

Rep. Anthony Weiner resigns under pressure from media and Democrats

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The short, sordid campaign to force Rep. Anthony Weiner from office ended predictably Thursday, as the New York City Democrat announced his resignation at a press conference in Brooklyn. A special election will be held to replace him.

In late May right-wing operatives uncovered sexually suggestive text messages and photographs that Weiner, a seven-term congressman, had sent to various women, and published them. After first denying they were his, Weiner admitted June 6 to sending them, but refused to quit Congress. He commented, “I lied because I was embarrassed ... But did I violate the Constitution because I lied about a Twitter post? I don’t think so.”

In response, the Democratic Party leadership in the House of Representatives, under Nancy Pelosi, aided by the national media (and the comments of President Barack Obama), launched a determined campaign to oust Weiner, which was crowned with success on June 16.

The *Washington Post* explained the process succinctly, noting that “[Democratic] party leaders mounted an effort against Weiner with an intensity that surprised many on Capitol Hill. They issued coordinated statements, made coordinated TV appearances, and set up a meeting Thursday to strip Weiner of his coveted committee assignments. Finally, the pressure campaign worked.” Politico.com described leading Democrats as “plotting new ways to force him [Weiner] out.”

If Pelosi and company expended one-quarter of this energy fighting the Republican right, American political life might have a somewhat different coloration.

The Weiner affair played out as though scripted, like so much of American public life at present, with its hollowed out and, in a genuine sense, *unreal* character.

How many times have we now seen this?

Some unscrupulous operator gets hold of evidence about a politician’s indiscretions and makes them public; the media-tabloid-scandal machinery is set in motion; at first the individual in question denies the allegation; right-wing elements and the media go to work; the politician admits his guilt and expresses contrition for lying; the media and political establishment pulls out all the stops, raising issues of “character” and “moral values”; the politician steps down in disgrace, explaining that his problems have become a “distraction” and apologizing to all and sundry. And out of this process, in a confused but consciously manipulated fashion, American politics takes a further turn for the worse.

The process has a profoundly undemocratic character. Elected officials are not tossed out by their constituents, but through the machinations of ultra-right scoundrels and their accomplices in the mainstream media. In episodes regarding their own members, the total spinelessness of the Democratic Party can always be counted upon.

All of this takes place over the heads of the population and without its participation, often against its expressed wishes. Polls indicated that a large majority in Weiner’s district and in New York City as a whole was opposed to his resigning. No matter. For all that, overwhelming majorities in the US are opposed to cuts in Social Security and Medicare and in favor of withdrawing most or all American troops from Afghanistan. No matter. The political establishment imperviously goes about its business, protecting the interests and wealth of the top 1 percent of the population.

At some point during the 10 days in which the New York City congressman refused to leave office, contrary to the wishes of the Democratic Party hierarchy, the *Post* reports, “Weiner told Pelosi about polls showing that a majority of voters in his district supported him. All the more reason to go, Pelosi said: ‘Consider those rose petals, to let you go

graciously.”

Magnificent! Principled, and a poet too!

The moral effluvium emanating from Washington and the major media over Weiner’s supposed sins is simply nauseating. After doing everything in her power to destroy the New York congressman, Pelosi told the media, “I pray for him and his family and wish them well.”

The American political class, most easily identified by its dishonesty and greed, has expressed almost universal outrage over Weiner’s sending inappropriate pictures to women he met online and then trying to cover that up.

Former Democratic Party governor of Pennsylvania Ed Rendell, for example, told television viewers on an interview program that Weiner “obviously has some form of emotional or mental illness ... He should get treatment.”

Former Virginia governor Tim Kaine, having just stepped down as chairman of the Democratic National Committee and now a candidate for the US Senate, proclaimed, “Lying is unforgivable, lying publicly about something like this is unforgivable, and he should resign.”

Experts consulted by the media earnestly suggest Weiner could undergo a “recovery process” that might last “three to five years.” Recovery from what precisely? The political atmosphere in America is odious. Organize the slaughter of various defenseless populations overseas, destroy the lives of the poor, and you will be honored to the end of your days—flirt online and you will be sent away to “recover.”

Weiner is not a friend of the working class. A protégé of Sen. Charles Schumer, the US Senator from Wall Street, the congressman has a history of self-promotion and occasional populist demagoguery. Weiner made a certain name for himself campaigning for benefits for sick 9/11 “first responders,” i.e., policemen and firemen, in the general framework of patriotic support for the “war on terror.” Along those lines, he has been a slavish defender of Israeli oppression of the Palestinians. In 2002, along with then-Senator Hillary Clinton, he voted for the resolution authorizing George W. Bush to launch the war in Iraq.

Weiner, whose constituents in Brooklyn and Queens include many retired people, has postured as a supporter of a broader public health care system and an opponent of the health insurance giants. In February 2010, Weiner made waves when he declared, “Make no mistake about it, every

single Republican I have ever met in my entire life is a wholly owned subsidiary of the insurance industry.” The congressman, considered a leading contender in the 2013 race for New York City mayor, may have offended some powerful people with these and similar comments.

It is a sign of the times that the ultra-right elements bent on destroying Weiner apparently viewed him as a liberal attack dog. In the same vein, a *New York Times* article Friday, discussing the fallout from Weiner’s resignation, asserted that the congressman’s departure meant that “liberals ... will no longer be able to turn to Mr. Weiner for the easy and fiery quote ... Mr. Weiner had been a bombastic irritant in Washington, never pulling his punches as he lashed out at Republicans, and sometimes those in his own party who strayed from what he saw as the progressive ideal.”

Speaking of the *Times*, its coverage of Weiner’s departure was especially lurid and overblown. The newspaper devoted two leading columns on its front page and a screaming headline to the congressman’s four-minute announcement. The “scrappy” Rep. Weiner, the *Times* breathlessly informed its readers, resigned his seat over “lewd online behavior” that “startled his constituents,” “alienated many of his colleagues” and, according to anonymous friends of the Weiners, “devastated” his wife.

The *Times* editors and columnists throw themselves into these sex scandals, repeating the salacious details while pontificating about the damage such episodes are doing to the nation’s moral fiber or, in the case of columnist Maureen Dowd, finding, in her “post-feminist resignation,” further evidence that “Men are dogs.”

At least two elements are involved. First, Dowd and company live at the gutter level of politics, whatever their disclaimers. This is their meat and potatoes because they see the world in a deeply subjective, polluted fashion. This is who they are.

Second, the media, including the *Times*, needs sex scandals and other such episodes to divert the population from the economic calamity, direct its angers toward the scapegoat of the hour and generally encourage the most backward thoughts and feelings.



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