

SURVIVORS' DOMAIN

Fix the Court director Gabe Roth owns BrettKavanaugh.com, a resource for people affected by sexual assault

BY ANN-DERRICK GAILLOT
STAFF WRITER

The past few weeks have been especially triggering for many survivors of sexual assault in the U.S. While the #MeToo movement has inspired more frank and open discussions of sexual assault and harassment, the nation also watched as now-Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh sputtered, shouted and sassed his way through a hearing about his alleged sexual assault of Dr. Christine

Blasey Ford in the 1980s, back when the two were high school students in Maryland.

Many praised Ford's statement and testimony for the credibility and grace she displayed under pressure during more than four hours of pointed questioning. Notably, Senate Republicans had Arizona sex crimes prosecutor Rachel Mitchell ask the questions, opting to remain mute themselves.

Meanwhile, Kavanaugh's testimony drew criticism for his entitled attitude, lack of empathy and presumed perjury.

During his portion of the hearing, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) suddenly roared to life to lament that Kavanaugh had to answer to the allegations at all. Nevertheless, nine days later, Kavanaugh was sworn in as the nation's 114th Supreme Court Justice.

After the Ford-Kavanaugh hearings, people across the country took to social media and blogs to share their views and battle over how history would remember the hearings and come to view Kavanaugh himself.

Anyone who visited BrettKavanaugh.com in search of information about the nominee discovered the URL leads to a landing page declaring "We Believe Survivors," complete with links to nonprofit organizations: National Sexual Violence Resource Center, End Rape on Campus, and the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network. As of Oct. 16, the website had more than a million views.

The man behind the very public statement is Gabe Roth, executive director of Fix the Court, a nonpartisan organization pushing for reforms that would make the Supreme Court more transparent and accountable, such as 18-year term limits and requiring justices to submit publicly viewable financial disclosure reports.

Roth spoke with Street Roots via phone from Fix the Court's office in Manhattan about what inspired him to make BrettKavanaugh.com a show of support for survivors of sexual assault.

Ann-Derrick Gailiot: Tell me about buying BrettKavanaugh.com.



Gabe Roth

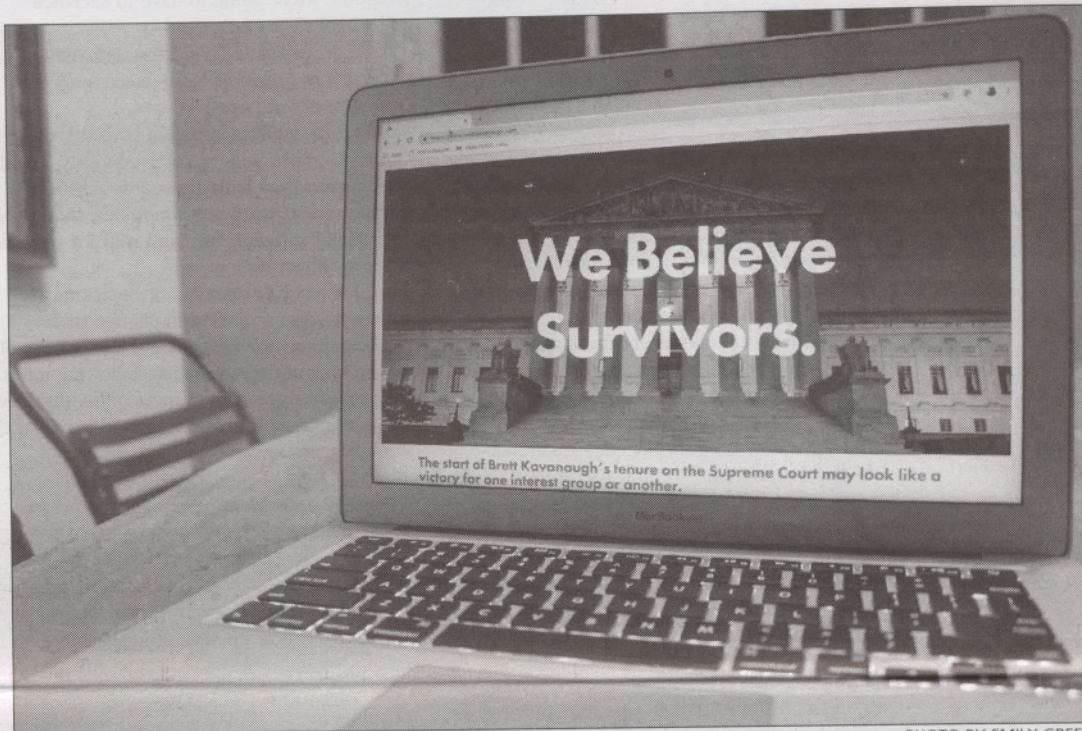


PHOTO BY EMILY GREEN

Gabe Roth: I bought it in September 2015. The 2016 election was coming up, and there are a number of justices that seemed like they wanted to retire soon based on age and length of service. I assumed that with the new election, (there would be) new retirements and some new justices on the court. So I thought a good way to bring attention to my organization was to buy some URLs and redirect them to FixtheCourt.com.

I bought about a dozen on the left and a dozen on the right, so for example, JudgeGorsuch.com and MerrickGarland.net, those sorts of things. And I didn't make most of them active. I waited until after it was down to two or three judges. JudgeGorsuch.com redirects to Fix the Court's site, but I didn't do that for everybody. BrettKavanaugh.com, from July 9 when he was nominated up until Monday (Oct. 1) was redirected to FixtheCourt.com.

A.G.: When did you have the idea to make the site a resource for people who are sexual assault survivors?

G.R.: On Monday night, watching the White House event. It was just so partisan and beyond the pale in terms of the lack of contrition from Kavanaugh himself and the lie President Trump uttered, saying that he had been proven innocent. The hearing on Sept. 27 with Dr. Ford testifying and Justice Kavanaugh testifying was a national moment. Tens of millions of people watched. And I think most people who watched and have been following the story feel like the Judiciary Committee did not fully investigate and the FBI did not fully investigate the claims against Kavanaugh

and that there needed to be more than just a week of the FBI interviewing nine White House-approved people and just a single hearing on the claim. More needed to be done in order to believe that this is someone who should be elevated to the Supreme Court.

Any average citizen realizes that the investigation was a total sham. I think that people were hurt and people were disappointed that government officials would articulate the view that this is a full and fair process. It wasn't. It was opaque, and it was severely lacking. The denigrating of Dr. Ford nationally and seeing the pep rally that the White House held on Monday with the supposedly nonpartisan Supreme Court justices in attendance, that was just a terrible moment. It left a lot of people raw.

Victims of sexual assault felt this process acutely in a very difficult way. So the ability to keep the conversation going in a way that's supportive is probably the least I could do. I'll acknowledge that it was a tough decision to do this because as part of my job, I need to have a good relationship with the federal judiciary. That is a very key part of my job in terms of trying to convince them to modernize, on the one hand. On the other hand, I felt like there was a moral obligation here that trumped that.

A.G.: What have reactions been so far from folks?

G.R.: I've heard from some sexual assault survivors who have been very positive about what I've done with the URL. The organizations that I linked to seem

BrettKavanaugh.com is a resource for survivors of sexual assault.