

“I can tell you that if it was me, I would resign”

Barack Obama intervenes in the Weiner affair

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15 June 2011

The Anthony Weiner affair continues to unfold in an entirely disgraceful fashion, with reports that the New York congressman may resign his office in the next few days. Weiner has been pilloried for apparently exchanging suggestive photographs and messages with several women online.

This has been made into a scandal in the usual American manner: the combined efforts of ultra-right dirty tricks operators and the “respectable” mainstream media, in this case, with an increased degree of complicity. The only consequence of such manufactured scandals, which excite the general public hardly at all, is to further degrade politics in the US and push it toward the right. Another symptom of political decay.

Much of the Democratic Party establishment is demanding that Weiner quit. Not a single one of these stalwarts has demonstrated a minimum of principle or backbone. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi declared Tuesday, for example, that “our caucus understands our concern for the rights of the individual member, but our higher responsibility to our country [is] to uphold a high ethical standard in the Congress in the United States.”

This is the multi-millionaire politician, who, as Speaker of the House in 2007, insisted that impeachment proceedings against George W. Bush, guilty of major war crimes, were “off the table.” A lewd Twitter, now that’s another matter!

President Barack Obama weighed in Tuesday on the Weiner affair. Among the various episodes of this affair, his intervention was perhaps the most predictable. In any given controversy or debate, Obama inevitably stakes out the most cowardly and calculating position. Is there anything to the man but the sum total of such positions?

In an interview with NBC, Obama was asked whether Weiner should resign. The president replied, in part: “Ultimately there’s going to be a decision for him and his constituents. I can tell you that if it was me, I would resign. ... [W]hen you get to the point where, because of various

personal distractions, you can’t serve as effectively as you need to at the time when people are worrying about jobs and their mortgages and paying the bills, then you should probably step back.”

This comment tells us a number of things.

One of Obama’s claims to fame during the 2007-08 electoral process was his background as a professor of law at the University of Chicago from 1992 to 2004. Along these lines, he stated in March 2007, “I was a constitutional law professor, which means unlike the current president [Bush] I actually respect the Constitution.” A bold self-promotion, which has proven thoroughly false on any number of issues, including continued government spying and wiretapping, the maintenance of the Guantánamo detention camp and the prosecution of illegal, undeclared wars.

Obama was preparing himself, or was being prepared, for greater things during his twelve years as a professor. According to a 2008 University of Chicago Law School statement to the media he declined “to join the faculty in a full-time tenure-track position” despite “several” invitations from the law school.

Perhaps he was too busy cramming on national security issues and who knows what else, but Obama apparently forgot to study the sections of the US Constitution that concern the separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

Weiner’s presence or absence in Congress has nothing to do with Obama, the head of the executive branch. It is none of his political or constitutional business to intervene in the affairs of Congress.

No one has demonstrated or seriously intimated that the New York congressman has done anything illegal or offered any grounds upon which he might be impeached. The media and Weiner’s colleagues have simply pronounced him unworthy to sit in that august body, the US Congress. (Mark Twain’s observation that “America is a nation without a distinct criminal class ... with the possible exception of

Congress” has probably been cited too often, but that’s because the occasions warranting its repetition arise so frequently.) In effect, the only difference between Weiner and a random cross-section of members of congress is that his peccadilloes have been found out and theirs have not yet.

On the whole, Weiner’s constituents have demonstrated far more political insight and humanity than the media and politicians. Despite the continuous media bombardment and the comments of Pelosi and others, a recent poll of registered voters in Weiner’s district found that only 33 percent felt he should step down.

A local media outlet interviewed residents. These comments were typical. “To me his personal life doesn’t have too much of an impact on what he does in office,” one woman observed. As for his lying about the texting, “That’s human nature. Nobody wants to get caught.”

Another constituent, also a woman, said, “Nobody’s perfect. He made a mistake. The other people, they might have skeletons in their closet that they’re hiding, you know.” A third individual, a man in his 40s, commented, “I don’t think he should step down at all. I think he should turn his back on this scandal.”

In any event, Weiner’s constituents have recourse available to them, in the form of organizing a recall election or voting him out of office next November. Why is Obama rushing to judgment over such a trivial issue?

In effect, the extreme right in the US targets virtually whomever it considers in any way vulnerable at present. The official media (including--and even especially--the liberal newspaper of record, the *New York Times*) enthusiastically chimes in, and careers are destroyed and the political process manipulated in the interests of the most predatory big business interests. And no one in the American political or media limelight challenges any of the hypocritical filthiness.

Weiner was first elected to represent New York’s 9th Congressional District (in southern Brooklyn and south central Queens), the seat formerly held by current US Senator Charles Schumer, in 1999. Weiner has never received less than 60.8 percent of the popular vote. In 2006 he was unopposed and two years later won 93.1 percent in the balloting. Obama won 55 percent of the 9th District vote in 2008. Now Obama, Pelosi and company propose to boot Weiner out in disgrace because he sent some lewd photos and texts. As titular head of the Democratic Party, Obama is incapable of defending his own party against a smear campaign mounted by reactionary opponents.

Weiner, a protégé of Schumer and well-heeled political representative of corporate America, is no hero. However, given the present political climate and modes of operation in the US, one can be fairly certain that at a certain point in his career Weiner crossed or threatened to cross someone or

something powerful. A score of one kind or another is most likely being settled.

Obama’s reference to “people [who] are worrying about jobs and their mortgages and paying the bills” is pretty rich coming from a president who exudes callousness about the suffering of the American population. Having handed out billions and billions to the banks and other financial institutions and seeing their profitability assured, Obama has washed his hands of any responsibility for alleviating the current social misery.

(Indeed, Obama’s indifference is so obvious that NBC’s Ann Curry felt obliged to ask him in Tuesday’s interview to address the notion that he was “unemotional” about the human toll that the economic crisis had taken.)

The president’s comment in regard to Weiner’s situation that “I can tell you that if it was me, I would resign” is especially significant in light of the events of the late 1990s. The endless effort to destabilize the Clinton administration took to a new level the use of sex scandals to influence American political life and regulate it for sinister purposes. Obama is now informing the public that if he had been in Bill Clinton’s shoes, he would have departed the White House in 1998 in the face of the Lewinsky affair. Obama would have acceded to the Republican right and the media, legitimizing the impeachment process and accepting an undemocratic and anti-constitutional coup.

This is not a matter of personalities, on that score there is nothing to choose between Obama and Clinton, but of how much farther the Democrats and the entire political set-up have moved to the right over the past decade. Indeed can anyone doubt what outcome a process similar to the Starr witch-hunt would produce today? The ignominious resignation of the Democratic Party officeholder, contrary to popular will, and the strengthening of the extreme right.



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