

# With Idaho case, AP counts 109 statehouse #MeToo allegations

4 lawmakers in 4 states pushed out of office in 2 months amid allegations

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The Associated Press

An Idaho lawmaker was accused of raping an intern; a Missouri lawmaker of abusing his children. In North Dakota and Oregon, a pair of lawmakers faced claims of a pattern of sexual harassment.

All are now out of office — resigning under pressure or getting expelled by colleagues within the past two months. Three other lawmakers accused this year remain in their jobs.

The flurry of sexual misconduct claims in state capitols comes 3½ years after the #MeToo movement sparked a public reckoning for people in power accused of sexual wrongdoing and an overhaul of many state policies. The continued incidents highlight both that problems persist and that some legislatures are responding more assertively.

“These institutions don’t change overnight,” said Kelly Dittmar, research director at the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. “Part of what the #MeToo movement did was shed a spotlight on the problem, but fixing that problem that has been so deep-seeded is going to take longer.”

Since 2017, at least 109 state lawmakers in 40 states have faced public allegations of sexual misconduct or harassment, according to an Associated Press tally. Of those, 43 have resigned or been expelled and 42 have faced other repercussions such as the loss of committee chair or party leadership positions.

Idaho Rep. Aaron von Ehlinger was the most recent to resign. The 38-year-old Repub-



State Rep. Aaron von Ehlinger, R-Lewiston, listens Wednesday as an accuser offers testimony during a hearing before the Idaho Ethics and House Policy Committee in the Lincoln Auditorium at the Idaho Statehouse in Boise.

Darin Oswald/Idaho Statesman

lican stepped down Thursday after a legislative ethics committee recommended he be suspended without pay over allegations that he raped a 19-year-old intern in his apartment after the two had dinner at a Boise restaurant.

Von Ehlinger denied wrongdoing, insisted the sexual contact was consensual and wrote that he was quitting because he could not effectively represent his constituents.

The decision came the day after the committee heard testimony, including from the young woman who brought the allegations. She was shielded from public view by a black screen and used the name Jane Doe during the proceedings. But a TV reporter attempted to film her as she left, and at least one lawmaker revealed her identify on social media. The Associated Press generally does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted.

Republican Senate President Pro Tem Chuck Winder on Friday praised the woman for “the courage to come forward.”

Von Ehlinger’s resignation came just a week after the Missouri House expelled Republican Rep. Rick Roerber after a bipartisan ethics committee investigation concluded there were credible allegations he had physically and sexually abused his children years ago.

Roerber attempted to resign shortly before the panel’s report

was publicly released, citing his plans to move out of state to be closer to family. But the House refused to accept his resignation. House Ethics Committee Vice Chairman Richard Brown, a Democrat, said it wouldn’t be right to let him “escape without us giving full recognition to what has taken place.”

The House instead voted overwhelmingly to kick Roerber out of office, marking the first time since the Civil War era that a Missouri House member had been expelled.

In March, the North Dakota House expelled Republican Rep. Luke Simons for allegedly threatening and sexually harassing women at the Capitol in a pattern of behavior that lawmakers said stretched back to soon after Simons took office in 2017.

In Oregon, state Rep. Diego Hernandez, a Democrat, resigned in March after a judge rejected his attempt to stop a planned expulsion vote following an investigation into claims that he had sexually harassed or created a hostile workplace for several women. He said he stepped down “so my colleagues may focus on serving Oregonians and so I can move forward with my life and focus on my health and family.”

In February 2018, then-Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, resigned his position in the Oregon Legislature after an investigation revealed that he had a pattern of unwanted touching and harassment.



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