

Political pressure point

In anticipation of the upcoming General Election, Rachael Maskell, York Central Labour candidate, and Robert McIlveen, Conservative candidate, talk to [Jack Harvey](#) about all things politics

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IMAGE: RACHAEL MASKELL

Rachel Maskell, Labour candidate

What brought you to politics?

From a very early age I've had a real desire to change the way this world has worked. I come from a very political family: my father was a trade unionist and my uncle led a campaign for the abolition of the death penalty. Since the age of three I've been arguing about the big issues, and fighting to change the structure of our society to make it fairer, particularly for the poor and vulnerable.

Why did you choose to stand for Labour?

I joined the Labour Party when I was at school. It's always been where I would stand. I went on to join the trade union movement, fighting the cause for other people. I've worked in the health service for 20 years as a physiotherapist, and alongside that I have been Head of Heath for Unite, representing one hundred thousand health workers across the spectrum.

Why should students put their faith in Labour over the other parties?

I think the Labour Party has put a great focus on education. We wish to help people into the labour market, building up to a good home, a good job and solid foundations. We've also driven the agenda towards education such as further education and vocational education.

Why don't people feel enthused with politics today?

The university has been doing lots to encourage students to register to vote, but I know many who haven't yet and don't intend to do so.

Why do you think it is important that they register?

Politics, for me, is not just about putting a cross in a box. If you want someone in power then you have to be in a position to do that, but this is only the first step. We can move on to engaging in the real debates, enabling lots of voices to be heard in politics. To people who are doubtful about putting a cross in the box, I'd ask them to come and join the process, come and get involved. If you do, and I am your MP, I will do my very best to get everything right for people.

We've heard lots about austerity in recent political discussions and debates. Would you agree that 'austerity' has become a dirty word in politics?

I think austerity became an excuse for being able to project different political outcomes. What has happened over the last five years has been used to privatise services and to redistribute money away from the most marginalised in our society. What we should do instead is look for a fairer way. As one of the wealthiest countries on the planet we should be trying to see off poverty. It's really important to me to get rid of food banks. Austerity is the big stick that has been used as an excuse to suppress people rather than encourage them.

On the day of the election, what would be the nightmare result for you to endure?

A return of this government! Whether it be the Tories on their own or if they are in another coalition, the NHS will disappear, and that is our most valued asset. We'll see a new agenda involving even harder and faster cuts. We'll have more people in poverty than before. In York there's a straight choice between Labour and the Conservatives, and if people want a different kind of politician I would urge them to vote for Labour.



IMAGE: ROBERT MCILVEEN

Robert McIlveen, Conservative candidate**What brought you to politics?**

I'd always been interested in politics growing up and I did a degree in it at university. It was on my gap year between my undergraduate degree and my Master's, working in a prison, when I thought to myself that despite a huge amount of activity we weren't achieving anything. The same prisoners were coming

back to prison. I've always considered myself a Tory and thought if I wanted to improve things I'd get involved – so I did.

Why did you choose to stand for the Conservatives?

I strongly believe in individual responsibility. What I really want to see is the government creating the conditions in which people can improve their own lives. It's not necessarily about what politicians can do for young people, it's more about what politicians can do to make sure British universities are the best so that young people can have the best education available. It's really about wanting people to thrive off their own backs rather than having the state do things for people.

Why should students put their faith in the Conservatives over the other parties?

We'll take you seriously! I think that with Labour's policy of cutting tuition fees, the only people who will benefit from that are the best-paid graduates afterward. Tuition fee rises or cuts only impact people who are capable of paying the debt all off. Cutting the fees from £9,000 to £6,000 is a bit of a con if you do a degree in something you love but isn't something that will give you a well-paying job at the end of it. The Conservatives will be honest; we want universities to be securely funded and we also want to invest more in the sciences.

Why don't people feel enthused with politics today?

Politics is quite remote to some people. If you've voted a few times you've probably made a confident decision to follow a party, and for many people it doesn't feel like things change enough to swing their vote. For the first time you have to think about what you believe and take into account what the parties are saying. I remember the 1997 election and just about recall the 1992 election, so I've had that lifetime of experiencing politics and the views of the parties; but other people might not have been brought up with politics in their home, and we have to reach out to these people and bring politics to them.

We've heard lots about austerity in recent political discussions and debates. Is 'austerity' a dirty word in politics?

It's become one, but everyone seems to have forgotten about the deficit. Many questions at the York Central Candidate Hustings concerned spending; it's obviously a nice thing that the government does, and if we were running a huge surplus then we would have a different approach to our policies. We're only just getting the deficit under control. Sadly we're going to have to continue the boring, long-term drudge of cutting spending. You can't abolish boom and bust, you can't abolish recession; we're the only party that takes this seriously, with the intention of eliminating the whole deficit.

On the day of the election, what would be the nightmare result for you to endure?

Two options: either a massive Labour majority, which would undo a lot of the hard work and gains we've made and challenge our economic credibility; or a dead heat, which be a horrible mess.



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