

Another Successful Congressional Scandal

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It looks like the scandal involving former Congressman Anthony Weiner is finally over now that he has resigned. This one was a so-called "sex scandal", although there wasn't any actual sex. In the interest of basic journalistic integrity (if there is such a thing), this episode should be referred to as a "character defamation" scandal. I am referring to both characters: a) Mr. Weiner, who sent those pictures to strangers (a not-too-bright action); and b) more importantly, Mr. Weiner's false accusation against Mr. Andrew Breitbart, whom Mr. Weiner falsely claimed had hacked Mr. Weiner's Facebook page and sent the pictures. But the media, knowing full well that sex sells better than character assassination, sold this to the public as a "sex scandal." From the media's standpoint, it makes a lot of sense to avoid accusing others of character assassination when such is in fact the main occupation of the media itself. Even the media can recognize that level of hypocrisy.

Mr. Weiner's departure is no doubt a blessing to the Democratic Party, since they have to reduce their New York delegation by one due to redistricting, and Mr. Weiner's new-found fame was not helping the Party's image. If history is any guide, the Party would have defended him to the end if not for the redistricting problem. But the Republican Party is no different: Senator Vitter remains in office after an actual sex scandal involving illegal activity. And so it is with the powerful: if you have enough "friends" in high places (political and in the media), like Sen. Vitter, Rep. Barney Frank, and President Bill Clinton, it is easy to keep your office. If not, such as in the cases of Tom Foley and Anthony Weiner, you have to go. Note that there was no impulse on the part of any of these persons to resign solely due to embarrassment over their sordid activities. I bet they all smile every time they think about them.

The real offensive thing about Mr. Weiner's actions was not the sending of the pictures per se, but his false accusation against Mr. Breitbart and the media's complicity in repeating that claim without questioning it. Sending the pictures was merely moronic, not criminal; but to falsely accuse someone else of a federal crime is quite another thing. I wonder how the media will cast the story if Mr. Breitbart chooses to sue Mr. Weiner for defamation of character.

So, all in all, another successful scandal: the media filled up a great deal of air time on the cheap for three weeks; the public was thrilled to hear about sex scandals in high places (although they were cheated this time on that score); some people enjoyed seeing a high-and-mighty fall; and neither the people nor the media were inconvenienced by having to take the time consider issues that really matter.

Mission accomplished -- we are now ready for the next diversion.