Under Pressure, Silver Moves to Expel Lopez

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Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver has faced a chorus of calls for his resignation for his handling of the Assemblyman Vito Lopez sexual harassment scandal. Editorial boards , good government groups and Republican legislators have either demanded Silver step down or hold a leadership vote in the Assembly. A broader chorus is calling for Lopez's resignation.

Silver seems to be paying attention as his spokesman Michael Wyland issued a statement tonight saying that Silver, "intends to draft and introduce a resolution tomorrow, to be voted on Monday, to ask the Ethics & Guidance Committee to consider the full JCOPE report and to recommend appropriate sanctions including expulsion of Assemblymember Lopez."

Silver has called for Lopez to step down several times.

Earlier today Gov. Andrew Cuomo told reporters that if Lopez continues to refuse to resign, "I think the body should expel him. I think they should make a statement that says we do not tolerate this in our house."

Cuomo defended Silver. "I don’t see any comparison between what Vito Lopez and what Shelly Silver did,” Cuomo said. “There is a magnitude of difference," Cuomo said.

Silver already stripped Lopez of his seniority, committee posts, and has restricted his ability to have interns, so expulsion would seem to be the last remaining option to further punish Lopez in his current position. Lopez is already looking to get out of town permanently as he is running for City Council.

Whyland says in the statement that he expects Silver's resolution to move quickly, "Given that

an exhaustive investigation has already occurred by two public agencies."

Reports by special investigator Staten Island District Attorney Daniel Donovan and the Joint Commission on Public Ethics detailed Lopez's persistent and vile harassment of four female staffers.

Stories include Lopez asking for the staffers to rub his tumors, kiss him, share a hotel room with him, write him letters, wear more revealing clothing.

Perhaps the most revolting incident involves Lopez demanding a woman massage his hand during a car ride. When the women told Lopez she was made uncomfortable by the situation because she had been raped in college, Lopez asked if she felt guilty because she hadn't pressed charges against her accuser and told her to continue massaging his hand while she cried.

According to JCOPE's report , after receiving two initial complaints against Lopez, Silver's staff placed two of Lopez's staffers in other positions in the Assembly. That allowed Lopez to hire two more women who later charged him with harassment . The second set of women filed complaints the day that Lopez finished settlement mandated sexual harassment training. Silver's staff kept the initial settlement secret and JCOPE's investigation seems to document that Silver's staff did so to avoid a scandal. So much for that idea.

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