

February 1, 2018

Dear Members,

It is with a heavy heart that I write this letter. Over the past few months, I have done much soul searching about what it means to be elected, to serve in elected office for the people I represent and our state. I have thought a lot about my actions and those I have caused to feel that I did not value by my careless, insensitive and offensive attempts at humor. I have thought a lot about Representative Townsend's plea on the floor yesterday and the Speaker's private, but urgent requests since the first week of this painful and public journey to resign.

Much of my focus has been inward and gradually coming to understand the impact of conduct, whether intentional or unintentional, that results in someone feeling demoralized and devalued. These are not just words I am saying because I have to. I care deeply that I have caused others discomfort at best and humiliation at worst. Those who know me, know that has been the hardest part of all of this. When I said that I want to begin to listen and apologize personally, to those who I have wronged, (who are interested) I meant it.

I have respect for those who had the courage to come forward whom I have wronged, because I know it has not been easy. They have paved the way for so many others to feel empowered and to educate those of us who just didn't understand. Which is why I am writing today. Not to preserve myself but to honor one woman who reluctantly came forward even though she was terrified about the consequences of speaking the truth. With limited means, she hired an attorney and faced the biggest fear of her life because, ultimately, she dared to believe that she did not deserve to be sexually harassed and when people heard what she had endured, these private, humiliating experiences would be exposed and she would know that she never again would have to quietly and gracefully endure such conduct. She did not contact the media. She contacted and met with the independent investigator. It was the hardest thing she has ever done in her life. Yet, inexplicably, the pattern of outrageous conduct that she described, including comments allegedly made directly to her by her elected boss, as well as being subjected to her boss' exposed genitalia, were not detailed in the report. What has been done to her, by omitting her story and not giving it the respect it deserves you disgrace the mission of the sexual harassment investigation committee and our chamber. No matter what happens to me, this young woman deserves better. The process matters. The truth matters; the process must be fair and complete.

I ask that before there is further discussion of the results of this investigation, the investigator be permitted to bring forward, with dignity and compassion, and ideally anonymously because I am certain that she has lost all faith in the system. This historic report must not hurt those it was intended to protect and empower. I ask that all of you honor the courage of this young woman whose only mistake, at this point, was the mistake of believing her voice mattered. Before we close this effort and consider consequences, I ask that the investigator not be restricted from describing and shining a light on this young woman's agony. How dare this young woman be dismissed and hidden when she risked so much to come forward. If that is not permitted, fortunately, those with firsthand knowledge can come forward and right this wrong in the ethics committee.

I have come to understand the devastating impact of sexual harassment and no legislator, me included, has the right to sexually harass anyone. I have heightened sense of awareness and compassion for those I have hurt and have been hurt by others. Starting with my own conduct, allegations must be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Respectfully,

Don Shooter  
Representative