

White House aides forced out over domestic abuse allegations

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Two White House officials, one of them among the aides closest to President Donald Trump, were forced to resign last week over allegations of domestic abuse. Rob Porter, staff secretary to the president, resigned on Wednesday, followed the next day by David Sorensen, a speechwriter who reported to Trump political adviser Stephen Miller.

Both men denied the allegations, with Porter claiming that the widely publicized photo of the battered face of his first wife showed the results of an accident rather than a physical assault. Sorensen maintained that he, not his ex-wife, was the victim of physical abuse and that she had repeatedly punched him during their marriage.

Neither of the charges of domestic violence has been tested in a judicial proceeding, but Porter's second wife did obtain a restraining order against him based on a violent outburst after they had separated and before their divorce became final.

The credibility of the allegations was entirely secondary, however, to their usefulness as weapons in the political warfare in Washington between Trump and his opponents in the military-intelligence apparatus, the Democratic Party and the corporate-controlled media.

The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, which have spearheaded the media campaign over concocted and fraudulent claims of Russian interference in the 2016 elections, seized on the charges raised, particularly against Porter, for a new salvo against the Trump White House. The *Post*, in particular, devoted two editorials, three columns by its deputy editorial page editor Ruth Marcus, columns by other op-ed writers and pages of "news" coverage on the subject over a four-day period.

The *Times* and *Post* have driven the coverage of cable television, which has devoted hour upon hour to

the allegations against Porter, including the accounts of his two ex-wives and a former girlfriend. This has been further fueled by leaks from White House aides with scores to settle, mainly directed at White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, Porter's immediate supervisor and his principal defender.

By Friday, there were multiple press reports that Trump was furious with Kelly's handling of the Porter affair and was canvassing his closest aides for their views on a possible replacement for the retired Marine general, who replaced Reince Priebus just over six months ago. Among those prominently mentioned in these accounts were budget director Mick Mulvaney, White House economic adviser Gary Cohn (former president of Goldman Sachs) and Representative Mark Meadows, chair of the ultra-right House Freedom Caucus.

The White House sought to push back against the media firestorm Sunday, sending a series of top aides to network television interview programs, each proclaiming Trump's faith in Kelly and denying any plans to replace him. Mulvaney, asked about press reports that he was being tapped as Kelly's successor, flatly denied that any such discussions were taking place.

Aside from destabilizing the Trump White House and continuing the pressure against any retreat from the aggressive anti-Russia policy of the Obama administration, the media furor over Porter and Kelly has another major function: to suppress any public discussion of events of infinitely greater significance than the personal conduct of a mid-level Trump aide, however repulsive that may have been.

Last week saw the two largest one-day point drops in the Dow Jones Industrial Average, 1,175 points on Monday and 1,032 points on Thursday, as well as

passage of a budget deal that will increase US military spending by more than \$300 billion over the next two years and ensure trillion-dollar deficits to pay for the Pentagon bonanza. It also saw stepped-up US military moves against North Korea and in the Syrian civil war, new outrages against immigrants, and reports of a further decline in US life expectancy.

The Sunday television interview programs barely mentioned these developments. Instead, they obsessed over the allegations of domestic violence by Porter, together with discussion on when Kelly, White House counsel Don McGahn and other officials learned of the allegations and how promptly they responded, and reactions to Trump's comments in which he commiserated with Porter over having his career ended without having a chance to refute the charges made by his ex-wives.

In raising the lack of "due process" for Porter, Trump is exploiting the fundamentally reactionary character of the #MeToo campaign, which has destroyed the careers of numerous artists and entertainers on the basis of unsupported and in some cases anonymous accusations.

A major aspect of the sexual harassment witch hunt is that it lumps together genuine crimes like rape and domestic violence with a much broader range of actions that should never become the subject of a criminal complaint or public humiliation, including unwanted comments or gestures of affection, or even, in a particularly noxious case, the charge that an individual was a "serial dater."

A goal of the *New York Times* and the Democratic Party operatives who instigated the #MeToo campaign was to direct it ultimately against Trump, already the target of lawsuits by more than a dozen women charging various kinds of sexual harassment.

War, inequality, attacks on social programs, the witch hunt against immigrants and the assault on democratic rights—these are not the subjects of the Democratic Party's opposition to Trump. On these issues, the Democrats are facilitating, either openly or by default, the reactionary policies of the administration. They are focused entirely on their reactionary anti-Russia campaign and the related antidemocratic drive to censor the Internet in the name of fighting "fake news" and "Russian meddling," combined with the #MeToo hysteria.



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