

Only dumb people should be offended

Surrey Now

Wednesday, December 3, 2003

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Section: Editorial

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Source: Surrey Now

You can't have a discussion about race, gender and politics in B.C. without someone getting fired. Last week, the head of the B.C. Construction Association dumped its president Mike **Geoghegan** for comments made about NDP MLA Jenny Kwan.

During a political radio debate in Victoria the week before, **Geoghegan** argued Kwan's success as a politician was due to her being a good-looking Asian woman with "not a lot upstairs." A small uproar ensued about his statement being racist and sexist. The construction association board promptly dumped **Geoghegan**, saying it believes in equal opportunity for all regardless of ethnicity or gender.

I don't want to second-guess the association's board, but I think they're missing the point. The **Geoghegan** scandal was predicated on his slandering women and Asians. From what I've read, he did not argue Kwan did not deserve her success because she was female and Chinese. He called her stupid. If any group should feel aggrieved by his comments, it's dumb people (for whom idiocy should be no barrier in going out and achieving anything they want).

The real focus of **Geoghegan**'s attack was the NDP, for what he believes was its cynical exercise in crass tokenism by selecting a young, attractive, Asian female as a candidate for office, and voters, who **Geoghegan** suggested elected Kwan just because she was a young, attractive, Asian female. He's right about the former, less so about the latter.

In the early '90s, the NDP recruited candidates to take on the failing Social Credit regime. B.C.'s demographic was taking on new hues after generations of pale whiteness. As with its new leader elected last month who likes to point out that she is aboriginal, the NDP is keen to reduce ancestral heritage to a political marketing brand and it wanted ethnic candidates. But while it had success with Indo-Canadians, it failed to attract Chinese members. Kwan was a godsend. She was Chinese and earnestly left, having earned her credentials as the lone NDPish voice on Vancouver council.

That she would never be confused for a particle physicist (or even a particle physicist's assistant), or the fact she is a terrible speaker for whom an original idea is a rare and confusing thing, did not matter.

Since when have voters preferred smart people? That Kwan is also what political analysts call a babe was a bonus because babes in politics are as rare and coveted as free parking spots in White Rock. Politics has been called show business for ugly people. Look at the current ranks of sitting MLAs and see how turned on you get.

Voters like to vote for candidates who are like themselves in ethnicity or class, or for attractive and successful people they can project their fantasies on. In choosing Kwan, the NDP knew exactly what it was doing.

But good bone structure only goes so far. Kwan was one of only two NDP MLAs to survive the last election. I'm told she works hard within her constituency. It's a good bet she earned that win.

Last week, Kwan graciously accepted an apology from **Geoghegan** and astutely stayed far away from debating his firing. Maybe she's smarter than **Geoghegan** thinks.