

Joe Biden’s 2020 opening act: Rocky but lucrative

By **BILL BARROW and THOMAS BEAUMONT**
Associated Press

Barely a day into his 2020 presidential campaign, Joe Biden is finding that his front-runner status comes with a glaring spotlight on his biggest political weaknesses.

The former vice president seemed to struggle at points on Friday under questioning about women who have said his unwanted touching made them uncomfortable. He appeared defensive when asked about his role in how Anita Hill was treated in 1991 when she accused then-Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment.

“I’m sorry this happened. But I’m not sorry in the sense that I did anything that was intentionally designed to do anything wrong or be inappropriate,” Biden said on ABC’s “The View,” referring to the women who’ve mentioned his unwanted touching.

Pressed on how he handled Hill and her accusations at Thomas’ confirmation hearings, Biden said, “I don’t think I treated her badly.” He then repeated his contention that his error as Senate Judiciary chairman was in not ensuring others treated Hill respectfully.

Biden’s team remains



Democratic presidential candidate and former Vice President Joe Biden greets people at Gianni’s Pizza, in Wilmington Del., on Thursday.

upbeat about the 2020 launch, particularly after he reported raising \$6.3 million in the first 24 hours of the campaign, a total that cements his status as a front-runner. Yet the takeaway remains: The long public career that Biden sees as his biggest selling point includes many missteps that some voters haven’t forgotten.

“There’s either an empathy gap or an unwillingness to take it seriously,” Women’s March spokeswoman Sophie Ellman-Golan said

after Biden’s answers on “The View.”

She predicted that his interview will not put the issues behind him. “It matters a lot,” she said. “We’ve hit a point right now where women are not going to put up with as much as we’ve been forced to put up with in the past.”

The television appearance came as Biden’s campaign announcement video has caused some early headaches for the campaign.

Biden framed President Donald Trump as a

threat to the nation’s character, building his attack around the August 2017 protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, and he alluded to the death of a counterprotester who was killed by a white supremacist. Rumors circulated that the family of Heather Heyer, the counterprotester, was angry that Biden mentioned her. But Heyer’s mother told The Associated Press that wasn’t the case.

Susan Bro said Biden did not contact her before the campaign video went live

but called her hours later.

“I said, ‘I noticed you didn’t mention her by name. Was that because you had not contacted me?’ and he said, ‘That is correct,’” Bro said.

“I think he thought it was going to be traumatizing for me. Everybody acts like I didn’t remember that my daughter was killed,” she said, adding that she was not upset Biden did not contact her before the video went live.

“I’ve been hearing from people, ‘We heard you were really angry and upset,’ and I said, ‘No, I wasn’t. No, it’s just politics,’” Bro said. “Heather is not the issue. The issue is hate. ... I’m glad someone is addressing the issue.”

Days earlier, Biden’s team had to navigate rumors that he was going to launch his campaign in Charlottesville against the objections of local officials. Charlottesville City Councilor Wes Bellamy said that he talked with senior Biden advisers ahead of the launch but that there were never plans to hold an actual event there. Bellamy said a Biden aide apologized to him about the rumors.

Joy Behar, a co-host of “The View,” alluded to the dynamics Friday, joking that it was an “apology” episode. Biden’s first apology

attempt came when asked explicitly whether he was “sorry for what you did” in instances where women have said his shows of physical affection made them uncomfortable.

He answered as he has previously, saying he has “to be more aware” of “private space.” After being pressed, Biden finally repeated verbatim a model apology demonstrated by one of his friendly interviewers: “I’m sorry for invading your space.” He later added, “It was inappropriate, but I didn’t understand. I assumed.”

Biden never made it to a direct apology for anything he did during the Hill-Thomas hearings.

Behar noted that his statements over the years, including in recent weeks, have been in the passive voice. “I think what she wants you to say is ‘I’m sorry for the way I treated you,’ not ‘for the way you were treated,’” Behar prompted. Biden responded, “I’m sorry for the way she got treated.” He added, “I did everything in my power to do what I thought was within the rules to be able to stop things.”

When pressed on why he did not personally contact Hill until this month, Biden noted his public statements and said he didn’t want to “invade her space.”

BENT: Wildfire has plenty of cases still marching through the court

Continued from Page A1

Court documents and the public trial identified the informant. But the *East Oregonian* is not identifying him in this story for two reasons: the *EO* was not able to contact the informant directly, and out of concern for his safety.

Defense attorney Kara Davis in early April filed a motion in 20 Wildfire cases, including the Reaves case, to compel the state to produce a full accounting of how much BENT paid the informant for services and what other actions it took on his behalf. Davis said this week the informant even received cash to testify to the grand jury.

The drug team’s budget runs about \$150,000 a year. Roberts said most of that pay is overtime for the police on the task force and for drug buys. The \$27,000-plus for the informant included \$2,000 cash for information leading to a

search warrant, according to court documents, and at least \$2,600 for lodging. Roberts said BENT had to move the informant and his family to keep them safe.

He said the expense seems large, roughly a one-fifth of BENT’s budget, but the cost was not out of line with some past operations.

“The way we justify this is, if you can take that many dealers off the streets, you’re going to have an impact,” Roberts said. “Once we did Wildfire, things dried up. People couldn’t get their hand on anything.”

Roberts said BENT could have paid Wildfire’s informant \$1,000 for a couple of buys and moved on. But he questioned if the public would want that when the team had the resources and the informant willing to do much more.

Davis said she had evidence the informant used drugs, conducted drugs

deals on the side and pressured women for sex in exchange for not ratting out their boyfriends, all while taking cash from BENT. Those actions would disqualify BENT from using the informant under its own policies, she said, yet no one investigated him.

Roberts said Davis nor anyone else reported those allegations. Until someone contacts the police and makes an accusation, there’s nothing to investigate.

He also said the drug team followed its policies. The informant on a few occasions showed up high, Roberts said, and the team scrapped the buy and sent the guy home. The police chief also said informants tend to be offenders and have connections to crime and are not going to be the most upstanding of citizens.

District Attorney Dan Primus said it is hard to know how paying an infor-

mant plays to a jury. Prosecutors present the evidence to bolster the state’s case, he said, but prosecutors and defenders don’t always get to know why a jury makes the decisions it does. Framing informant pay for a jury, he said, is “one of the things we have to evaluate with each case.”

Wildfire has plenty

of cases still marching through the court. The jury this week found Reaves guilty of selling heroin, a Class A felony in Oregon.

Primus said several Wildfire defendants cut plea deals, but Reaves was the first jury trial. Reaves’ sentencing was Friday afternoon. The district attorney’s office recommended a prison sen-

tence of 20 months, in part because Reaves has convictions in 2015 and 2016 for possessing drugs, attempting to elude, resisting arrest and more, and he committed the heroin crime a month after he finished serving probation.

Reaves received a sentence of three years probation. The Umatilla County Jail released Reaves Friday.

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