Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi demands Representative John Conyers resign over harassment claims

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House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi demanded Thursday that Representative John Conyers Jr., the chamber's longest-serving lawmaker, resign from Congress because of unproven allegations of sexual misconduct. "Zero tolerance means consequences—for everyone," she said. "No matter how great the legacy."

The move marks a reversal by Pelosi, who defended Conyers Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press", calling him an "icon in our country" who has "done a great deal to protect women" and should be entitled to "due process."

Conyers, who has already stepped down as the top Democrat on the House Judiciary committee, participated in the civil rights movement and helped found the Congressional Black Caucus. As the longest-serving member of the House of Representatives, he holds the honorary title of "dean."

A spokesman for Conyers said Thursday that the congressman, who is nearly ninety years old, has been hospitalized due to a stress-related illness.

Demands have also been made for the resignation of Senator Al Franken, though both have said that they will not. Responding to Pelosi's demand, Conyers' lawyer declared, "Nancy Pelosi did not elect the congressman and she sure as hell won't tell the congressman to leave."

The accusations against Conyers and Franken come as the Trump administration is pushing through a watershed bill that would slash taxes on the rich, raise taxes on low-income households, and gut social spending. Both Conyers and Franken have been among the more vocal opponents within the Democratic Party of the Trump administration's domestic agenda.

Conyers and Franken are the latest victims of the ongoing "sexual misconduct" witch hunt that has been heavily promoted by the Democrats and their semi-official news outlets, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post.*

The *Times* lifted the lid on the some of the bitter factional divisions motivating the campaign against Conyers in an article published Tuesday that declared the Conyers scandal "has highlighted schisms that are as much about generations as they are about gender."

It quoted Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York, who observed, "House Democrats have been in transition since the 2016 election with younger members being given the opportunity to be on the playing field in a meaningful way," adding that the downfall of Franken and Conyers "may accelerate the elevation of younger voices."

It continued, "Especially among Democrats, Mr. Conyers's troubles have…underscored the difficulty that newer members of the House have in rising up in a system where leadership positions, including committee chairmanships, are determined almost solely by seniority."

It added, "The three top Democrats in the House—Representatives Nancy Pelosi of California, Steny Hoyer of Maryland and James E. Clyburn of South Carolina—are all in their late 70s. Mr. Conyers has been the top Democrat on the Judiciary Committee—either as chairman or ranking member—for 10 years."

It noted that Pelosi had come under political pressure following her public defense of Conyers, including by Jeffries and other members of the Congressional Black Caucus. The *Times* highlighted other members of Congress who were unhappy with Pelosi's leadership,

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including Tim Ryan of Ohio, who declared, “It’s been no secret that I think we need new people stepping up across the board in the party providing leadership.”

The *Times*, which has been at the forefront of promoting the sexual misconduct witch hunt, made no effort to square the naked careerism and factional infighting it profiled with any defense of women’s rights.

It does make clear, however, some of the political considerations leading to Pelosi’s about-face. She appears to have received a clear message: throw Conyers under the bus or her own position as Democratic leader would be in jeopardy.

As these events played out in Congress, Today Show host Matt Lauer, whose firing was announced while the program was on air Wednesday, made a contrite apology, declaring, “To the people I have hurt, I am truly sorry. As I am writing this I realize the depth of the damage and disappointment I have left behind.”

On Wednesday Oscar-winning actor Geoffrey Rush hit back against the Sydney Theatre Company, which announced it had received a complaint against him. “Not to afford a person their right to know what has been alleged against them let alone not inform them of it but release such information to the public is both a denial of natural justice and is not how our society operates,” he wrote in a statement.

The same day, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) said it fired Garrison Keillor, creator of the iconic “A Prairie Home Companion” radio program, over allegations of “inappropriate behavior.” Commenting on the firing, Keillor said the story was “more interesting and more complicated than the version MPR heard.”

MPR reported on Thursday that it had received widespread criticism from the public for its summary action, based on an accusation that Keillor has said involved him mistakenly touching a woman’s back while offering an expression of condolence. “Hundreds of Minnesotans are expressing anger, disappointment and disbelief” over the decision to cut ties with Keillor, MPR reported.

“Some Facebook and email commenters accused MPR of ‘McCarthyism’ and called MPR’s investigation of Keillor’s conduct a ‘witch hunt.’ Others asked for a more complete explanation of the accusations from the company.”

Just hours before he was fired, Keillor published a column in the *Washington Post* defending Franken, entitled, “Al Franken should resign? That’s absurd.”

“On the flight home, in a spirit of low comedy, Al [Franken] ogled [accuser] Miss Tweeden and pretended to grab her and a picture was taken,” Keillor wrote. “Eleven years later, a talk show host in LA, she goes public, and there is talk of resignation. This is pure absurdity, and the atrocity it leads to is a code of public deadliness.”

The *Washington Post* now carries an editors’ statement above the online version of the column, declaring that Keillor “failed to meet” a “basic level of transparency” in publishing the article, adding “we do not intend to publish his columns in the future.”

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