

ROOKIE PC CANDIDATE DODGES QUESTIONS ABOUT REPEALING SEX-ED CURRICULUM



Rookie PC candidate dodges questions about repealing sex-ed curriculum

07.11.2016 [Jessica Smith Cross](#)

The 19-year-old Progressive Conservative candidate in Niagara West–Glanbrook dodged questions like a veteran pro Monday night in his first press gallery scrum.

Asked repeatedly if he believes the government should repeal the controversial update to Ontario’s sex-ed curriculum, **Sam Oosterhoff** did not answer, but instead repeated prepared lines on the need for parental consultation on sex-ed.

It was the same tactic PC Leader **Patrick Brown** had relied on — decrying the lack of parental consultation on the curriculum update, but dodging questions about the content of the curriculum itself — until he was faced with a full-blown scandal on the issue in the September 1 byelection in Scarborough–Rouge River. Brown [now supports the sex-ed curriculum](#).

“I think I’ve been pretty clear on this issue,” said Oosterhoff, when asked where he stands on sex-ed.

“I think we need to have a comprehensive curriculum, one that recognizes the realities of the world kids are growing up in nowadays,” Oosterhoff continued. “The old curriculum was written in a different time, was from a different time and we need to make sure that kids nowadays are recognizing the realities of the world they grow up in.

“But we need to ensure that parental voices are heard in this discussion and quite frankly, on this issue, as on so many others, the Ontario Liberals have failed to involve stakeholders and failed to involve parents in the discussion. And that’s something that I think I’ve been very clear about.”

Oosterhoff went on to repeatedly avoid answering whether or not he believes the curriculum itself should be repealed.

It was Oosterhoff’s first encounter with the Queen’s Park press gallery, taking place right before an all-candidates’ debate hosted by the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce. Since securing the PC nomination, he’s given a number of local media interviews, but had declined or ignored all media requests from the gallery, until he was cornered at an all-candidates town hall on Monday evening.

Oosterhoff was similarly vague when asked for his views on same-sex marriage. He said the debate in Canada is over but refused to say where he stands.

“The federal marriage laws were changed some time ago — I think 10 or 11 years ago — and no one’s talking about changing them now, and that’s a federal issue that this byelection’s not about,” he said.

On abortion, he was unequivocal: “I’m pro-life,” he said.

Oosterhoff’s values may not matter overmuch to his role as potential backbencher with little influence on Ontario politics, until the 2018 general election, but he has an outsize role in the ongoing saga of Brown’s efforts to frame the PC party as “socially progressive,” and “fiscally conservative.”

Brown's shift to the centre has been a major theme of his leadership of the party, and has to the potential to be a major narrative of the 2018 election, and the next generation in Ontario politics.

Oosterhoff throws a twist into that tale. He campaigned for the nomination using the language of the anti-sex-ed movement, promising never to "waver" in his "support of parents as primary educators," and "striving to ensure that parental rights are respected in education."

But Oosterhoff has wavered, publicly, on the issue since he was nominated. His refusal to commit to repealing the curriculum has caused concern among social conservatives, who had thought he was on their side.

"People who know Sam personally assure me that Sam is 'our guy' on the s/x-ed issue and that PAFE should support him," wrote Parents As First Educators (PAFE) leader Tanya Granic Allen, in a recent email blast to supporters.

The group has endorsed Oosterhoff on that basis, she continued, but wants to know where he stands. PAFE is also running **Queenie Yu** as a single-issue anti-sex ed candidate, who has been encouraging Oosterhoff to speak out about his true beliefs on sex-ed.

Oosterhoff said he's promised to be true to his community, and bring their views to the Ontario legislature — and not, as he described it, just "ride the Queen's Park pony."

In the town hall debate, he said he was pleased to be nominated by a party that allows MPPs to vote their conscience on values issues. All of the candidates were asked for their views on abortion and sex-ed. He said again he's pro-life, and repeated his lines on the sex-ed curriculum.

By all accounts, Oosterhoff is sincerely religious and local media has credited his church contacts with helping him secure the nomination. He has credited his church with instilling the values of community, dedication and service in him, and after thanking volunteers who helped secure him the nomination, he thanked God.

He is a member of [the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church](#) and his resume shows years as work in community outreach with the church, which supports socially conservative positions on some issues, [including opposing mainstream acceptance of same-sex relationships](#).

"It's very important to me," he said. "Religion is an important part of many people's lives and some people aren't religious, and I respect that. I'm committed to representing all the views of the constituents here in my riding and ensure that everyone's concerns and everyone's priorities are being brought forward, regardless of what they believe, or if they have no belief."

Brown has supported Oosterhoff since his nomination. While social conservatives have accused Brown of muzzling the teen candidate — because he'd avoided interview requests at the beginning of his campaign and until Monday had dodged all request from the provincial press gallery — Oosterhoff said that hasn't been the case, and he's been free to speak if he chooses.

The Niagara West-Glanbrook byelection will take place on Nov. 17, along with another race that's being run in Ottawa-Vanier.

The twin byelections were triggered by the resignations of former PC leader **Tim Hudak** in Niagara West-Glanbrook and former Liberal attorney general **Madeleine Meilleur** in Ottawa-Vanier.

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