

# Democrats force resignation of US Senator Al Franken

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The forced resignation of Democratic Senator Al Franken of Minnesota, the highest-level elected official to become a casualty of the media campaign over sexual misconduct, is antidemocratic and politically reactionary.

Franken was elected in 2008 and then reelected in 2014, each time winning more than one million votes. He is being ousted from the US Senate on the basis of allegations relating for the most part to the period before he entered electoral politics, which have not been tested in any legal or evidentiary procedure.

In his speech on the Senate floor Thursday, in which he announced his resignation, Franken suggested that most of the charges against him were unwarranted or exaggerated. He acknowledged apologizing for some past actions, but declared, “I also think it gave some people the false impression that I was admitting to doing things that in fact I haven’t done. Some of the allegations against me are simply not true. Others I remember very differently.”

He said that he had referred the charges to the Senate Ethics Committee because he was confident that he had done nothing during his nine years as a senator that would warrant disciplinary action against him.

He also acknowledged “that there is some irony in the fact that I am leaving while a man who has bragged on tape about his history of sexual assault sits in the Oval Office and a man who has repeatedly preyed on young girls campaigns for the senate with the full support of his party.”

Franken was referring, of course, to the widely reported remarks of Donald Trump in the notorious Access Hollywood tape, and Trump’s endorsement of Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore in the special election in Alabama December 12.

Franken said he was resigning his seat because “It’s become clear that I can’t both pursue the ethics committee process and at the same time remain an effective senator for them.”

The real reason for his resignation is the collapse of support for Franken among his Senate Democratic colleagues. After a report in *Politico* Wednesday morning of another allegation against Franken, New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, one of the leaders of the sexual misconduct witch-hunt, declared that “enough is enough” and Franken had to go.

Within 90 minutes of Gillibrand’s statement, in an orchestrated rollout, one Democratic senator after another called for Franken’s resignation. Finally, late Wednesday, they were joined by the two top Democrats in the Senate, Minority Leader Charles Schumer and Minority Whip Richard Durbin.

Only a few days ago, Durbin had said of Franken’s case, “Let’s have a hearing, an investigation. Let’s let this really reach whatever conclusion it is going to reach, but through a due process.” By Wednesday he declared, “Senator Franken’s conduct was wrong. He has admitted to it. And he should resign from the Senate.”

Some Democratic leaders reportedly calculate that disposing of congressional Democrats charged with sexual transgressions, such as Representative John Conyers, forced out Tuesday, and Senator Franken, forced out Thursday, will give them greater leverage to use the sex issue against the seating of Senator Roy Moore, assuming he wins the election in Alabama, and against Trump himself.

Thomas Perez, chairman of the Democratic Party, issued a statement declaring, “If you are a candidate for office or an elected official who has engaged in sexual misconduct, you should step aside—whether you sit in the US House of Representatives, the US Senate or the Oval Office.”

Senator Bernie Sanders gave voice to this sentiment in an appearance Thursday on the “CBS This Morning” program, where he called for Franken’s resignation, then declared, “I would hope maybe the president of the United States might pay attention to what’s going on and also think about resigning.”

To say that this is unlikely is an understatement. The Republican Party, as the more aggressive party of big business, will not let the personal conduct of this or that politician, or even of a president, stand in the way of prosecuting the reactionary agenda of the ruling class.

Even if Moore or Trump were to be undone on the sex issue, this would contribute nothing to the development of a genuine political opposition to the right-wing policies of the Republican Party, which are in all essentials shared by the Democrats.

On the contrary, the Democratic Party is focused on a series of right-wing witch hunts: first, the campaign based on unsubstantiated charges that Russia intervened in the 2016 elections to aid Trump; now, the stampede to use alleged sexual

misconduct to purge a whole section of the political and media establishment.

The embrace of a neo-Puritan sexual morality by the Democrats is both reactionary and hypocritical. Thirty-five of the 48 Democrats in the Senate called for Franken's resignation over allegations of sexual misconduct that have not been seriously investigated, let alone prosecuted, and that Franken basically denies.

By contrast, not one Democrat called for the resignation of Senator Robert Menendez, the New Jersey Democrat who faced prosecution this fall over charges of receiving millions in bribes from a long-time crony, a multimillionaire doctor-businessman for whom Menendez repeatedly interceded with the Department of Health and Human Services under the Obama administration.

Every Senate Democrat said that Menendez deserved the presumption of innocence until a jury returned a verdict. But no such consideration is to be afforded to the reported behavior of Senator Franken, which never rose to the level even of a misdemeanor.

To say nothing of the record of the Senate Democrats as a whole, who have wholeheartedly supported mass murder committed by American military forces in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, and drone warfare—widely promoted by the Obama administration—in dozens of countries. All these wars, of course, have been accompanied by horrific violence against civilians, including widespread sexual violence perpetrated by forces backed by American imperialism.

The Socialist Equality Party would support the removal of every Democrat and Republican in the Senate by a mass movement of the working class for acting as stooges of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus. What is happening in the case of Al Franken, however, is a politically motivated witch-hunt using mere allegations of sexual misconduct to remove elected officials and shift the entire political spectrum further to the right.

As this campaign has been stoked up, with the *New York Times* and other "liberal" media outlets taking the lead, the sex witch-hunt has taken on an increasingly unhinged and openly antidemocratic character. Liberal pundits pride themselves on demanding, like Lewis Carroll's Red Queen, "Sentence first, trial afterward." Or worse, "sentence first," forget about the trial.

Thursday's *Washington Post* carried an op-ed by Ana Marie Cox, a feminist columnist, headlined "Al Franken isn't being denied due process." Cox denounced concerns over the lack of due process as "one of the most pernicious half-true rejoinders dragging down the #metoo movement..."

The same day, Kirsten Powers, writing in *USA Today*, declared, "Due process is for court proceedings. Harvey Weinstein didn't get to go before a judge and jury to plead his case. Charlie Rose didn't get to cross-examine his accusers. In these cases, what was determined was that the accusations were

credible."

This is utterly reactionary and antidemocratic. The abandonment of the presumption of innocence in the entertainment industry is used to justify its abandonment in political life. Moreover, unlike Weinstein and Rose, Al Franken and John Conyers were elected—in the case of Conyers, 27 times.

Certainly if the standards advocated by Gillibrand, Cox and Powers had been in effect 20 years ago, the ultra-right campaign to impeach and remove Bill Clinton as president, overturning the result of two national elections, would have been successful. Indeed, the Democrats would have taken the lead and joined forces with Newt Gingrich & Co.

Even then, the more right-wing sections of the Democratic Party, headed by then-Senator Joseph Lieberman, joined in the moralistic condemnation of Clinton and would have supported impeachment. But there was such widespread popular opposition to the ultra-right Republican campaign that the Senate ultimately refused to convict Clinton and remove him from office.

There is already considerable evidence of popular revulsion against the use of charges of sexual misconduct to demand the immediate resignation of elected officials.

The comment section of the *New York Times* article reporting Franken's resignation was flooded with postings largely hostile to his being forced out of office, characterizing the sex witch-hunt as "McCarthyism," a "political hatchet-job" and an attack on American democracy. "Accusations are not proof of action," one person noted, echoing a widespread sentiment.

The Democrats refuse to wage any serious fight against the massive attacks on jobs, living standards and social services conducted by the Trump administration, because the Democratic Party, like the Republicans, is a political instrument of the corporate elite.

Their special role, under conditions of immense and deepening economic inequality and social polarization, is to deliberately fracture the population along the lines of gender, race and sexual orientation, in order to prevent a unified struggle by the entire working class—black, white, Hispanic and Asian, male and female, gay and straight—against the capitalist class.



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