

Political hysteria over alleged sexual abuse ensnares congressional Democrats

Patrick Martin

17 November 2017

Within days of the eruption of a media hysteria over sexual abuse allegations against Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore, a Senate Democrat has been targeted in a similar campaign. A Los Angeles woman accused Senator Al Franken of Minnesota of “forcibly kissing” and groping her in 2006.

By Thursday afternoon, amid near-universal condemnation from other Senate Democrats and many Republicans, Franken had issued two public apologies to Leeann Tweeden, now a news broadcaster at KABC radio, and referred himself for investigation by the Senate Ethics Committee.

Franken, a former standup comedian and regular on *Saturday Night Live*, was elected to the US Senate in 2008 and reelected in 2014. The incident involving Tweeden took place during a USO tour to entertain troops in Afghanistan in 2006, which Franken headlined, with Tweeden appearing as a model and in a comedy skit directed by Franken.

Tweeden said she had come forward with her account of Franken’s conduct after having California Representative Jackie Speier on her program several weeks ago. Speier has been spearheading efforts to launch a congressional investigation into sexual harassment of employees and interns on Capitol Hill by senators and congressmen, citing her own experiences as a young staffer decades ago.

In the wake of the array of abuse allegations against prominent Hollywood figures, beginning with producer Harvey Weinstein and actor Kevin Spacey, a congressional hearing took place last week at which Speier and other female legislators and staffers voiced similar allegations against current and former members of Congress.

The atmosphere in Washington is as venomous as in Hollywood. There were reports of a “creep list,” which

CNN described as “an informal roster passed along by word of mouth, consisting of the male members most notorious for inappropriate behavior, ranging from making sexually suggestive comments or gestures to seeking physical relations with younger employees and interns.”

Speier said that there were at least two active sexual harassers among current members of Congress, and announced she would introduce a bill with the acronym “ME TOO,” after the hashtag associated with the uproar over sexual abuse in Hollywood. It is a near certainty that others on Capitol Hill will be named in the wake of the report on Franken, extending and intensifying the furor over alleged sexual misconduct.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said the Ethics Committee investigation into Franken’s conduct would begin immediately, although it wasn’t clear whether the panel even had jurisdiction, since the incident took place two years before Franken was elected.

The Democrats are now being hoisted on their own sexual misconduct petard. Congressional Republican campaign committees immediately fired off press releases demanding that virtually every Democrat running for reelection next year to the House and Senate denounce Franken and return contributions that he had made to their previous campaigns.

They were following the example of the Democratic campaign committees, which made every Republican senator running for reelection next year pronounce on whether Roy Moore should remain as the party’s candidate for Senate in Alabama, to fill the vacancy left by Jeff Sessions when he left the Senate to become Trump’s attorney general.

The media campaign against Moore remained at full boil, with five more women brought forward by the

Washington Post and other newspapers, claiming either that Moore had sought to date them while they were teenagers and he was in his 30s, or that he had sexually assaulted them. This brings the total to nine women speaking about encounters that took place between 1977 and 1991.

As the number of women has grown, the number of prominent Republicans and right-wing media outlets defending Moore has shrunk. His campaign was cut off by the National Republican Senate Campaign Committee and the Republican National Committee, and Senate Republicans lined up to demand that Moore withdraw and to threaten his expulsion from the Senate should he win the election December 12.

Fox News has largely abandoned the Moore campaign, and even ultra-right radio host Rush Limbaugh denounced him. Only the fascistic Breitbart News, headed by former Trump adviser Stephen Bannon, continues to support him.

Moore himself remained defiant, appearing at rallies and church services across the state to denounce the accusations of sexual misconduct as a conspiracy of the Republican and Democratic establishments and the media.

The Alabama state Republican Party decided Wednesday to maintain its support for Moore in the runoff next month. But Moore's fundraising has reportedly dried up, and polls showed his campaign now trailing significantly behind his right-wing Democratic Party opponent, former US Attorney Doug Jones.

The American media has been completely focused on the charges against Moore, and now Franken, to the virtual exclusion of other political issues for nearly a week. After McConnell declared Monday, "I believe the women," and called for Moore to withdraw, both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* ran editorials hailing this venal reactionary, the tool of Wall Street and the coal bosses, as a great statesman. The *Times* gushed that McConnell "said words that thousands of victims of sexual harassment and assault have waited in vain to hear."

New media reports raise accusations against the 93-year-old ex-President George H. W. Bush for alleged unwanted touching 26 years ago. And the *New York Times*, which spearheaded the campaign against Weinstein and Spacey, has now begun to raise again the

decades-old charges of sexual misconduct against former President Bill Clinton.

The *Times* published one op-ed column under the headline "I believe Juanita," referring to unproven 30-year-old allegations of rape made by Juanita Broadrick against Clinton. Another news analysis was headlined, "'What About Bill?' Sexual Misconduct Debate Revives Questions About Clinton," and cited a slew of liberals now having second thoughts about their opposition to impeachment in 1998-99.

On CNN, which has given round-the-clock coverage, the insufferable Chris Cillizza mourned over President Trump's inability to speak out credibly on the issue due to the well-known allegations against him—and his own tape-recorded boasting—of sexual assaults. Cillizza contrasted Trump to his predecessors George W. Bush and Barack Obama, who supposedly could act as "moral leaders."

Apparently, the evaluation of these two former presidents has not been negatively impacted by their responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of thousands in the various wars over which they presided. Nor has Bush's reputation as a chivalrous gentleman been marred by his refusal in 1998, while governor of Texas, to commute Karla Fay Tucker's death sentence. Bush actually joked about her 11th hour plea for mercy.

The WSWS warned only three days ago that the campaign against Moore has set a dangerous and reactionary precedent, with the claim that allegations of sexual assault must be taken as true as soon as they are brought forward, regardless of such democratic principles as due process, the presumption of innocence, and the right of the accused to confront and rebut the charges against him or her.

The campaign against Moore, and now against Franken and soon to be others on Capitol Hill, is an ugly spectacle, whose operative method is that of a witch-hunt. The political agendas driving this fraudulent moral crusade are utterly reactionary.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact