

Why Isn't Sexual Violence Being Talked About in This Election?

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With allegations of sexual harassment against both Democratic Presidential nominee Joe Biden, and President Donald Trump, with 26 alleged victims of sexual violence having come forward, this is an obvious topic that needs a ton of light shed upon it. For every 1,000 sexual assaults on women, 995 of those predators will walk free. So, why is it that this topic has been completely avoided during the election? Why is it that, in the year 2020, women still do not feel safe in the United States?

As a female, I can personally attest to the many times I have been at the end of inappropriate comments, unwanted touching, and work place sexual harassment, beginning at the age of 14 years old. In particular, I can relate to why so many are passionate about this subject, as I've been sexually assaulted myself. It was something I kept to myself for two years. I did not speak of it to a soul. I told myself, like many victims, it didn't really matter. I tried to downplay the entire experience, but carrying it alone took a toll on me. The shame was insurmountable. I felt so exposed, emotionally raw, and terribly embarrassed. I worried I would be looked at differently. I worried people would judge me for not coming forward sooner, which is why it is so common that survivors often do not come forward until years later.

Society taught me that men assaulting women wasn't a big deal, and nothing would be done. After all, our current President, former Presidents and lawmakers have been oppressing and violating women for years. They are the leaders and role models for not only our country, but the entire world. We are setting a dangerous global precedent. Complacency is not okay and enables rape culture.

One would think that with the Women's Rights and #MeToo movements, sexual crimes would lessen. One would also assume that our government would pass legislation and criminal justice reform surrounding sexual violence. However, this has not happened. This predator mentality is now trickling from the top of society down into our school systems. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 7.4% of high school students had been physically forced to have sex when they did not want to. My own teen daughter and her female friends, who themselves have had to combat unwanted sexual advances from classmates, think it's funny to shame and harass girls. The statistics almost double for college, where 11.2% of all undergraduate and graduate students have

been the victim of rape or sexual assault.

How can we be shocked when kids are subjected to a desensitized world, where congressman, senators and even Presidents, literally get away with rape and sexual harassment? Since 2017, over 90 allegations have been brought against state legislators.

To unravel a culture, you must first start at the top. Sexual predators come in the form of Republican, Democrat and all colors of the political rainbow. Below are some accounts of state legislators' sexual transgressions in the past few years.

1. Hawaiian Representative Joseph Souki, a Democrat. He was a part of a settlement in 2018, for unwanted touching, kissing and sexual language towards several women. His slap on the wrist was a \$5,000 fine to the state and a public apology. He also had to wait two years before seeking public office again. He is again eligible for office.
2. Republican Idaho Representative, Brandon Hixon. He resigned in 2017, and then killed himself in 2018, for being caught molesting two girls, including a young female family member
3. Matt Manweller, a Washington state representative and a Republican. He resigned in January 2019 for having a relationship with a high school student in the 1990s and for being fired from Central Washington University in August 2018, for sexual harassment.
4. Brian Ellis, Republican representative for Pennsylvania. He drugged a staffer's drink while at a hotel bar, and then sexually assaulted her. The Dauphin County District Attorney at the time, despite admitting a crime was committed, decided not to press charges.
5. Ruben Kihuen, a representative from Nevada and a Democrat. It was proven that he groped women, put his hand up their skirts and kissed them against their will. He stated it was not rape so it was not a big deal. Despite this, he was still permitted to run for a city council seat in Las Vegas in 2019.
6. Alcee Hastings, U.S. representative from Florida and a Democrat. In 2012, Hastings was investigated for sexual harassment and employment retaliation. The House Committee on Ethics determined there was not enough evidence to remove Hastings from his seat. However, in 2014, a \$220,000 settlement was paid, with taxpayer money, to the victim. Hastings is still in office and is up for re-election this year.

These are just six examples out of numerous accounts, though there are many more.

Between 1997 and 2017, \$17 million dollars of taxpayers' money went to settlements to keep legislators out of court and out of jail. The American people have been paying for the cover-ups of politicians for years. It is absolutely disgusting to think that the women who have been raped are paying their hard earnings in taxes to help government officials assault women without consequence. Currently, our Justice Department is spending American tax dollars to try and get Donald Trump out of a defamation law suit, concerning an *Apprentice* contestant he sexually assaulted.

Twenty five other women have also accused Donald Trump of sexual misconduct, including assault. This is in addition to his "on the record" public interviews demoralizing women, and minimizing rape, since the 1970s. Not only has President Trump never apologized or admitted guilt, he has called all his victims "liars." He consistently defends himself with sexist comments, saying that the women that came forward were not attractive enough for him to consider assaulting. In a video that was released in 2016 by Access Hollywood, Trump was interviewed and bragged about grabbing women's genitals in 2005. In his exact words, he told anchorman Billy Bush, "I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it, you can do anything... grab them by the pussy." When Trump was confronted, he denied all accusations, saying during his presidential campaign that he was going to sue everyone who accused him. To date, he has not tried to sue any of the women, and on

the contrary, two of the women are suing him. As soon as he leaves office, these legal battles are waiting for him.

Here are but a few examples from the public records of Trump's alleged sexual misconduct, prior to the 2016 election.

1. Jessica Leeds: Came forward about Trump putting his hand up her skirt and groping her during a flight in the 1970s. She states she never came forward, as sexual harassment was common in those times. Just three years after the incident, she ran into Trump at a Gala in New York, where he approached her and called her a "c*nt."
2. Ivana Trump: Was recorded in a 1990 divorce deposition stating that Trump attacked and raped her in 1989, after a medical procedure she recommended to him, did not go according to plan. She later issued a statement saying she did not want any criminal charges pressed against him, and did not mean to construe it as rape.
3. Kristin Anderson: Says that Trump grabbed her vagina under her skirt, in a club in the 1990's in New York, without her consent.
4. Jill Harth: States that in the 1990's Donald Trump shoved her against a wall and put his hand up her skirt at the Mar-a-Lago resort. She sued him in 1997 for the assault and backing out of a business deal..
5. Lisa Boyne: A health food business entrepreneur, told the Huffington Post that she attended a 1996 dinner with Trump and modeling agent John Casablancas during which several other women in attendance were forced to walk across a table in order to leave. As the women walked on the table, Boyne says that Trump looked up their skirts and commented on their underwear and genitals. Trump allegedly asked Boyne for her opinion on which of the women he should sleep with.
6. Maria Billado and Victoria Hughs: Both participants in one of Trump's teen pageants, recall Trump walking into the room while the teen girls were getting dressed. He did not walk back out but said, "Don't worry, I've seen it all." He later bragged on the Howard Stern show and was directly quoted saying: "I'll go backstage before a show and everyone's getting dressed and ready and everything else. And you know, no men are anywhere. And I'm allowed to go in because I'm the owner of the pageant," he said. "You know they're standing there with no clothes. And you see these incredible-looking women. And so I sort of get away with things like that."
7. E. Jean Carroll: Carroll recounts Trump pushing her in a dressing room in the 1990s and raping her. Her head hit the wall hard and before she could fight, his pants were unzipped and his fingers and penis went inside her.
8. Samantha Holvey: She recounted being a part of Trump's pageant in 2006 and all the girls having to line up for Trump to inspect and ogle them. After this incident, the 20 year old, Southern Baptist college student said she had no interest in winning and felt the "dirtiest" she ever felt in her life.
9. Summer Zervos: She was a contestant on *The Apprentice* and currently has a defamation lawsuit against Trump, as he says she lied about an alleged sexual assault. In 2007, while having a meeting at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Zervos recounts: "He then grabbed my shoulder and began kissing me again very aggressively and placed his hand on my breast." "I pulled back and walked to another part of the room. He then walked up, grabbed my hand, and pulled me into the bedroom. I walked out." Zervos added that Trump thrust himself on her before she left the room.
10. Alva Johnson: A former campaign staffer of Trump, has filed a federal lawsuit against the President for kissing her without permission at a Tampa Bay Rally in 2016.

It is hard enough to read these accounts, let alone fathom that they were committed by the

Commander-in-Chief of the United State of America. These women are coming out and sharing their sensitive stories, despite knowing the backlash they will receive. They know money and power make President Trump and other politicians immune to the laws of our country.

To be fair, Joe Biden is no saint himself in the sexual allegations department. Most notably, Tara Reade has recounted her experience with Biden in 1993: "He's talking to me and his hands are everywhere and everything is happening very quickly she recalled. "He was kissing me and he said, very low, "do you want to go somewhere else?" Reade said Biden penetrated her with his fingers before she was able to pull away. When she did, she says he appeared confused. 'He looked at me kind of almost puzzled or shocked," Reade told the *New York Times*.

For those who ask, "why did it take the victims so long to come forward?" To put it frankly, this country glorifies sexual assault. Even when these women did the hardest thing possible and spoke their truth, an accused rapist still became president. These women are someone's daughters, wives, grandmothers, etc., not just statistics. They are real people who have experienced soul-crushing violence.

Will we remain silent as our society continues to perpetuate this cycle and send the message that a man has more rights over a woman's body than she does herself? Political biases must be put aside. This has nothing to do with being Democrat or Republican or otherwise. It is about basic human rights and equal protection under the law. We the people should do what's right and just for all. We the people must put basic human rights, and specifically a woman's right to bodily autonomy, before politics. We the people must never be silent while injustice exists and our government does nothing. Our right to vote this year has never been more important. Together, our voices can be heard by exercising our constitutional rights and removing the corrupt from office. Together, we can create a safer future for our daughters and send a message to countries all over the planet. Women's rights are human rights, and the oppression must stop now.

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