in our community, but not only struggling with their own illnesses, but struggling with the stigmas that surround it. And I think that really gives me insight into that particular area of concern in our province, which is under-supported, under-funded, and under-publicized issues in our healthcare system. I've had experiences both as a patient in healthcare, and now also as an employee in healthcare. And I'll tell you, it's definitely given me a different perspective of the population that I live in and the population I'm looking to represent. Another aspect of my lived experience is, as I mentioned before, I've had the opportunity to live in other parts of the country and not only the other parts of the country, but other parts of the world. And one thing that it has really developed in my viewpoint is discrimination. So not only am I LGBTQ, but I'm also mixed race, and I've been able to discover through lived experiences to see how different members of our society, both here in New Brunswick and abroad are treated differently. I would never say that my experience makes me an expert on the topic in any sense of the word, but it has definitely given me a new found respect for individuals who struggle day to day, just to be accepted. It has given me a new perspective to open my ears and close my mouth and listen to people's experiences and their struggles rather than just trying to throw money or blind solutions at them.

5. If elected, what will be your top 5 priorities for your riding?

So the top five priorities for my specific riding would be the big one, which has been talked about by a number of different candidates, which is tax reform. Tax reform not only would affect New Brunswick as a whole, or Saint John as a city, but it would directly affect my riding because of a number of economic issues and developmental issues here in my own riding of Lancaster. Bringing more businesses, things like that. And it also helps we have one of the highest tax rates here in New Brunswick, right here in the city of Saint John, and tax reform would not only help keep more money in the hands of the individuals in my riding, which desperately need it, but it would also help with giving our municipality more money to be able to help with developments, help create health facilities here on the West side, help create social services here on the West side, help create and promote development of businesses and retail shops here on the West side.

The second thing that I would really focus on would be our transit system, and that kind of goes right in line with my passion towards tax reform. So our transit system, it impacts our communities in two ways, the way that I see it, it impacts our communities with the people that are already living here by limiting their ability to transport themselves from one area of the city to

another and where a lot of our services are held in the core area, our health services are in Millidgeville or the North End. And a lot of our retail services are in the East Side. It really, really impacts a person's quality of life and ability to sustain that quality of life. The second part of that transit is to entice a growth of our economy and also to promote people from away and in other provinces and other countries to move here who may not have the ability to drive, or may not have the financial ability to purchase a vehicle or to take taxis, and I think it not only would help the individuals that are already living in our community to be able to live a better quality of life, but it would also help to entice people to move here, especially because transit is such an integral part of living in a greener economy and a greener world. The younger generation doesn't see the ability to be able to live in that type of economy here because of the lack of transportation.

The third thing that I would like to look at in our specific riding would be again, development. So I won't go back into tax reform, but development in the area, so that, though we will have better transportation, we will also have some of the services that are available in other parts of the city. And also other parts of the province right here in our community. Things like access to safe out-of-hospital abortions, things like access to family doctors right here in our own riding, access to things like getting blood work done right here without having to travel to the uptown core area or to Millidgeville to get that work done. And that's just the health side of things. So there's many other things that I would like to see grow here in the development of the West side.

The fourth thing that I would really like to focus on is of course, our education. So we've had the great opportunity here on the West Side to build a brand new school over recent years. Seaside Park Elementary is an absolutely beautiful facility to promote education to our young people here in our community, but there's more needed. So of course you know, many people are aware that they struggle for a long time to be able to build things that promote the social development of children, things like our playground. And I would really like to see more focus on things like that, that not only help our children in their educational needs, but in their psychological and physical development as well, again, right here in our own community. So they don't have to go to places like the Q-plex in Quispam, they don't have to go to places like the Aquatic Center in Uptown Saint John. They don't have to go to places like that when it's not feasible for them or their parents. Young people are able to take part in physical and social development activities right here in our own area. And the fifth and final thing that I really think we need to focus on here in our area is housing. Housing, though a large portion of the upper and lower West Side and all that encompasses the West Side and Lancaster and the whole is houses, which is absolutely wonderful. It's so great to be able to see such a large portion of the population own their own homes. That being said, I think we need to develop policies and procedures to make owning your own home more accessible to people who financially or physically are unable to do that. I think by doing that, we create stronger communities because when you own a piece of the community, you're more apt to take care of the community. You're more apt to be involved in the community, and you're more apt to reach out and help other members of your community. Whereas if you're living 1. paycheck to paycheck and 2. in someone else's home in someone else's building, you are less likely to get involved in that

community and promote different aspects of it. And I think we have a great opportunity. We have so much space, undeveloped space, here on the West Side that wouldn't impact our green areas, that we could definitely expand into things like co-op housing. We could expand into things like low priced, and I stress that, low priced condominiums. We can help by promoting things like garden homes, things that you're not taking up a huge amount of the land for one home, but in the same sense, you're giving people a piece of the community to be able to call their own. And those would be my main focuses here in Lancaster.

6. LGBTQ+ and reproductive healthcare

Well, I mean, the first thing that I would start with is reiterating the fact that every single individual in our province and I assume we're talking on a provincial level here, not, specific ridings, but every individual in our province, regardless of how you identify, regardless of your sexual or gender diversity background, deserves access to healthcare. And I mean, we have spent over a hundred years developing what we already have. And I think it's important that not only do we fulfill what's described as rights to the individuals in our province, but that we expand on that. And we let it grow to a point where nobody has to ever worry about how they're going to get access to support services, or medical services that help them live a more productive life and help them experience less trauma in their lives. So speaking directly to reproductive health and LGBTQ health, I think a great example of that is the current situation that's going on with Clinic 554 in Fredericton. And it is not only -not- a private clinic, it is a public clinic where we have family doctors treat people from all different areas of walks of life, but it's also a place where people can go and not feel stigmatized. People can go and not feel pressured to make a decision one way or another, whether it be about having things like an abortion or having proper counseling to decide, maybe someone decides that they don't want to have an abortion, but we need to have those options in place. And we need to have those services in place to help people make an informed, factual decision based on what they want for themselves, because everybody's body is their own. And whether we're talking about people who are transitioning or people that are looking to, you know, have an abortion or have counseling to decide what to do in the situation that someone you know, unplanned got pregnant. I think it's important that we put a lot more resources into those people, not only because it's going to help the individual grow to be a stronger, more active member of society, but it's also going to help the trickle down effect. It's going to help with our mental health system. It's gonna help with our homelessness. It's going to help with all different areas of need in our province, because as the facts have stated, people who are forced to make a decision about their own lives, based on nothing but ignorance, which I would go as far as saying, it causes things like depression, it causes things like anxiety, it causes things like homelessness, it causes things like anger, which can lead to other forms of crime. It can lead to things like child abuse. It can lead to all different types of things. And I think if we just put more focus, not into specifically Clinic 554, but expanding that to other parts of the province to make every community accessible, I think we would see a huge drop in those other areas and those other issues within our community.

7. Access to mental health and/or addictions services

I would like to see them get treated and funded and supported in the same way that we see things like heart surgery, that we see things like cancer treatments, that we see things like diabetes. Because the reality is they are all in their own way very serious illness, whether you're dealing with addiction, mental health or physical ailments, the reality is our bodies are all connected and mental health issues that are left untreated can develop into physical issues, which means in the long run, you're affecting the tax payers, you're affecting how much money is being spent on physical healthcare. When in reality, if we just dealt with the underlying issues, which are the mental health, the addiction, things like that, again, just as the last question I stated you would be able to help a lot of issues in our communities throughout the province without having to be reactive. If we were more proactive, the issues may be mitigated before they even start.

8. Glyphosate use in New Brunswick

So Glyphosate spraying has been a topic of conversation throughout, oh my goodness... I would say at least the last 10 years. It has become more and more of a concern of the people of New Brunswick, not only because of the ramifications to our personal health, but to our environment that we're going to pass on to future generations. My personal feelings on the topic is, there are other ways and there are many other countries, there are many other communities, there are many other provinces, right here in our own country that are able to support a lumber industry, that are able to support a safer economy and a stronger economy without spraying chemicals into our environment. And, not even speaking specifically to that particular chemical, there are all different chemicals that I truly feel aren't needed in order to sustain the sectors that we're using these to sustain. And I'm using air quotes right now, and you can't see it. The reality is they're not needed. They're truly not needed. These chemicals are not needed in our environment and they do more harm than good on all levels that you look at them, they do more harm to our wildlife, they do more harm to our environment, they do more harm to our personal health, they do more harm to our food industry, than what they're actually helping them. And the reality is, I really don't even think we should be having this conversation in 2020, but this is something that should have been stopped a long time ago. We are on a federal level, a member of the international organizations that fight against climate change that fight against things like oil and fossil fuel use. So the reality is how can we be on one side of it there and on the complete opposite side when it comes to spraying our forest and our crown lands with chemicals that do goodness knows what.

9. Access to affordable housing in Saint John

So access to affordable housing is not really existent here in Saint John. In my opinion, you're either living in or being offered low income housing instead of mixed income housing, or you are being offered a \$300,000 - \$400,000 condo in one of the poorest areas of town. So it's not really, our current process is not realistic.

10. Police funding in Saint John

So our police funding, I know there's been a lot of talk about defund the police. I'm a big supporter of re-allocate the funding so that our police officers can be properly trained and so that they can focus on actual crime and the solving of crimes and gathering of information for crimes rather than attending a mental health welfare check. When we could be putting that funding towards mental health professionals, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, doctors that can better act and that can better deal with those particular situations. And I really think we need to look at not so much taking funding directly away from police, but reallocating it so that we're properly supporting the people in our community.

11. Reporting and investigations of sexual assaults

Well, as we've seen in recent months and information that has come out in the general media and social media the actual focus on solving these issues and solving particular instances of sexual assault are in my personal opinion, severely under-focused. We really need to up our game because sexual assault is not a subjective matter. It is something that we need to take people at their word, and we need to investigate things and treat it like any other situation in law enforcement.

12. Municipal and Industrial Tax reform

Currently we have industries, large corporate industries that have been receiving tax breaks for many, many, many, many years. Not only tax breaks, but they have been able to avoid paying what people have considered 'their share of the burden' here in our city and in our economy. I think it's really important. Industry definitely has more money than the common individual. And I think they definitely should be regulated and made to pay their share, so that the common individual and the common taxpayer isn't trying to subsidize these corporations. We're struggling as a community and as a province, as it is, it's not realistic for us to be subsidizing corporate welfare. As it pertains to keeping more money in the city, it just makes sense if you're paying the taxes in the city, obviously it makes sense that that money that is collected from both personal and industrial taxes stays in our municipality so that we can then reinvest in the community in which it is paying in.

13. Access to public transit in Saint John

So access to public transit in Saint John is, again, one of those situations that I would just consider non-existent when you have to spend an hour and a half to get from one point of our city to another, when driving a vehicle only takes 10 minutes. I wouldn't say that is successful. You shouldn't have to work your life around a very, very limited public transit system. And a very underfunded, public transit system. People use this transit system to get from their home to doctor's appointments, to buy groceries, to see their family, to get to postsecondary education. The reality is, if you invest in the transit, you invest in the people.

14. Access to affordable childcare in Saint John

So access to affordable childcare is right up the same lines as access to transport or transit. So affordable childcare helps individuals get out of poverty. It helps them be able to get back into

the workforce. It helps them get back into postsecondary education, better educate themselves, get involved in things like politics, get involved in things like community outreach programs, volunteer opportunities. There's all kinds of things that really give some opportunities for them. But when you have to choose between going to work and having to pay for childcare, which for the most part, is not financially feasible, or staying home, staying on income assistance, staying on whatever, whatever funding you're getting, because it's just cheaper to take care of your own child. That's not really an option. That's not really a question in anybody's mind. The reality is you're going to choose the best option for your family. If we had affordable childcare, there wouldn't be any questions.

15. Media Ownership in New Brunswick

So our media in New Brunswick is predominantly owned by one organization. And I won't name or call out the organization, but the reality is, it is not unbiased. Our media in the province needs to diversify its' ownership, it needs to be free to report in whatever viewpoint the individual chooses to report on. And it needs to be able to be diverse in its focus because when one organization owns all of the media or quite large percentage of the media, it pinpoints the focus where that organization wants it to be. It does not give people diversity in what they're seeing.