Babe in Arms

September 3, 2008 By Regan Hofmann

By now, you've likely heard that Bristol Palin, the 17-year-old unmarried daughter of Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, is five months pregnant. Perhaps you've also heard that this bit of news was released to prove that Sarah Palin's own fifth child, Trig, who is about five months old, IS actually her own child—and not that of her daughter, as some liberal blogs unofficially linked to the Obama campaign (e.g., barackoblogger.com) have hinted. The allegation was that Sarah Palin had faked her own pregnancy to cover up the fact that her teenage daughter was with child. In order to dispel that myth, Sarah Palin admitted that her teenage daughter is currently with child. Got that? (Perhaps someone should remind the Palins that Juneau is a town in Alaska, and not license to be a teenage mother.)

A senior McCain official stated that though they had no evidence that Obama and/or his campaign was behind the allegations, the "blog rumors circulating on websites that appeared to support Obama had the effect of being "a real anchor around the Democratic ticket."" For his part, Senator Obama denied the connection, saying he considered people's families "off-limits" vis-à-vis political campaigning.

"We don't go after people's families," Obama said. "We don't get them involved in the politics. It's not appropriate and it's not relevant. Our people were not involved in any way in this and they will not be. And if I ever thought there was somebody in my campaign that was involved in something like that, they'd be fired.

"It has no relevance to Governor Palin's performance as a governor or potential performance as a vice president," he added. "So I would strongly urge people to back off these kinds of stories."

Okay. I get it. But she offered up the news. Okay, I get that she offered the news in response to people trying to make up nasty lies about her family. And while I agree with Obama in theory, I also think these types of things are relevant to know about someone who could be the first female president of the United States (if McCain were to realize people's fears of falling ill). How, for example, would she lead this nation on the issue of Roe v. Wade (well, we know; Palin is a staunch anti-abortionist and pro-lifer).

But as a female AIDS activist, I want to know how Palin feels about offering comprehensive sex education to young Americans in this era when one in four teenage girls has at least one STD (and we have no idea how many have HIV, because the ones screened for that study weren't tested for HIV) and when 34 percent of new HIV infections are among people younger than 30.

I find it amazing that the Republicans think that the same kids who are too young, impressionable and fragile to be taught the facts of life are capable of determining whether they are ready to become parents. How is it that kids can't be taught about condoms even when they can have babies? And how will those kids parent their own kids if they themselves were not given proper sex ed? When will we stop the cycle of refusing to divulge lifesaving information to America's youth?

If the fact that Bristol plans to keep the child and marry the father makes her pro-life poster-girl material, couldn't she also be used as evidence that America's teens are having unprotected sex and are therefore at risk for contracting HIV? Has anyone mentioned to Sarah or Bristol that anyone who has ever had unprotected sex is at risk for contracting HIV? Has Bristol ever been tested? Will she?

I can get down with Obama and agree to leave the Palins alone, but only under one condition: We use Bristol as an example not just of the right to life but also of the lack of widespread and complete sexual education in America. "Children" who are old enough to become parents deserve to know the whole truth about human health as it relates to their sexuality.

Bristol Palin is living proof that America's kids are sexually active. The issue is not whether or not abstinence works to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies (it does), but whether or not it's possible to keep people, particularly teens with raging hormones, from having sex (apparently, we can't). Bristol is proof-positive of our nation's failure to realize that abstinence is a farce.

We need real leadership at the highest levels of politics on the issue of comprehensive sex education if we hope to save the lives of our children—and our children's children. Being pro-life is not the only way to save a child's life.

We're not the only ones who find this subject saucy...

Check out the Black AIDS Institute's press release from today.

Sexologist and friend of POZ Logan Levkoff blogged about the issue on the Huffington Post.

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