

## Chatham-Kent-Essex Riding Report

By Tony Gosgnach

It turned out to be one of the closest federal election races in Canada in 2004, with just a little over 400 votes separating the winner from the runner-up. This Jan. 23, it promises to be another nailbiter, as Liberal and Conservative candidates square off as the frontrunners in the latest federal election in the bellwether riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex, Ont.

Observers across Canada are watching the riding, which Liberal Jerry Pickard has held since defeating a Progressive Conservative in 1988. But Pickard won't be running this time around, leaving four candidates who have never served in Parliament to vie for the MP's chair – David Van Kesteren for the Conservatives (who finished right behind Pickard in the last election), Jim Comiskey for the Liberals, Kathleen Kevany for the NDP and Ken Bell for the Green Party. A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation analysis of the riding indicates that some NDP supporters there may vote strategically for Liberal Comiskey in order to keep Van Kesteren out of office.

The riding is bordered by Lake Erie to the south and the Thames River to the north. It includes the cities of Chatham, Leamington and Blenheim.

### The Candidates and Life and Family Issues

<b>Conservative</b> <i>David Van Kesteren</i>	<b>Liberal</b> <i>Jim Comiskey</i>	<b>NDP</b> <i>Kathleen Kevany</i>	<b>Green Party</b> <i>Ken Bell</i>
Rated pro-life with exception for life of mother by CLC.  Supports traditional definition of marriage.	Rated pro-life with exception for life of mother by CLC but also does not support abortion de-funding.  Refused to answer same-sex "marriage" question.	Rated Pro-abortion by CLC.  Opposes maintaining traditional definition of 'marriage'.	No response to CLC questionnaire.  Party supports both abortion rights and "honouring sexual diversity"

### Conservative – David Van Kesteren



The 50-year-old Van Kesteren is a native of Chatham, married for 30 years and a father of eight children. He is the owner of Van Kesteren Auto Sales in Chatham. Van Kesteren scored a coup in 2004 when he received the endorsement of former Chatham-area pro-life Liberal MP Rex Crawford, who commended him as "a man of integrity and principle."

On life issues, Van Kesteren has responded in a strong pro-life manner to the current questionnaire sent to him by CLC, which is the national political arm of the Canadian pro-life movement. He endorses the pro-life platform on all nine points, except that he believes a woman should have access to an abortion in a case where her life is threatened by a pregnancy.

On the marriage issue, Van Kesteren responded to a recent Campaign Life Coalition questionnaire that he will, if elected on Jan. 23, vote for measures that define marriage exclusively as the union of one man and one woman. However, the independent website wheredotheystand.ca reports that Van Kesteren declined to respond during the 2004 election campaign to its question on how he would vote on a motion to define marriage exclusively as the union of one man and one woman.

## Liberal – Jim Comiskey



Comiskey is a father of four who holds a master of education degree, is the owner of Comiskey Underground Sprinklers, has worked as a reporter, photographer and salesman and is a retired teacher and principal.

Comiskey responded in a basically pro-life manner to the questions on life issues sent to him by Campaign Life Coalition. However, like Van Kesteren, he said he favours access to abortion in cases where it is necessary to save the life of the mother. In addition though, he is opposed to abortion de-funding, indicating he favours the continuation of public funding of the procedure.

The first-time candidate has declined to respond to CLC's question on whether he would vote in the House of Commons to define marriage as the exclusive union of one man and one woman, saying that the query is "not relevant" to the issue.

"To support the use of the notwithstanding clause to withdraw rights from any group would be to erode the very basis of fundamental rights in Canada," he wrote in a letter to CLC. His website also has a link to the federal Liberal Party's page on family issues, which includes a defence of the bill legalizing same-sex "marriage."

## NDP – Kathleen Kevany



Second-time candidate Kevany is married, holds masters and doctorate degrees in education and is as an assistant professor at the University of Western Ontario in London.

In response to the CLC questionnaire during the current election campaign, CLC reports that, despite indicating she believes life begins at conception - Kevany considers herself "pro-choice" on abortion and opposes laws that would protect every human being from conception onwards, as well as any measures that would exclude abortion as an insured health service under the Canada Health Act. However, she indicates that she opposes measures to permit euthanasia or doctor-assisted suicide.

On the marriage issue, Kevany indicated to CLC that, if elected, she would oppose measures to maintain marriage exclusively as a union between a man and a woman. In April 2004, she had stated, in response to a question from the Life Ethics Educational Association, that she would vote in favour of same-sex "marriage" or unions, if the issue came before the House of Commons.

## Green Party - Ken Bell



Bell, an owner-operator of a small building business, is a former member of the Canadian Armed Forces and, in his own words, has "played a pivotal role in raising environmental awareness within Chatham-Kent." He has also been an active participant in public anti-war rallies since 2001 and has promoted an embargo of uranium to the United States in order to bring about an end to the use of depleted uranium weapons.

Little is known of Bell's position on marriage, family and life issues, as he has yet to respond to a Campaign Life Coalition questionnaire on these matters and has made no other public statements. However, the official platform of the federal Green Party, as spelled out on its website, calls for equal rights for all individuals regardless of "sexual orientation," eliminating the causes of population growth by giving men and women "greater control over their fertility," honouring and valuing sexual "diversity" and the recognition of, and respect for, "sexual minorities."