

Trump leads aggressive, all-out GOP drive to save Kavanaugh

By **ALAN FRAM**
and **LISA MASCARO**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans mounted a combative, coordinated drive Monday to salvage Brett Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court nomination as they fought to keep a second woman’s allegation of long-ago sexual misconduct from derailing his confirmation. President Donald Trump leapt to his defense, the top Senate Republican accused Democrats of a “smear campaign” and an emotional Kavanaugh pledged to fight for his nomination and proclaimed, “I’ve never sexually assaulted anyone.”

That declaration, remarkable for a nominee to the nation’s highest court, came as Republicans embraced their newly aggressive stance and Kavanaugh’s prospects dangled precariously. The similar tones and wording they used in defending him suggested a concerted effort to undermine the women’s claims and portray an image of unity among GOP senators while pressing toward a confirmation vote.

In the run-up to an appearance by Kavanaugh and his main accuser at a dramatic Senate hearing, Trump called the accu-

sations “totally political” and among “the single most unfair, unjust things to happen to a candidate for anything.” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., angrily accused Democrats of slinging “all the mud they could manufacture” and promised a full Senate vote soon, but specified no date.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., retorted that if McConnell believed the allegations were a smear, “Why don’t you call for an FBI investigation?” Schumer accused Republicans of “a rush job to avoid the truth.”

Trump has made clear he won’t order an FBI probe. McConnell said Thursday’s Judiciary Committee hearing would proceed, and No. 2 Senate GOP leader, John Cornyn of Texas, said the panel could vote on sending Kavanaugh’s nomination to the full Senate as early as Friday.

In a letter to the committee, which plans the climactic hearing featuring Kavanaugh and his first accuser, Christine Blasey Ford, the nominee accused his opponents of launching “smears, pure and simple.”

Later, Kavanaugh and his wife sat for an interview on the conservative-friendly Fox News Channel, an extraordinary step for a Supreme Court



Brett Kavanaugh, with his wife Ashley Estes Kavanaugh, answers questions during a FOX News interview, Monday, in Washington, about allegations of sexual misconduct against the Supreme Court nominee.

nominee. Kavanaugh, 53, is currently a judge on the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals.

Kavanaugh said he wasn’t questioning “that perhaps Dr. Ford at some point in her life was sexually assaulted by someone at some place, but what I know is I’ve never sexually assaulted anyone.”

Kavanaugh said while there were high school parties with beer and he wasn’t perfect, “I’m a good person. I’ve led a good life.” He said that he’d never done

anything like the episodes his accusers have described and that he didn’t have sexual intercourse until “many years” after high school.

“I’m not going to let false accusations drive me out of this process. I have faith in God, and I have faith in the fairness of the American people,” he said.

On Sunday, The New Yorker magazine reported that Deborah Ramirez described a 1980s, alcohol-heavy Yale dormitory party at which she said Kavanaugh exposed him-

self, placed his penis in her face and caused her to touch it without her consent. Ford has said Kavanaugh tried removing her clothes and covered her mouth to prevent screams after he pinned her on a bed during a high school party.

Despite the forceful rhetoric by Kavanaugh and his GOP supporters, it remained unclear how three moderate Republican senators — Maine’s Susan Collins, Arizona’s Jeff Flake and Alaska’s Lisa Murkowski — would react to

the latest accusation. With the GOP’s Senate control hanging on a razor-thin 51-49 margin, defections by any two Republican senators would seal his fate if all Democrats vote “no.”

Collins said Monday she remained undecided about Kavanaugh.

Proceeding with Kavanaugh seems to give Republicans their best shot at filling the Supreme Court vacancy — and giving the court an increasingly conservative tilt — before November’s elections, when GOP Senate control is in play.

Even if Republicans lose their Senate majority, they could still have time to confirm a nominee in a post-election lame duck session, but the GOP hasn’t indicated that is under consideration. Delaying Kavanaugh’s confirmation could allow time for doubts about him to take root or any fresh accusations to emerge.

Pushing forward with Kavanaugh has its own risks, besides an embarrassing defeat for Trump and the GOP. His nomination and the claims of sexual misconduct have stirred up women and liberal voters whose antipathy to Republicans has already been heightened by Trump’s policies and his own fraught history of alleged sexual transgressions.

Rosenstein still has his job — at least till Trump showdown

By **ERIC TUCKER**
and **ZEKE MILLER**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After a long weekend spent wondering if he should resign or would be fired, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein still has his job — for now.

President Donald Trump gave Rosenstein a three-day reprieve pending their face-to-face White House showdown Thursday. That’s when the man who oversees the Trump-Russia investigation will respond to reports that he had discussed secretly recording the president and possibly using constitutional procedures to remove him from office.

The revelation that Rosenstein last year had broached the idea of taping the president touched off a dramatic weekend of conversations with the White House in which he offered to one official to resign and confided to another that he was considering doing so, according to two people familiar with the discussions

who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Even as he took issue with the reports, Rosenstein arrived at the White House on Monday expecting to be fired, according to another person who spoke on condition of anonymity. Instead, after he met with chief of staff John Kelly and spoke by phone to Trump himself, questions about his future were effectively tabled until the personal meeting Thursday.

The position of deputy attorney general is ordinarily a relatively low-visibility one in Washington, but Rosenstein has assumed outsized significance given his appointment of special counsel Robert Mueller to investigate potential ties between Russia and Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign.

Any firing or resignation spells immediate uncertainty for an investigation that Rosenstein oversees and would place that responsibility in the hands of a replacement who Democrats fear would be less respectful of



Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein leaves the White House in Washington on Monday.

Mueller’s independence and mandate. Even some congressional Republicans and Trump aides have warned for months against firing Rosenstein for fear that it could lead to impeachment.

The commotion about Rosenstein’s future adds to the turmoil roiling the administration, just six weeks before midterm elections with control of Congress at stake. In addition to dealing with the Mueller investigation, the White House is also

struggling to win confirmation of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh in the wake of sexual misconduct allegations.

The Trump-Rosenstein meeting will be on the same day as an extraordinary Sen-

ate committee hearing featuring Kavanaugh and a woman who has accused him of sexually assaulting her when they were in high school.

Questions about Rosenstein’s future, long simmering, took on new life Friday with a New York Times report that, in May 2017 discussions with FBI and Justice Department officials, he suggested the idea of secretly recording Trump — remarks his defenders insist were merely sarcastic — and of invoking the Constitution to have the Cabinet consider removing him from office.

Rosenstein was summoned to the White House on Friday evening for a conversation with chief of staff Kelly, after which he issued a denial meant to be even sharper in tone than the one the Justice Department sent

out hours earlier.

In conversations over the weekend, he offered to Kelly to resign, though the terms were unclear. He also told White House Counsel Don McGahn that he was considering doing so. McGahn told Rosenstein they should discuss the issue Monday, said the person who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private conversation.

He met again with Kelly on Monday and spoke by phone with Trump, and he attended a pre-scheduled meeting at the White House in place of the Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who was traveling. Rosenstein was captured by photographers leaving the White House after his meetings Monday and was led out by Kelly, later returning to the White House.

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