

New Delhi Times

Ford, Kavanaugh Testify; Now Senators Must Decide

September 28th, 2018

It was a day of drama, tears and tempers in the U.S. Capitol on Thursday with Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh angrily denying a charge of sexually assaulting Christine Blasey Ford at a party in 1982 when they were teenagers.

Both got the chance to tell their stories to the Senate Judiciary Committee during a nearly nine-hour-long hearing.

“I have never sexually assaulted anyone, not in high school, not in college, not ever,” Kavanaugh told the senators. “I have never done this to her or to anyone.”

Hours earlier, Ford told the panel she was “100 percent certain” it was a drunken Kavanaugh who pinned her down on a bed, groped her, tried to take off her clothes, and put his hand over her mouth to muffle her screams for help.

Kavanaugh told the senators he attended no such party. He accused Democrats of seeking to avenge Hillary Clinton’s election loss by mounting a calculated attack for political gain and engaging in grotesque character assassination.

Kavanaugh vowed he will not be intimidated into withdrawing.

The Judiciary Committee, with 11 Republicans and 10 Democrats, plan to vote on Kavanaugh’s nomination Friday and, if approved, will send it to the entire Senate, which will begin procedural votes Saturday.

Late Thursday, Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee announced he would vote to confirm Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. While, he said, it took courage for Ford to testify, there was no evidence to corroborate her allegations.

Sen. Jeff Flake of Arizona said he is still weighing his vote after hearing Ford and Kavanaugh testify.

Asked how he will vote, Flake said, “Let me process it.”

Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, a Democrat from North Dakota, also said she needs time to decide how she will vote. She is running for re-election in a state that voted heavily for President Donald Trump.

Sen. Doug Jones, a first-term Democrat from Alabama, said he is voting no on Kavanaugh’s bid for the Supreme Court. “The Kavanaugh nomination process has been flawed from the beginning,” he said, adding that Ford was credible and courageous.

Ford's testimony

Earlier in the day, Ford testified that she feared that Kavanaugh was “going to accidentally kill” her during the alleged incident in 1982.

She said what she remembers most was Kavanaugh and his friend Mark Judge’s “uproarious laughter” during the incident and “having fun at my expense.”

Democratic senators repeatedly praised Ford for her courage in coming forward.

A prosecutor, Rachel Mitchell, questioned Ford on behalf of Senate Republicans. She asked Ford about timelines and peripheral issues and did not challenge her basic account of sexual assault. But Ford’s account lacked firm corroboration of her claims by others at the party.

Kavanaugh's testimony

Kavanaugh was much angrier, strident and emotional.

He “unequivocally and categorically” denied the charges and cried as he spoke of how the ordeal has wrecked his family. He presented the senators with what he said were handwritten calendars from 1982 showing his activities and whereabouts. He says they did not include the party.

Kavanaugh said he welcomes whatever the investigation the committee wants, but would not directly answer whether he would approve an FBI probe.

Admitting he loves drinking beer, he pointed to what he says was his outstanding academic record and dedication to high school sports and church.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley defended Kavanaugh and blamed Democrats for not disclosing the accusations earlier.

“As part of Judge Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court, the FBI conducted its sixth full field background investigation of Judge Kavanaugh since 1993, 25 years ago. Nowhere in any of these six FBI reports ... was there a whiff of any issue, any issue at all related to anyway inappropriate sexual behavior.”

But Democrats did not buy Kavanaugh’s self-portrayal of an angelic choir boy. Senator Patrick Leahy pointed to Kavanaugh’s high school yearbook page and its jokes about heavy drinking and sex.

Republican Senator Lindsay Graham lost his temper during his time to question Kavanaugh. He accused Democrats of an “unethical sham” and warning Republicans that if they vote not to confirm Kavanaugh, they would legitimize “the most despicable thing I’ve ever seen in my time in politics.”

Trump stands by his man

President Trump nominated Kavanaugh to replace the retiring Justice Anthony Kennedy. He tweeted that the judge showed Americans exactly why he was chosen.

Judge Kavanaugh showed America exactly why I nominated him. His testimony was powerful, honest, and riveting. Democrats’ search and destroy strategy is disgraceful and this process has been a total sham and effort to delay, obstruct, and resist. The Senate must vote!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) September 27, 2018

Trump's tweet did not mention Ford.

No clear winner

Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, Ilya Shapiro, says it is unclear if anyone came out ahead after Thursday's testimony.

"We're at a dangerous point because if we have no more evidence and Kavanaugh's rejected, that sets the precedent that accusations are enough to derail ... and if he's approved, then still there will be people who think that he's a sexual assaulter or rapist and there he is sitting at the Supreme Court."

If Kavanaugh is confirmed, the court will have a clear 5-4 conservative majority, which could be solidified for a generation or longer.