

Akin affair highlights hypocrisy and ignorance in US official politics

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Republican Congressman Todd Akin continued Wednesday to reject demands that he step down as the party's candidate for the US Senate seat from Missouri, three days after making himself a national symbol of ignorance and bigotry with his declaration that women who were raped were unlikely to become pregnant or need an abortion.

Defending his opposition to abortion even in the case of rape, Akin told a local television interviewer in St. Louis, "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down." He added that even if pregnancy resulted from such an assault, "the punishment ought to be of the rapist and not attacking the child."

Akin won a narrow victory in the Republican primary August 7, defeating two equally reactionary candidates, self-funded millionaire businessman John Hovde and former state treasurer Sarah Steelman. The latter had the backing of former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin and much of the Republican Party establishment.

Akin's remarks Sunday touched off a firestorm of public criticism, much of it from his Republican colleagues. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and his choice for vice president, Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan, both urged Akin to withdraw by a Tuesday 5 p.m. deadline, which would have allowed the state Republican Party to name a replacement for the contest with incumbent Democrat Claire McCaskill, who was trailing in the polls against all three potential Republican opponents.

Ryan has been linked to Akin in the House Republican caucus as the co-author of legislation that would redefine rape, creating two categories of the crime, "forcible" (Akin's "legitimate") and otherwise.

The Republican National Committee, the Senate Republican Campaign Committee, and the super PAC

founded by former Bush White House aide Karl Rove all announced they would withdraw all financial support for Akin, taking an estimated \$10 million off the table for the fall campaign.

Missouri Republican Senator Roy Blunt also issued a statement demanding that Akin step down, backed by a quartet of former Republican senators from the state—Christopher Bond, John Danforth, Jim Talent and John Ashcroft, the ultra-conservative Christian fundamentalist who was Bush's attorney general.

It is evident from this reactionary lineup that the Republicans were concerned not with the position taken by Akin, but with the political uproar and media backlash sparked by his pig-headed ignorance, which have damaged Republican prospects of winning the Missouri seat.

According to the calculations of both big business parties, the Missouri contest is one of a handful that will decide which party controls the Senate, giving it the upper hand on a wide array of legislation, in particular the tax and regulatory issues that are of enormous significance to corporate America.

The Democrats currently hold a 53-47 majority, but must defend 23 of the 33 seats that are up for election November 6. The Republicans must gain at least four seats to win control if Obama is reelected, or three if Romney wins and Ryan, as vice president, becomes the tie-breaking vote.

While the Republican establishment demands Akin's removal as the party candidate in Missouri, the commission drawing up the Republican Party platform for adoption at next week's convention in Tampa, Florida approved an anti-abortion position identical to Akin's.

The commission voted Tuesday for language opposing abortion without exceptions for rape, incest or

the life of the mother, as well as backing the claim that a fertilized egg was a “person” under the terms of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution, entitling a pinhead of protoplasm to the same legal rights as a human being.

Akin himself seemed to have taken heart from the platform vote as well as support for his continued candidacy by right-to-life groups and the evangelical Christian lobby. In an appearance Wednesday morning on ABC’s “Good Morning America,” he said he would accede to demands of party leaders that he not attend the Republican National Convention in Tampa but would remain as the candidate.

Asked if he would categorically not change his mind about withdrawing and allow the state Republican Party to seek a court order to appoint a replacement—something which is still possible until September 25—he visibly hesitated, then said, “I’m never going to say everything that could possibly happen; I don’t know the future.”

The Akin affair puts the spotlight on one of the salient facts of modern American politics—the domination of ultra-right elements that have only minimal support in the population, but whose influence on the Republican Party, and through it on the Democratic Party and bourgeois politics as a whole, is inordinate.

Akin, whose father, grandfather and great-grandfather were steel company executives, has called for the abolition of the federal school lunch program and school breakfast program, voted against funding autism research, opposed increases in the minimum wage, and called federal loans for college students “a stage-three cancer of socialism.”

The Democratic Party and the Obama reelection campaign have naturally welcomed the implosion of the Akin campaign as a welcome diversion from their own reactionary and unpopular record as the defenders of Wall Street, as the recession generated by the 2008 financial crash approaches its fifth year.

Incumbent Democratic Senator Claire McCaskill is a multi-millionaire whose reelection campaign was hard-hit by reports that she had billed the government tens of thousands of dollars for the use of a private plane that she and her husband co-owned. She was also accused of failing to pay property taxes of more than a quarter million dollars on the plane.

National Democratic Party leaders have welcomed the Akin controversy because it allows them to posture as the defenders of women’s rights, despite the dismal record of the Obama administration on jobs, living standards and democratic rights.

This position is echoed by “left”-liberal defenders of Obama such as the *Nation* magazine, which seized on the Akin episode to promote Obama’s reelection with articles carrying headlines like “GOP Convention Will Formally Endorse the Todd Akin Platform” and “The Danger of Laughing at Todd Akin.”

This is more outrage than the *Nation* has summoned in all the months since it was revealed that President Obama personally selects the targets for drone missile incineration at White House meetings dubbed “Terror Tuesdays” by his top aides. It is more expedient for these representatives of a privileged subset of the upper-middle class to express outrage over the ravings of a Republican ignoramus than to oppose the homicidal actions of the US commander-in-chief.



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