

Franken's Old Comments Causing Him New Worries

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Democrat Al Franken's past work again complicated his present bid to become a U.S. senator, when Republicans on Thursday circulated 13-year-old quotes of him joking about rape while co-writing a skit for "Saturday Night Live." While Franken has tried to draw a sharp line between his comedic endeavors and his Senate aspirations, he's taking heat from across the political spectrum over old material.

St. Paul, Minn. — Officials from one of the state's largest abortion rights groups say they have concerns about some of the things DFL U.S. Senate candidate Al Franken has said and written in Playboy and elsewhere.

Planned Parenthood of Minnesota's director of legislative affairs sent a note to supporters, saying the group is "very concerned by the misogynist remarks" made by Al Franken, and found them degrading to women.

She added that it would be difficult for Planned Parenthood to endorse the candidacy of anyone with such extreme perspectives.

After the letter became public, Planned Parenthood's executive director released a statement saying "it was premature to speculate about candidate endorsements."

In addition, DFL U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum of St. Paul released a statement saying, "it is appalling that anyone could characterize rape, a violent and horrible crime, as a joke."

The comments come after the Republican Party held a news conference criticizing a 1995 story in New York magazine that quotes Franken joking about rape, while he and other "Saturday Night Live" writers discussed ideas for a sketch.

State Rep. Laura Brod, R-New Prague, said Franken should reconsider his candidacy and apologize to the state.

"When he could talk about a skit and throw ideas out there, he chose drugging and rape," said Brod. "These are his words. He's painting his own picture. And I think the picture he's painting with his own words is a picture that Minnesota would absolutely reject."

A spokeswoman for Franken would not directly respond to the magazine quotes. Instead, she issued a statement criticizing Republican Sen. Norm Coleman for not supporting the Violence Against Women Act.

In response to concerns raised by women over the Playboy article, the Franken campaign distributed a statement in his defense from Shannon Drury, president of Minnesota's chapter of the National Organization of Women.

"Now its content is being used as an excuse to label him a misogynist. Nothing could be further from the truth," Drury wrote Tuesday. "In fact, Al Franken will be a senator who will work tirelessly in support of women's issues. After meeting with Al personally, I find his honesty and openness refreshing, his intelligence and perseverance inspiring."

The issue may come into play this weekend when Democrats decide who to endorse as a challenger to Republican Norm Coleman.

Franken is considered the front-runner in a Democratic race that also features college professor Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer and frequent candidates Darryl Stanton and Dick Franson.