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**Sent:** Tuesday, June 14, 2011 7:51 PM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** Fw: Weiner's circle of friends, though 'appalled' by behavior, remains loyal

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**From:** Toiv, Nora F  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 14, 2011 12:24 PM  
**To:** Mills, Cheryl D  
**Subject:** Weiner's circle of friends, though 'appalled' by behavior, remains loyal

Posted at 10:39 AM ET, 06/14/2011

## Weiner's circle of friends, though 'appalled' by behavior, remains loyal

By [Felicia Sonmez](#)

On Monday, the House's first day back in Washington following the explosion of the Anthony Weiner scandal, in some ways it was business as usual, in others not. Members took action on several amendments to an appropriations bill; committees met; and there was a buzz of activity in the Speaker's Lobby, the long hallway just off the House floor where lawmakers and reporters often congregate during votes.

Yet most of that buzz centered on the action off the floor – whether Weiner, a seven-term New York Democrat, should heed the calls from senior congressional Democrats and even the suggestion of President Obama to resign his seat in the wake of the lawmaker's admission last week that he had repeatedly lied to cover up lewd photos and messages he sent to more than half a dozen women online.

As other lawmakers scuttled up and down the hallway fielding questions about the Weiner scandal, Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-N.J.) wearily sighed while looking out a window overlooking the Capitol's south lawn into the evening sun.

"I just think it was reprehensible," Pascrell, 74, said of Weiner's behavior. "He thinks the same thing, so I'm not breaking the news. I have yet to find anything – not that I've bisected it – but I've yet to find anything that may touch upon the breaking of the House rules. If I did – *if I did* – I would immediately ask for his resignation. But right now, I'm more concerned about his health and the health of his family, and that's what friends are for."

Friendship is not something that has often found its way into the narrative of the Weiner imbroglio, which is entering its third frenzied week. And yet, despite the stream of resignation calls from members high-profile and otherwise -- and notwithstanding the fact that Weiner, 46, is often described as something of a loner – the New York Democrat retains a core group of about ten House supporters who are standing by their friend even as they condemn his behavior.

Rep. John Larson (Conn.), the number-four House Democrat and another Weiner friend, said Monday that Weiner's House allies don't defend his conduct but still empathize with their embattled colleague.

“It’s the question of, in the midst of a reprehensible act, is there still any human feeling left in the place?” Larson said. “I think that’s what tears people asunder. And people that know him and were his friends before will probably be his friends afterwards and think that it was an absolute reprehensible, stupid, creepy thing to do.”

“And then,” Larson added, “he’s seeking help, which is the right thing.”

The House Democratic Caucus Chairman added: “The crushing thing is what’s happening – most of our guys would say, ‘Hey look, there’s a circus about this.’ And seeing one of your friends – by his own acts, mind you – but just being destroyed in front of your eyes, who wants to go through that?”

Among the House Democrats backing Weiner are Pascrell, Larson and Reps. Michael Capuano (Mass.), Mike Doyle (Pa.), Bob Brady (Pa.) and Tim Holden (Pa.); previous members of the Friends of Weiner group include former Reps. Ron Klink (D-Pa.) and Bart Stupak (D-Mich.) and former congressman and governor John Baldacci (D-Maine).

Mostly liberal northeastern Democrats hailing from outside the New York delegation, the members’ bonds with Weiner are based more on tenure than on regional affinity. Weiner, Larson and Capuano (who was Weiner’s Capitol Hill roommate for nearly a decade) were all members of the 1998 House freshman class, while the other members were elected a few years apart in the mid-1990s.

Many of the group’s members serve as the foundation of the congressional Democrats’ baseball team; Doyle is manager of the group, while Pascrell is his top assistant. (“I’ve been playing baseball but now I’m the hitting coach, because they think I’m going to get hurt out there,” Pascrell said.)

“He’s the ultimate buster of other people, he is,” Pascrell said of Weiner on the baseball field. “He knows how far he can push you. If you don’t have a good sense of humor, you’re going to get pissed off at him. If you do have a good sense of humor, then you give it right back. Not unlike life, and that’s the way it is.”

In the House, Weiner and his allies’ loyalty was to Rep. Jack Murtha (D-Pa.), a close ally of now-House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) who before his death last year used to sit in a spot on the far side of the House chamber known as Pennsylvania Corner, an area frequented by Weiner and friends.

The Murtha alliance didn’t translate into automatic support for Pelosi, however, and after their party’s sweeping losses in the 2010 midterms, Capuano and Pascrell were two of the more outspoken critics of the California Democrat’s bid to retain her position as party leader, aiding Rep. Peter DeFazio’s (D-Ore.) effort to postpone the leadership elections.

In late 2001, the entire group found itself under the microscope in a Vanity Fair expose on the lives of young female Capitol Hill staffers and interns. In the final part of the piece, the young women profiled by the author run into Weiner and his friends at the Capital Grille the Thursday after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks and are invited to join the lawmakers for a few rounds of song and drink. Weiner then followed up with one of the women via email. From the *Vanity Fair* piece:

*The next day, New York’s Anthony Weiner finds the time to hunt down Diana’s E-mail address. He writes that he hopes they might meet again. Diana is overwhelmed that he’s managed to think of her on a day that must be heavy with import and emotional intensity. Last night he mentioned that he’d be going to Manhattan to inspect the World Trade Center wreckage with the president. They’d be traveling together on Air Force One.*

The magazine’s excerpt seems prescient after the recent revelations about Weiner mistakenly sent a lewd photo of himself to a female Twitter follower.

This past Monday, one day after some of the most embarrassing photos to date of Weiner had surfaced on the gossip web site TMZ, the Democrat's friends did what they could to help as Weiner began a leave of absence from the House. Capuano submitted Weiner's two-week leave request, which was approved by the House unanimously. And Capuano, Larson, Pascrell and other Weiner friends huddled on the Democratic side of the House chamber as they often do during votes.

"You know, we all came in the same class together, so of course, there's those feelings for your colleague," Larson said.

Looking out at the sunset, Pascrell, who said Weiner called him last week to apologize for his behavior, reflected on his friend's outsize personality and his penchant for headline-making.

"Tony is a character, there's no two ways about it," Pascrell said. "We all have egos. He was more concerned about effect – I talked to him about this several times – of the effect of what he said rather than the results. ... And so, he was theater. He was a lot of theater. That's his projection. It doesn't mean he's right; it doesn't mean he's wrong."

"Now, can Tony get his act together?" Pascrell asked. "Can Tony clear up the problems he must have in his personal life? I can't answer that question. I hope he does, for his family's sake and his sake. And I pray for him. Right now, that's the best I can do."

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