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Abortion debate not on the table: Ont. PC leader

By Antonella Artuso, Queen's Park Bureau Chief

TORONTO - Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak won't go there.

Opening up the abortion debate is something he says he won't do, nor will his party.

"I set the agenda, I set the plan," Hudak said Thursday, after three Tory MPPs sponsored a Wednesday Campaign Life media conference at Queen's Park.

"We're not going to reopen this debate."

Hudak said he wouldn't disavow positions he's taken in the past on the subject - which include signing a petition calling for the province to stop funding the procedure - but he wouldn't be acting on them.

He also said he didn't feel his three caucus members - John O'Toole, Randy Hillier and Rick Nicholls - were undermining him by putting the issue back in the spotlight.

None of the three who sponsored the conference appeared or spoke at it.

Hudak's dismissal of the question didn't sit well with Premier Dalton McGuinty.

"It's absolutely essential on this issue in particular, which is an important aspect of public policy, that leaders don't dodge, bob, weave and obfuscate," McGuinty said.

"When presented with the opportunity today Mr. Hudak did not seize it and clarify his position and the position that he would put forth on behalf of his party. He's got to be absolutely clear. I've been clear from day one I support a woman's right to choose."

McGuinty said Hudak was dancing around on abortion and challenged him to stake out a clearer stance.

"We're talking about the party leader and the party leader's position," he said.

"I put it to Mr. Hudak he absolutely must state without equivocation, where he stands today on this issue. He's had two positions in the past. He says everybody knows his position. Well the question I ask is, which one?"

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said she was surprised the issue of defunding abortion was able to get so much attention thanks to the three Tory MPPs who sponsored the media conference.

"I was pretty disappointed to learn the Conservatives once again want to try to roll back the clock in Ontario and take away women's right to choose," Horwath said. "That for me is shocking and inappropriate and disappointing, frankly."

Horwath said she hopes Hudak will "reconsider" if his party is planning to defund abortion services.



Ontario Tory leader Tim Hudak. (QMI Agency file photo)