

Speaking out on spanking

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Hot on the heels of another scientific study about the deleterious effects of spanking children, Saskatoon-Rosetown-Biggar MP Kelly Block has entered the debate squarely on the side of corporal punishment.

To be fair, the reclusive MP, who refused to take part in most all-candidate forums in her riding in the lead-up to last-year's election, doesn't actually say she is in favour of having parents spank their kids. In fact, she doesn't actually say anything, outside of accusing the Liberals of believing "spanking is a criminal act."

In an inflammatory and misleading flyer she is circulating in her far-flung riding, Ms. Block asks her constituents whether parents should have the right to choose how to discipline their own kids, or if they agree with "Michael Ignatieff's Liberal Senators -- all spanking should be illegal."

Set aside for the moment the notion that the Senate is in any way a creature of the current Liberal leader, who has yet to appoint a single senator and who seems to have but a tenuous grip on his cadre of elected members. For Ms. Block to suggest that the proposed Bill S-209, which would set tighter limits on the level of physical restraint that adults can use on children, amounts to criminalizing all parents demonstrates either her limited ability to read or a tenuous connection to honesty.

It is difficult to determine which, however, because true to her electoral strategy, Ms. Block has avoided speaking directly to her constituents or to The StarPhoenix, which tried extensively over three business days to get some clarification on her position on this important matter.

Almost as disconcerting as Ms. Block's ambiguous position on what level of physical force she is willing to tolerate when it comes to disciplining children was Liberal MP Ralph Goodale's casual disregard for the issue. He pointed out that revisiting the law on spanking isn't even on the Liberal party's agenda. This is in spite of the growing body of scientific evidence about the efficacy of spankings and, most recently, about the impact this form of punishment can have

on the intellectual development of children.

This may be a cowardly stance on the part of the federal Liberals, but to seem clearly to be advocating the use of force without defining its limits, such as Ms. Block's mail-out does, is particularly disturbing.

Without some clarification on her part, it could be seen as advocating a form of discipline for which there is not one iota of scientific data to indicate it is anything but destructive.

That this stance should come from an erstwhile member of the Saskatoon Health Region, which should be playing a front-line role in identifying potentially dangerous behaviour, makes her parliamentary missive even more disturbing.

As Saskatchewan Children's Advocate Marvin Bernstein pointed out in an

interview, the body of scientific evidence grows every year demonstrating that to hit children increases the likelihood of injury, mental health problems, anti-social behaviour, bullying and copied violence when these kids become adults.

If this evidence is out of line, as one suspects Ms. Block believes to be the case, it is her responsibility as an elected representative of the people to produce evidence to the contrary.

It is at least her responsibility to justify and clarify the controversial position she's taken.

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