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Clinging to power does not make corrupt Dianne Feinstein a ‘feminist hero’

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The 89-year-old senator has been urged to stand down amid doubts about her cognitive and physical health but Nancy Pelosi claims a man would not face similar questions

Feinstein’s feminist farce

Here’s a controversial opinion: when you’re no longer capable of doing your extremely important job you should gracefully step away from your extremely important job. I know that may not sound controversial on the surface, but it appears to be quite the topic of debate in Washington DC. It certainly seems to be a contentious issue for Nancy Pelosi, the former speaker, who recently hit back at calls for the 89-year-old Democratic senator [Dianne Feinstein](#) to resign over her health.

Feinstein is the oldest sitting US senator (narrowly beating out spring chicken Chuck Grassley who is a few months younger) and there have been concerns about her [cognitive health for a while now](#). Her physical health has also become an issue: Feinstein has been absent from the Senate since February, when she was diagnosed with shingles. She’s missed 60 of [the Senate’s 82 votes](#) so far this session. Her absence from the judiciary committee, on which the Democrats hold a one-seat majority, has stopped the Democrats from advancing federal judges for confirmation. Which is a big deal because these judges get lifetime appointments.

On Wednesday, multiple Democrats, led by Representative Ro Khanna, called for Feinstein to resign, saying she could no longer fulfil her duties. Not everyone agrees. “I don’t know what political agendas are at work that are going after Senator Feinstein in that way,” [Pelosi told reporters on Wednesday](#). “I’ve never seen them go after a man who was sick in the Senate in that way.”

Norma Torres, another California Democrat, also argued that calls for Feinstein to quit [were sexist](#). “When women age or get sick, the men are quick to push them aside,” she tweeted. “When men age or get sick, they get a promotion.”

Do female politicians face unfair double standards and increased scrutiny? Of course they do! But cynically weaponizing the very real sexism that women in politics face to defend Feinstein’s stubborn decision to cling to power is appalling. Feminism isn’t about individual women climbing up the corporate ladder, it’s about working for equal rights. Feinstein represents 40 million Americans and her decisions affect millions more: there is nothing remotely feminist about Feinstein putting her ego above the greater good, particularly at such a critical moment for women’s rights in the US. It’s just selfish.

I can understand why Feinstein doesn’t want to resign, don’t get me wrong. Being in government seems to have been very lucrative for her. She’s [worth at least \\$58m](#). How did she get so rich in public service? Well, Feinstein’s husband was an investment banker and the pair have been incredibly lucky in the stock market. It’s almost like they’ve got access to inside information. Feinstein, for example, sold off a huge amount of shares just before the stock market collapsed at the [beginning of the pandemic](#). The pair faced [scrutiny](#) over their stock trades but have denied doing anything wrong. Pelosi and her husband have faced similar scrutiny.

Feinstein, to be fair, has now responded to criticism about her long absence from work. On Wednesday, following calls for her resignation Feinstein said that she’d asked the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, to allow another Democratic senator to take her place on the judiciary committee until she’s fit to return to work. That’s a good solution for now but Feinstein, who is due to step down in 2025, should think about resigning altogether: she can certainly afford retirement. Real leadership, as [Jacinda Ardern has demonstrated](#), isn’t about staying in power as long as possible, but knowing when it’s time to step aside. It’s way past time for Feinstein to cede some space and make way for fresh leadership.