

Beacon Hill Byline by Rep. Mary Rogeness

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### **Concerning Dick Morris**

You've come a long way, baby!" So says the song and advertising slogan. Women have worked hard to earn their rightful place and respect in government and the professions, business, labor and athletics. People now talk about when, rather than if the first woman will be elected president. These advances will keep coming in spite of incidents such as the recently disclosed affair of presidential adviser Dick Morris with a prostitute, and the progress will continue. However, that scandal and the response of many opinion makers to it are setbacks to the progress of women and trivialize their role in society.

I waited for people to stand up and say Morris's behavior is deplorable, that his actions repudiate any reasonable person's idea of family values, and that his attitude toward women as demonstrated by his relationships is unacceptable. Isn't that what equality is all about?

I waited for the television commentators to criticize the family values of the man who reinvented family values, but they only asked the question, "How will this affect the campaign?" The standard answer was, "Not at all."

I waited for opinion writers to address basic issues of morality, but the focus has been on the political question: how long it would take Morris to be rehabilitated. That restoration to respectability or at least celebrity was almost instantaneous.

Random House quickly announced a book deal with Morris for a reported price tag of \$2.5 million. New Yorker editor Tina Brown, wife of the Random House editor, seconded the announcement by scheduling Morris as the honored guest at an exclusive meeting for advertisers.

Whether we like it or not, Sherry Rowlands was the long-standing companion and confidante of Morris, and the record indicates that he voluntarily shared sensitive information with her. Yet when her story was published, commentators disparaged her social position and demeaned her for selling her story to a tabloid. Rowlands took more criticism for accepting \$12,000 for the story than Morris received for signing his multi-million dollar contract.

A talk show asserted that it is no problem when a married man promotes family values in national campaigns and dallies with a prostitute, so long as that prostitute does not have tapes of him revealing national security secrets. I mean, it's not like he calls his secretary Honey.

Gloria Steinem seems to think the whole thing is a Republican plot.

The National Organization for Women did not initially comment on the Morris exploitation of a prostitute. Patricia Ireland eventually came forward to say it is not like

he “tricked voters in his last election like Senator Packwood did.”

Ellen Goodman seems to have more scorn for the woman whose services he engaged than for her employer, so she will probably not include Morris in her annual list of people who have done the most to turn back the clock for women’s rights.

The Dole campaign remained silent on the issue, while the White House dismissed the subject with a statement that Morris’s expenses are being audited to ensure the rules of the Federal Elections Commission were not broken.

Prominent leaders were widely reported in the media to have telephoned to express their condolences, not to Morris’s wife Eileen McGann, but to Morris himself.

A common thread running through the statements above is that words speak louder than actions and that it does not matter what a person does. I say it matters a mountain. Democrats and Republicans alike can agree that honorable behavior between men and women is the cornerstone of family and family values.

Morris by his actions and the commentators by their responses put women back into the role of inconsequential objects and victims, not human beings deserving of respect.

We teach our children the difference between right and wrong. Even without a generation of feminism working to promote equality between men and women, we know the behavior of Dick Morris is wrong. The Morris standard tells our sons that they have permission to emulate his behavior if they can get away with it. It tells our daughters that boys will be boys, and they can learn from the example of Morris’s wife.

If this is really the message that our society wants to teach the next generation, we still have a long way to go.

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