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Democrats Demand Rove Apologize for 9/11 Remarks

By **RAYMOND HERNANDEZ**

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WASHINGTON, June 23 - Leading Democrats reacted furiously on Thursday to remarks by Karl Rove that liberals had responded to the Sept. 11 attacks by wanting to "offer therapy and understanding for our attackers," with some Democrats calling for him to apologize or resign as a White House adviser.

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Jamie Rose for The New York Times

From left, Senators Frank R. Lautenberg, Jon Corzine and Hillary Rodham Clinton all criticized Karl Rove.

The remarks also rippled through New York political circles, putting two top Republicans, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Gov. George E. Pataki, on the defensive in the state that bore the brunt of the terror attacks in 2001.

Mr. Rove made the comments at a fund-raiser in Manhattan on Wednesday, saying: "Conservatives saw the savagery of 9/11 and the attacks and prepared for war; liberals saw the savagery of the 9/11 attacks and wanted to prepare indictments and offer therapy and understanding for our attackers."

"Conservatives saw what happened to us on 9/11 and said, 'We will defeat our enemies,'" Mr. Rove continued at a

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gathering in Midtown for the Conservative Party of New York State. "Liberals saw what happened to us and said, 'We must understand our enemies.' "

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The remarks led to a cascade of criticism from Democratic lawmakers, particularly in the Senate, where Republicans have sought to put the party on the defensive for days after a leading Democratic senator, Richard J. Durbin, compared abusive treatment of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to the war crimes of the Nazis and the Khmer Rouge.

"Karl Rove should immediately and fully apologize for his remarks or he should resign," Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the Democratic minority leader, said in a statement. "Dividing our country for political gain is an insult to all Americans and to the common memory we all carry with us from that day."

The White House immediately rejected the Democrats' demands for an apology, offering a strenuous defense of Mr. Rove and suggesting that his statements had been taken out of context.

"Karl was simply pointing out the different philosophies and different approaches when it comes to winning the war on terrorism," said Scott McClellan, the White House press secretary.

"If people want to try to engage in personal attacks instead of defending their philosophy, that's their business," Mr. McClellan continued. "But it's important to point out the different approaches to this when it comes to winning the war on terrorism. That's all he was doing."

But a ranking Republican official later argued that Democrats were blowing Mr. Rove's comments out of proportion, noting that his comments specifically pointed out the post-Sept. 11 positions of MoveOn.org, the filmmaker Michael Moore and former Gov. Howard Dean of Vermont, not Congressional Democrats or the party itself.

On Thursday, Democrats seized on Mr. Rove's comments, clearly hoping to put Republicans on the defensive by issuing harsh criticisms throughout the day in press releases, at a hastily arranged news conferences in the Capitol and in remarks delivered on the Senate floor.

The parade of Democrats attacking Mr. Rove included Senators Charles E. Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, Senators Jon Corzine and Frank R. Lautenberg of New Jersey; and Senators Christopher J. Dodd and Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut.

Six senators signed a letter to Mr. Rove that Mr. Schumer circulated calling his comments "inflammatory" and divisive. The letter also chastised Mr. Rove, saying he came into New York City to "score partisan, political points at the expense of 3,000 victims and their families."

At the same time, in heavily Democratic New York City, several leading Democrats tried to use Mr. Rove's remarks against Mayor

Bloomberg, a Republican who is up for re-election this year.

In a statement to reporters, one of the Democrats running for his job, Council Speaker Gifford Miller, called on Mr. Bloomberg, who played host to the Republican National Convention last summer, to "denounce" the comments and "demand" an apology from the president.

Mr. Bloomberg responded a few hours later with a statement that fell short of an outright criticism, saying instead that "we owe it to those we lost to keep partisan politics out of the discussion and keep alive the united spirit that came out of 9/11."

Neither Mr. Bloomberg nor any of his aides had attended the Conservative Party dinner. But Governor Pataki was at the dinner, prompting Democrats, most notably Mrs. Clinton, to call on him to repudiate Mr. Rove's remarks.

Mr. Pataki, who refused to criticize Mr. Rove, responded angrily, taking direct aim at Mrs. Clinton, who has maintained a wary truce with him since taking office. "I think it's a little hypocritical for Senator Clinton to call on me to repudiate a political figure's comments when she never asked Senator Durbin to repudiate his comments," he said.

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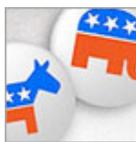


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