



STRAIGHT TALK

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Ontario PCs who sponsored abortion defunding newser have death wish



ONTARIO PC LEADER TIM HUDAK AND PC MPP FROM DURHAM, JOHN O'TOOLE

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TORONTO - I don't know what crazed political death wish the Progressive Conservatives have, but three of their MPPs sponsoring a Campaign Life news conference calling for the end of funding for abortions is just plain suicidal.

And sure, this is a free country where we should be able to discuss all topics openly and freely.

But this isn't about freedom of speech. This is about political strategy.

The Tories need to win votes in urban areas. They need to increase their support among women.

Yet Randy Hillier (Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington), John O'Toole (Durham) and Rick Nicholls, (Chatham-Kent-Essex) sponsored a controversial news conference that sent an archaic message to women that their bodies are not their own.

Or, rather, that if they have an unwanted pregnancy, they'll only get an abortion if they're rich.

O'Toole said sponsoring the news conference was simply a gesture that allowed the group to air their views. He doesn't support what they're saying.

"When I agreed to sponsor it, I said, "This is a democracy, we have freedom of religion and we have freedom of speech. Go for it.

"Obey the rules of the legislature media studio, and make your point," he told me.

He doesn't support defunding abortion.

"I think it's an individual's choice," he told me.

Fair enough. And no topic is so toxic that we can't even discuss it.

None of the three MPPs attended the news conference.

But the message it sends when not one, not two -- but three MPPs sponsor a news conference is that this is a view or a policy that is widely held within the party.

PC leader Tim Hudak should kneecap those three MPPs for sending that message.

Instead he and Thornhill MPP Peter Shurman were both knocked off their messages and left scrambling to control the spin.

"This is a closed debate," Shurman told reporters.

"First of all, it's a federal debate. Secondly, it's a closed debate. It's not something that's up for discussion. And my colleagues are acting entirely on their own," he said.

The Liberals gleefully sent out Laurel Broten, the minister who has responsibility for women, to decry the Tory-sponsored newser.

She waxed self-righteously about how the three MPPs were trying to re-open the debate about a woman's right to choose.

She called the press conference, "disheartening."

She said it's important to know where Hudak stands on abortion.

"That debate is over," she said, adding that Premier Dalton McGuinty supports a woman's right to choose.

Well, that's all a tad hypocritical.

First, as education minister, Broten knows Catholic schools teach youngsters that abortion is a sin. I haven't seen the government do anything about defunding Catholic schools. And as the minister with responsibility for women's issues, she knows that publicly-funded Catholic hospitals will not perform abortions or sterilization procedures.

She also knows there are Liberal MPPs who share the pro-life views of the three Tories.

There's nothing wrong that. People of conscience have the right to whatever view they want. They don't have the right to impose that view on the majority of people who disagree with them.

Clearly, though, this shows once again Hudak's weakness in controlling his caucus. When three MPPs embarrass him in such a way, he's in big trouble.

McGuinty whips his trained seals into line.

Hudak's task is to present himself as a modern, forward-looking leader with fresh new ideas.

When three old men on your backbench sponsor a news conference to tell young women how to live their lives and offer a policy that would allow only rich women private abortions, the rest of your platform is dead in the water.