

One hearing, two witnesses, vastly different takeaways

By Marjorie Miller, Jocelyn Noveck

The Associated Press

It was one hearing, with just two witnesses. But, in an era of political polarization and yawning cultural divides, Americans came away having heard very different things.

Millions of men and women listened to nervous-but-composed college professor Christine Blasey Ford tell the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday that she was “100 percent” certain that Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her when they were teenagers, and they lauded her credibility and courage in speaking out.

Others saw a woman with a spotty memory who failed to prove Kavanaugh was her abuser, and believed the judge as he repeatedly choked up and vigorously defended himself. “The allegation of misconduct is completely inconsistent with the rest of my life,” he said.

Americans followed the hours of testimony from their homes, in their cars, in offices and in classrooms. Wherever they were, though, it seemed most responded through the prism of their own politics, and personal experiences. Few people interviewed by The Associated Press seemed to have had their minds changed by anything they heard.

Heather Lake of Omaha, a

stay-at-home mother of four and registered Democrat, said she went into the hearings believing Ford, and that the professor’s testimony only solidified her belief.

“Just seeing how vulnerable she is, it strikes me how cruel all the attacks on her have been,” said Lake, 38, who was sexually assaulted in her teens. “This is why women keep their sexual assaults to themselves.”

But Connie Cook Saunders, a 52-year-old fitness director for a San Diego athletic club who considers herself a moderate Republican, wasn’t swayed by Ford’s appearance.

“I personally feel like it’s a witch hunt,” she said. “It’s political. If it happened to her I am sorry, but it doesn’t make sense to bring it up now.”

The hearing was to be the culmination of a Supreme Court nomination process that will determine the political bent of the court for decades, and quite likely decide issues such as the legality of abortion and gay marriage in the United States.

It took place in a week when “America’s Dad,” Bill Cosby, was declared a sexual predator and sentenced to jail, and at a time when the U.S. president himself has battled multiple accusations of sexual misconduct. The major backdrop was the #MeToo movement, in which women across the country

have brought down powerful men they accused of sexually assaulting or harassing them.

Ford’s detailed testimony brought many to tears in the wood-paneled hearing room and beyond as she described being locked in a bedroom as a 15-year-old by two drunk boys whom she identified as Kavanaugh and his friend Mark Judge. She said Kavanaugh groped her, tried to take off her clothes and covered her mouth to keep her from screaming.

“Both Brett and Mark were drunkenly laughing during the attack,” she said, adding that she eventually escaped to a bathroom. In fact, she said, her most indelible memory was the “uproarious laughter,” the two boys “having fun at my expense.”

She was “terrified” to testify, she said, but did so because “I believe it is my civic duty to tell you what happened to me while Brett Kavanaugh and I were in high school.”

Kavanaugh began his own testimony on a note of barely contained fury. He labeled Ford’s accusation and two other allegations that have followed as “smears,” “character assassination” and part of a “calculated and orchestrated political hit” fueled by a hatred of President Donald Trump and funded by left-wing opposition groups.

He repeatedly fought to

control his tears as he talked about how the allegation has destroyed his family. “The truth is that I have never sexually assaulted anyone — not in high school, not in college, not ever,” he said.

His supporters focused on what Ford could not remember. How is it possible, they wondered, that she didn’t recall the exact address where the assault took place or how she got to and from the house?

Mary Ann Almeida, who said she was raped as a 14-year-old, thought Ford came across as untruthful.

“When you’re a true victim, you remember where it happened,” said Almeida, now 60, who watched the hearing from her home in southeastern Kentucky. “You know who was in the room, you also remember every single detail.”

But it was Kavanaugh whom Jalon Alexander, a 25-year-old Democrat and law student at the University of Pittsburgh, did not find credible.

“The more I listened to him, there was nothing he said that made me doubt Dr. Ford’s accusation,” Alexander said. “What makes him so special that we’re willing to undermine the integrity and legitimacy of the court?”

In San Diego, Republican strategist Jennifer Jacobs was struck by Ford’s sincerity. But she also was moved by Kavanaugh. “Clearly this

is a passionate man,” she said. “He’s not some crazed barbarian.” She added her “heart was breaking” for his wife and children.

But Jen Bradshaw in Quincy, Illinois, who was texting with a girlfriend as they watched Kavanaugh’s opening statement, was shocked at his angry demeanor.

“Can you imagine if Dr. Ford had shown even a hint of that much anger or openly cried?” said the 36-year-old mother of two. She also wondered: “If this is him sober and angry, what is he like after one too many beers?”

At Yale, Kavanaugh’s alma mater, student Samantha Peltz was troubled by what she called the partisan nature of the judge’s remarks. “It’s quite surprising to see him behave in such a partisan manner as someone being considered to be elevated to the highest court in the land,” she said.

Another viewer, sympathetic to Kavanaugh, saw the hearing as an attack on a successful white man.

“He’s on trial for being basically a white conservative who went to an elite school,” said Mike Glasoe of West Fargo, North Dakota, who considers himself independent politically and said he has voted for both Democrats and Republicans.

But in Raleigh, North Carolina, artist and retired state employee Penney De Pas called it part of a move-

ment of Americans fed up with men in positions of power abusing their status to get away with sexual assault.

“You have a group of baby boomers and Gen Xers and millennials ... who are like ‘We’re not going to put up with this anymore,’” De Pas said.

Many of the Americans who remembered the Clarence Thomas hearings in 1991 found themselves comparing the treatment of accuser Anita Hill then to the treatment of Ford now.

“I remember one of the questions asked of Anita Hill was something like, ‘Are you a woman scorned?’” recalled Helen Anderson, 72, of Sioux City, Iowa. “I think some lessons have been learned since Ms. Hill was treated the way she was.”

Thomas was confirmed despite Hill’s allegations of sexual harassment, which he strenuously denied.

At least one thing seemed clear Thursday: The country’s awareness and understanding of sexual assault has evolved markedly in the years since.

“Anita Hill happened at a time in our culture where women were not as empowered as they are now at all levels,” said John Cowles, a formal federal prosecutor and practicing attorney in Kansas City. “It makes sense to me women are believed more now than they were back in the 80s.”

Kavanaugh confirmation spills into heated governor’s races

By Geoff Mulvihill

The Associated Press

The controversy over sexual assault allegations against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh spilled into governor’s races across the country as the woman at the center of the claims told her story to a riveted nation.

The already highly charged contests became even more so after psychology professor Christine Blasey Ford gave her emotional but steady recounting of a sexual assault she says happened while she and Kavanaugh were teenagers. Later, an emotional and emphatic Kavanaugh denied it.

Her testimony and whether Kavanaugh’s nomination should move forward became flashpoints in governor’s races from New Hampshire to Oregon.

One Republican facing reelection this November, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, called Ford’s allegations serious and said they should be fully investigated.

Through a campaign spokesman, Sununu said the Senate “should think carefully about the next steps in this process.”

But his Democratic challenger Molly Kelly, said

Sununu should go further and call for President Donald Trump to withdraw Kavanaugh’s nomination.

“Sununu’s latest statement is not enough,” Kelly said in a statement. “And he owes the women of New Hampshire an apology.”

It was similar in Oregon, where Republican challenger Knute Buehler called for an FBI investigation into Ford’s charges while Democratic Gov. Kate Brown said Kavanaugh’s nomination should be rejected.

In a Twitter message, Brown called the federal judge “a threat to women’s rights in our nation.”

Governors have no official role in how the U.S. Senate should handle Brett Kavanaugh’s appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, but their voices could add pressure to senators trying to decide how to vote.

In Illinois, Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner said earlier this month that there should be an investigation and the allegations, if true, should disqualify Kavanaugh. He did not specify whether he thought the Senate inquiry was sufficient or whether the FBI should investigate, as Democrats have asked.

Rauner’s spokesman said the governor was traveling Thursday and did not watch Ford’s testimony.

His Democratic challenger, J.B. Pritzker, criticized Rauner’s response.

The governor, he said Thursday, “continues to support Trump and this troubling nominee. I’ve opposed Kavanaugh from day one because he poses a grave threat to Roe v. Wade, the Affordable Care Act, and critical consumer and environmental protections.”

The allegations resonate deeply in Maryland, where Kavanaugh and Ford attended separate private prep schools. Ford says the assault took place at a gathering in a Maryland suburb of Washing-

ton, D.C.

Through a spokeswoman, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan said Kavanaugh’s nomination should not proceed without a full investigation of the allegations. A week earlier, Hogan had rejected a Democratic state senator’s call for Maryland state police to investigate Ford’s story.

Hogan’s opponent in the November election, Democrat Ben Jealous, said Kavanaugh should not be confirmed.

“The women who have come forward should have the freedom to pursue legal remedy, and our leaders have the obligation to do everything they can to end this epidemic of sexual violence,” he said in a statement.

Some other Republican governors and candidates for the office stopped short of calling for a full investigation. Others, including Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey and Connecticut’s Republican candidate, Bob Stefanowski, avoided the question by saying Kavanaugh’s confirmation was not an issue for governors to decide.

Stefanowski drew groans at a debate on Wednesday, the day before Ford’s testimony, when he responded to a question on the confirmation by saying, “I’m going to pass on

that. That’s a federal issue.”

On Thursday, he issued a statement saying the Senate committee should “fully consider” Ford’s and Kavanaugh’s testimony before proceeding. His Democratic opponent, Ned Lamont, criticized those responses.

“His silence is deafening,” Lamont said. “The voters of Connecticut deserve to know where candidates for governor — who are running to appoint Connecticut’s cabinet officials and Supreme Court Justices — stand on Brett Kavanaugh.”

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Please welcome Dr. Stacy Iles to our community.

Dr. Iles was born in Hood River and still has friends in Oregon. She has been looking forward to returning home. At the top of her personal hobbies list are a variety of outdoor activities, which made Union County so very attractive. She also likes hitting the gym and traveling. Her favorite thing about traveling is the diversity of cultures and foods she gets to experience.

In 2012, Dr. Iles completed her Doctor of Podiatric Medicine at the Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science in Chicago, IL. She began her career as a co-Chief Resident with the Staten Island University Hospital, New York. While there, she worked in a partnership with the Director of Plastic Surgery, and gained experience in basic and complex foot and ankle trauma.

Dr. Iles is a member of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, the American Podiatric Medical Association, and the American College of Foot and Ankle Orthopedics and Medicine.

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