

# EQUAL PARENTING VOTE TO TEST PC-MPP-TO-BE SAM OOSTERHOFF



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18.11.2016 [Jessica Smith Cross](#)

A bill to expand rights for same-sex parents may be the first litmus test of young PC MPP-elect **Sam Oosterhoff**.

Oosterhoff was elected in Niagara West-Glanbrook Thursday night with 54 per cent of the votes. Immediately after his victory, Oosterhoff was faced with conflicting demands for his vote on Bill 28, the Equal Parenting Act.

His leader, **Patrick Brown**, told the media the PC caucus will vote in favour of the bill, while a social conservative group that supported Oosterhoff in the campaign called on him to vote against. Oosterhoff himself declined to make a commitment, when confronted by the press.

As the votes were being counted Thursday evening, Oosterhoff's lead was strong enough that he and Brown gave victory speeches before more than half the polls were in.

When they stepped away from the podium they were mobbed by reporters full of questions about Oosterhoff's socially conservative beliefs — and how they might conflict with Brown's socially progressive vision of the party.

Bill 28 was ordered for third reading earlier this month and Oosterhoff will be in the legislature when it comes to a vote. The bill is complex, and amends numerous pieces of legislation, to ensure the legal status of parents, including same-sex parents, whether they are biologically related to their child or not, and whether their children were conceived with or without reproductive assistance, without having to go through the adoption process.

In practical terms it means, for example, that both men in gay couple who have a child with the assistance of a surrogate are legally recognized as the parents of that child, even if one has no biological tie to the child.

Social conservatives object to the bill, citing the fact that it removes the words “mother” and “father” in several statutes, in favour of the gender-neutral “parent.”

When Oosterhoff was asked in the election night media scrum if he'd support the bill, Brown jumped in and answered for him.

“To be fair, Sam hasn't even had the chance to read the bill,” said Brown. “Our caucus came out in support of the bill. We tried to highlight reasonable amendments to the government, even without them taking into account our reasonable amendments, we thought it was a step in the right direction and our caucus committed to support it.”

Asked if there would be a free vote in his caucus on the bill, Brown said there won't be — the caucus will be voting in favour.

Oosterhoff, when asked if he'd follow Brown's directive, didn't confirm he'll fall in line.

“I have yet to examine the legislation,” he said. “I said during the campaign that I’d be very focused on a consultative form of representation that I’ve decided to listen to my constituents and their voice.”

Brown jumped again. “He has been elected for about 10 minutes,” he said. “Let’s give him 30 minutes before we ask him for briefings on current legislation.”

During the campaign, Oosterhoff told the press he’s proud of a “long-standing tradition within the PC party that allows members to vote their conscience” — but Brown said he’s asked his caucus to support the direction he’s taking the party.

One group is calling Oosterhoff to stand up against that socially progressive direction. **Queenie Yu**, an anti-sex-ed activist who endorsed Oosterhoff in the election, issued a press release to that effect on Friday morning.

“Now that Sam has won, I hope he won’t let Patrick Brown silence him,” said Yu, in the release. “Sam, if you are reading this – please vote against Bill 28! The parents of Ontario are counting on you to stand up for them!”

Meanwhile in Ottawa, after PC candidate **André Marin** lost the Ottawa-Vanier byelection to Liberal **Nathalie Des Rosiers**, Marin predicted Brown would have "a challenge on his hands to keep the so-cons in their place," and that, if he didn't, they would be a "threat" to the party, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported.