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SOCIAL CONSERVATIVES BOLSTERED AFTER 19-YEAR-OLD STUDENT WINS PC NOMINATION IN NIAGARA WEST-GLANBROOK

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Social conservatives bolstered after 19-year-old student wins PC nomination in Niagara West-Glanbrook

⌚ 24.10.2016 🚩 Sabrina Nanji 💬 0

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Social conservatives say the reports of their death have been greatly exaggerated – and pointed to Saturday's Tory nomination contest in Niagara West-Glanbrook as proof they are a mighty presence in the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario.

The Progressive Conservatives on Saturday (two weeks earlier than originally scheduled) nominated 19-year-old social conservative **Sam Oosterhoff** to carry the blue banner in next month's byelection in Niagara West-Glanbrook – a seat historically and handily held by ex-party leader and now-real estate association exec **Tim Hudak**.

Oosterhoff's win came as somewhat of a surprise – the Brock University student managed to beat out party heavyweights **Rick Dykstra**, former St. Catharines MP and current PC party president, and **Tony Quirk**, regional councillor and the party's second vice-president.

Social conservatives shared in some of the credit Monday. Though **Charles McVety**, president of the Canada Christian College, said he did not personally campaign for Oosterhoff, McVety said the win was "absolutely" owed in part to the social conservative faction, and is indicative that PC Leader **Patrick Brown** is "out of step" with his own party.

It then stands to reason the wounds inflicted in the Scarborough-Rouge River byelection and subsequent sex-ed letter scandal have yet to be sutured. In that race, eventually won by PC MPP **Raymond Cho**, a letter promising to "scrap" the Liberals' controversial sex-ed curriculum that included Brown's signature was circulated in the riding, but Brown later said "a mistake" had been made and recanted with an [op-ed in the *Toronto Star*](#), much to the chagrin of social conservative groups long opposed to it. (*QP Briefing* has put together a comprehensive [chronology](#) of the sex-ed letter snafu.)

Brown said his entire caucus backs his current stance that he supports an updated curriculum. But where Oosterhoff is concerned, there appears to be a few tacks on the trail to Queen's Park.

According to his website, under the banner "[Why I'm Running](#)," Oosterhoff says he wants to be "a voice for commonsense, pro-family policies and concerns." He also says that "I will never waver in my support of parents as primary educators, and I will strive to ensure that parental rights are respected in education," and that "Queen's Park won't change me."

McVety said it is easy for so-cons to throw support behind such a candidate, whose platform appears unequivocal.

"I have confidence that Sam will be true to his voters, and be true to his word. But there's no reason to believe that he will not be. Going against Rick Dykstra, going against the party apparatus, he had to take a strong stand. And he has done so and that shows, to me, strength – because we need voices," McVety said. "He ran on the platform of defending family values, and he won – that's the marvel of democracy, that decrees don't matter ... He fits this very well. Ten years ago, we thought Rick Dykstra did, but Rick really went sideways."

Asked whether Oosterhoff's nomination is, as the [Toronto Star's high-ranking Tory source put it](#), "revenge of the so-cons," McVety preferred a more literary characterization, saying that the "reports of our death have been greatly exaggerated."

Queenie Yu, who at one time worked for the PCs, told *QP Briefing* the nomination could be considered a gauge on Brown's leadership – and the dials appear to be turned off. Yu ran as an

independent in the Scarborough-Rouge River byelection on the sole issue of doing away with the sex-ed curriculum, and placed fourth. She also broke the news to the Canadian Press that Brown's chief of staff had sent her an email with the heads-up that the sex-ed letter was going around in the riding, which contradicted Brown's initial claims that only the local campaign, and not his office, knew the missive would be circulated.

"I am so impressed, not only with Sam, but with the PC membership in that riding. In saying 'yes' to Sam Oosterhoff, they also said a big 'NO' to Patrick Brown and to Brown's declaration that the PC Party is a 'socially liberal' party. I hope Sam wins the byelection next month," Yu added in an email.

But the Tories were quick to put up a united front Monday.

Speaking to reporters from the Ottawa-Vanier neighbourhood, where there is a simultaneous byelection (and where he and his candidate ex-ombuds **Andre Marin** were holding a community safety roundtable), Brown said Oosterhoff supports his current position on sex-ed, and that that is what party canvassers will support when they knock on doors in Niagara West-Glanbrook.

"We had a candidate that hustled, won over the membership, won over the other candidates, and emerged victorious ... I've spoken with him (Oosterhoff) and he certainly supports my direction of the party. I think on marriage equality, and sex education, I've made my position very clear, abundantly clear, around the province and Sam told me that he's happy to be part of our team and happy with the direction of the party," Brown said.

Back at the legislature, PC MPP **Vic Fedeli** dismissed the notion that the inner cogs of the party were out of sync, saying "I think we're in great shape."

"This is the beauty of an open nomination. Here we've got others that were the front-runners, or perceived to be the front-runners. The beauty of Patrick Brown is that he's had an open and transparent nomination process. Sam has the most votes, and he's going to be our brand new PC caucus member ... I expect Sam to win," Fedeli said.

Should Oosterhoff take the seat, he will become the youngest MPP in Ontario's history. **Reid Scott**, who was elected MPP in 1948, at 21, currently holds the title.

Fedeli added he is more excited than concerned that Oosterhoff is still finishing up his post-secondary education, saying, "we're all rookies our first day on the job."

Oosterhoff goes toe-to-toe with Liberal candidate, lawyer **Vicky Ringuette** and New Democrat **Mike Thomas**, former Hamilton Police Association president, on Nov. 17, at the same time voters in Ottawa-Vanier cast ballots to replace former attorney general **Madeleine Meilleur**.

Ottawa-Vanier is a longtime Liberal riding, but the ticket includes fierce competition for Grit contender **Nathalie Des Rosiers**, former Canadian Civil Liberties Association head and current dean of law at the University of Ottawa. She's up against Marin and the NDP's **Claude Bisson**, brother to **Gilles Bisson**, the New Democrats' house leader and MPP for Timmins-James Bay.

Oosterhoff and Dykstra did not respond to requests for comment.

With files from Jessica Smith Cross.

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