

Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog of Brad DeLong. Comments (mostly) welcome, or email me at delong@hey.com with "delong-weblog" as the subject.
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Ocasio-Cortez: Speech on Yoho Remarks—Noted

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: *Floor Speech on Yoho Remarks* <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/rep-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-floor-speech-about-yoho-remarks-july-23>: ‘Speaker, I seek recognition for a question of personal privilege.... Thank you Madam Speaker. I would also like to thank many of my colleagues not only for the opportunity to speak today, but for the many members—from both sides of the aisle—who have reached out to me in support following an incident earlier this week...

...About two days ago, I was walking up the steps of the Capitol when Representative Yoho suddenly turned a corner. He was accompanied by Representative Roger Williams. He accosted me on the steps, right here in front of our nation’s Capitol. I was minding my own business, walking up the steps, and Representative Yoho put his finger in my face. H called me disgusting. He called me crazy. He called me out of my mind. And he called me dangerous.

Then he took a few more steps. After I had recognized his comments as rude, he walked away and said: ‘I’m rude, you’re calling me rude’. I took a few steps ahead, and I walked inside and cast my vote. Because my constituents send me here each and every day to fight for them, and to make sure that they are able to keep a roof over their head, that they’re able to feed their families, and that they’re able to carry their lives with dignity.

I walked back out and there were reporters in the front of the Capitol and in front of reporters Representative Yoho called me, and I quote, “a f—ing b—.”

These were the words that Representative Yoho levied against a congresswoman: a congresswoman that not only represents New York’s 14th Congressional District, but every congresswoman and every woman in this country. Because all of us have had to deal with this in some form, some way, some shape, at some point in our lives.

I want to be clear that Representative Yoho’s comments were not deeply hurtful or piercing to me, because I have worked a working class job. I have waited tables in restaurants. I have ridden the subway. I have walked the streets in New York City. And this kind of language is not new. I have encountered words uttered by Mr. Yoho, and men uttering the same words as Mr. Yoho, while I was being harassed in restaurants.

I have tossed men out of bars that have used language like Mr. Yoho’s.

I have encountered this type of harassment riding the subway in New York City.

This is not new, and that is the problem.

Mr. Yoho was not alone. He was walking shoulder to shoulder with Representative Roger Williams. That’s when we start to see that this issue is not about one incident. It is cultural. It is a culture of a sense of impunity, of accepting violence and violent language against women. It is an entire structure of power that supports that. Not only have I been spoken to disrespectfully—particularly by members of the Republican Party and elected officials in the Republican Party—here, but the President of the United States last year told me to go home to another country, with the implication that I don’t even belong in America.

The governor of Florida, Governor DeSantis, before I even was sworn in, called me a ‘whatever that is’. Dehumanizing language is not new. What we are seeing is that incidents like these are happening in a pattern. This is a pattern of an attitude towards women, and a dehumanization of others.

I was not deeply hurt or offended by the little comments that are made. When I was reflecting on this, I honestly thought that I was just going to pack it up and go home.

It’s just another day, right?

But then, yesterday, Representative Yoho decided to come to the floor of the House of Representatives and make excuses for his behavior. That I could not let go. I could not allow my nieces, the little girls that I go home to, the victims of verbal abuse and worse, to see that excuse and to see our Congress accept it as legitimate and accept it as an apology, and then to accept my silence as a form of acceptance.

I could not allow that to stand.

That is why I am rising today to raise this point of personal privilege.

I do not need Representative Yoho to apologize to me.

Clearly he does not want to. Clearly when given the opportunity he will not. I will not stay up late at night waiting for an apology from a man who has no remorse over using abusive language towards women. But what I do have issue with is using women—our wives and daughters,—as shields and excuses for poor behavior.

Mr. Yoho mentioned that he has a wife and two daughters. I am two years younger than Mr. Yoho’s youngest daughter. I am someone’s daughter too.

My father, thankfully, is not alive to see how Mr. Yoho treated his daughter. My mother got to see Mr. Yoho’s disrespect on the floor of this House towards me on television. I am here because I have to show my parents that I am their daughter and that they did not raise me to accept abuse from men.

Now what I am here to say is that this harm that Mr. Yoho tried to levy against me was not just an incident directed at me but at every woman. What Mr. Yoho did was give permission to other men to do that to his daughters. In using that language in front of the press, he gave permission to use that language against his wife, his daughters, women in his community.

I am here to stand up to say that is not acceptable. I do not care what your views are. It does not matter how much I disagree or how much it incenses me or how much I feel that people are dehumanizing others. I will not do that myself. I will not allow people to change and create hatred in our hearts.

What I believe is that having a daughter does not make a man decent. Having a wife does not make a decent man. Treating people with dignity and respect makes a decent man.

When a decent man messes up, as we all are bound to do, he tries his best and does apologize. Not to save face. Not to win a vote. He apologizes genuinely to repair and acknowledge the harm done, so that we can all move on.

Last, what I want to express to Mr. Yoho is gratitude.

I want to thank him for showing the world that you can be a powerful man and accost women. You can have daughters and accost women, without remorse. You can be married, and accost women. You can take photos and project an image to the world of being a family man, and accost women without remorse and with a sense of impunity.

It happens every day in this country. It happened here on the steps of our nation’s Capitol. It happens when individuals who hold the highest office in this land admit to hurting women, and using this language against all of us.

Once again, I thank my colleagues for joining us today.

I will reserve my time and I will yield to my colleague, Representative Jayapal of Washington.

Thank you.

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