

TheStar.com | Ontario | Tory to 'fight' for his job Tory to 'fight' for his job



RON BULL/TORONTO STAR

John Tory speaks to reporters after meeting his caucus to discuss the Conservatives' disastrous campaign. At the meeting yesterday, Tory admitted his ill-fated faith-based schools policy handed Premier Dalton McGuinty's Liberals a second majority government on Oct. 10 but he plans to stay on as leader.

Questions surround Tory as PC caucus meets today

Heading into an election post-mortem meeting today, Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory has support among his 26 MPPs, but faces hurdles to keep his job after the party's Oct. 10 drubbing.

PC leader drops plan to fund religious schools

Oct 25, 2007 04:30 AM

**ROBERT BENZIE
AND ROB FERGUSON**
QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU

Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory is keeping his job after a conversion on the faith-based schools policy that cost him the election.

In an emotionally charged five-hour caucus meeting yesterday, Tory acknowledged his ill-fated scheme handed Premier Dalton McGuinty's Liberals a second majority government on Oct. 10.

"The voters have spoken on it very clearly and they've said 'no,' and I respect their verdict and I will abide myself by their verdict," he told reporters later.

Tory, who lost in Don Valley West to Education Minister Kathleen Wynne, plans to stay on as leader, but is consulting MPPs, defeated candidates and party brass over the weekend before making it official next week.

"I'm going to finish consulting, make a decision and then fight hard for the job that I think I can do well ... which is to be the premier of this province and to be in the government of Ontario in 2011," he said.

"I see no reason why I won't be here, just as quite a few people ... lost their first election as leader and went on to have very successful careers as premiers of this province and prime ministers of Canada after that."

But he still faces a leadership review vote next February in London at the party's annual general meeting, where he must secure at least 50 per cent support from party members to stay on. Realistically, Tory needs a much higher percentage to be an effective leader.

"You learn from mistakes you make, from things you do that you then have to improve," he told reporters.

While there is no organized movement to dump Tory so far, there is plenty of time for one to coalesce.

Delegates to the convention will be selected over the coming months and there is a secret ballot in which they will be asked: "Do you wish to have a leadership election?"

Already, former PC cabinet minister John Snobelen has urged the 53-year-old Tory to quit and either seek a new mandate from party members or step aside.

Snobelen, who has not spoken to Tory since calling for his resignation, believes the faith-based school fiasco and other campaign issues could linger and undermine the party.

Still, Tory was buoyed after yesterday's closed-door session at the University of Toronto's Faculty Club, where he delivered a 90-minute post-mortem of the disastrous campaign he led.

"I received a huge amount of encouragement unanimously around the room this morning from the caucus and I'm happy about that," he said.

Tory said he welcomed their frank talk – one veteran MPP indelicately noted his colleagues "had finally grown some balls" and stood up to the leader – and the blunt assessment of what went wrong.

"The worst nightmare you can have is when people aren't prepared to be candid with you and aren't prepared to tell you what's on their mind," he said.

But there were suggestions support from his 26-member caucus might not be as solid as it seems.

MPP Christine Elliott (Whitby-Oshawa), who may have leadership aspirations, said "John is an excellent leader and we all stand behind him" but refused to say how she would vote at the leadership review.

"That's something that we need to continue to listen to people in my constituency and we need to listen to people across the province," said Elliott.

While MPP Tim Hudak (Niagara West-Glanbrook) backs Tory, he cautioned "an election defeat of this nature isn't one policy alone."

Hudak, considered by some to be an heir apparent to the leader, said the Conservatives must examine everything from staffing to their campaign organization to their tactics in the Legislature in the months ahead.

Through most of the election campaign, Tory insisted he would not back down from his proposal to extend funding to private religious schools that agreed to be bound by the provincial curriculum.

But faced with polls showing a big majority opposed the plan and growing opposition within his party, Tory backtracked with just over a week left in the campaign, announcing he would put the measure to a free vote in the Legislature if he won the election.

But it was too late. On election night, the Liberals swept to a second straight majority, winning 71 seats to 26 for the Tories and 10 for the New Democrats.