

More sexual harassment allegations hit congressmen, media and entertainment figures

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Nevada Democratic Representative Ruben Kihuen announced Saturday he would not seek reelection, making him the seventh member of Congress to have his career terminated by allegations of sexual misconduct of some kind.

The other six include four Republicans—Representatives Tim Murphy of Pennsylvania, Joe Barton of Texas, Blake Farenthold of Texas, and Trent Franks of Arizona—and two Democrats, Representative John Conyers of Michigan and Senator Al Franken of Minnesota. Barton and Farenthold said they would not run for reelection, while the other four resigned with immediate effect.

More could follow soon, as allegations, frequently unsupported by evidence or decades old, continue to surface in the media.

Kihuen was the least senior representative among those accused of sexual harassment, having been elected to his first term in November 2016. He was pushed out by the Democratic leadership in the House, particularly House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, after several press reports of inappropriate “touching” of campaign and legislative aides.

The campaign to oust alleged sexual harassers spread to the judicial branch of government Thursday, when the chief judge of the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, which covers most of the western states, began a review of misconduct allegations against Judge Alex Kozinski, a former head of the 9th Circuit.

Chief Judge Sidney R. Thomas issued an order in which he wrote that in the absence of a formal complaint against Kozinski, he would treat allegations in a *Washington Post* article as the basis for a complaint. This is a remarkable legal precedent,

suggesting that the press witch hunt could become a self-sufficient process, generating official probes and punishment even in the absence of actual victims willing to testify.

The *Post* article detailed the alleged experiences of six women with Kozinski, including suggestive conversations, viewing and sharing pornography, and unwanted touching. Since the first article, further media reports have cited another nine women making allegations against Kozinski, one of the most right-wing figures on the circuit court, first appointed by President Ronald Reagan.

Prominent media and entertainment figures continue to be targeted, either for allegations of misconduct or for the dubious charge of being “insensitive” to the seriousness of such charges.

In Hollywood, several additional charges were raised against Dustin Hoffman, one of the most talented actors of his era, now 80 years old. Three women were reported by *Variety* magazine to have claimed improper actions by Hoffman in the early and mid-1980s, more than 30 years ago. Two of them were named, while the third spoke anonymously.

Actor Matt Damon drew fire for an interview with ABC in which he sought to differentiate between the conduct of Senator Franken and the comedian Louis C. K. and more serious allegations. “There’s a spectrum of behavior,” he said. “There’s a difference between, you know, patting someone on the butt and rape or child molestation, right?”

“You have rape and child molestation,” he continued. “That’s criminal behavior, and it needs to be dealt with that way. The other stuff is just kind of shameful and gross.”

For these comments, Damon has been denounced by some of the high-profile advocates of the sex witch hunt in Hollywood, including Alyssa Milano and Damon's former costar in *Good Will Hunting*, Minnie Driver. Milano wrote on Twitter that Damon's reference to a "spectrum of behavior" was wrong. These were "different stages of cancer. Some more treatable than others. But it's still cancer."

The right-wing publication Daily Caller reported that Chris Matthews, host of the MSNBC program Hardball, had been accused of sexual harassment in 1999 and that the accuser, an assistant producer, had received compensation relating to her dismissal from her job. Matthews' "offense" was purely verbal—ribald jokes for which he was formally reprimanded by MSNBC.

In a further sign that the sexual misconduct witch hunt is to become institutionalized and made a permanent regime in Hollywood, a group of top entertainment industry executives announced Friday the formation of a Commission on Sexual Harassment and Advancing Equality in the Workplace to be chaired by Anita Hill, most famous for her accusations of sexual misconduct against Clarence Thomas in 1991, during hearings for his confirmation as a justice of the Supreme Court.

Lucasfilm President Kathleen Kennedy and other top Hollywood executives established the commission, including Disney Chairman and CEO Bob Iger; Carol Lombardini, president of the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers; Jeff Blackburn, senior vice president of Amazon; Paramount Chairman and CEO Jim Gianopolous; Warner Brothers Chairman and CEO Kevin Tsujihara; and Leslie Moonves, CBS Chairman and CEO, among others.

The campaign of sexual harassment allegations is spreading into local political and media circles in a way that suggests it is being employed to settle scores, both political and personal.

The managing director of opinion and commentary at the *Detroit Free Press*, Stephen Henderson, was abruptly terminated Friday after an internal investigation by the newspaper prompted by unsupported allegations from a local Detroit minister the week before. The minister's own radio show was suspended because he failed to provide any evidence of his charges against Henderson and two other local

media figures.

Gannett Corporation, owner of the *Free Press*, released a statement declaring that its investigation had surfaced "credible allegations that Mr. Henderson's behavior has been inconsistent with company values and standards." Henderson won a Pulitzer Prize in 2014 for commentary, for editorial columns largely supporting the forced bankruptcy of the city of Detroit and the savage cuts imposed by the state-appointed emergency financial manager. In a statement to the rival *Detroit News*, Henderson said he was "stunned," after dedicating 18 years to the *Free Press*.

In Philadelphia, the main daily newspaper, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, published a lengthy report on alleged sexual misconduct by State Senator Daylin Leach, a liberal Democrat who is challenging Republican incumbent Pat Meehan for a congressional seat.

The examples of Henderson and Leach suggest that there may well be dozens of such cases in which local media and political figures are destroyed by such allegations, in many cases without any indication of corroborating evidence or without the supposed accusers being named.



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