



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Weeding our Political Garden

Admittedly, I do not have a green thumb. If our home is verdant it's entirely by my wife's efforts but I do recall once reading some gardening advice that seemed useful: you can't get rid of weeds by simply pulling them out. You must plant something in their place to prevent their return.

I think of that advice when I hear people complain about some politicians. I believe "disgusted" is their term of choice, and certainly the media has uncovered plenty of unsavory behavior for us to be disgusted about. Still, I'm bothered by that cynicism because I know firsthand that most elected officials are honest and good people who take their public service as a point of pride. Nonetheless, I certainly understand where that cynicism stems from, especially when you read the sordid affairs smeared on the pages of New York's newspapers these days.

That's why I'm baffled by how many disgraced public servants make a comeback. Forget about the Marion Barry's or the Silvio Berlusconi's of the world. Right here in New York, at this very moment, there are three former politicians whose relatively recent, scandalous behavior forced them out office in shame. Yet all three seek to regain public office.

You know who they are because if there's anything the media loves more than scandal, it's the public's obsession with the villains we supposedly, "love to hate." One of these married men patronized prostitutes, another who had a pregnant wife at home would regularly send lewd pictures of his anatomy to other women on the internet, and the last sexually harassed so many female staffers that it cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in settlements and legal fees. Any of them would rightfully have been fired from the private sector, yet each now has the audacity to throw his hat into the public arena once more. What's worse, despite their tremendous lack of judgment, polls show they have notable public support while they simultaneously rake in campaign dollars.

What's going on here? As a "public" official always mindful of being in the "public" eye, I wondered whether each of these men had lost their minds. Now I can't help but think maybe we've collectively lost ours as well. Let's face it. People don't get far in politics and win primaries and elections without public support and more so, the direct financial support of their parties. And what does that say about those political organizations who publicly celebrate their commitment to women's rights, to then quietly back its worst abusers? Is their commitment to battling exploitation in word only? Obviously, candidates should be vetted by their party to ensure that they value the ideals we're all fighting for.

So, why don't they? A party can certainly revoke a candidate's registration sending a clear message that such antics will not be tolerated while preventing that candidate from seeking further public office. But it hasn't and won't. Again, I ask why?

Let's hold them accountable, individuals and the party they represent. Regardless of how out-of-touch party leaders are the real power belongs to you, the voter. Members can guarantee their party is better represented by getting out in primaries and voting for the candidate who truly values their ideals. A party's tacit support of candidates who have a track record of, at best, poor judgment and, at worst, misogyny sends a clear message as to

that party's priorities. Of course, your voting in all the general elections is the best way to guarantee that better candidates prevail.

Over time, you'll find that public service and policy improves as we weed our political garden.