

MSNOW's *Deadline: White House*

07/06/26

4:00:31 p.m.

19 minutes and 6 seconds

ANTONIA HYLTON: A deeply disturbing new report, published in the last hour about Graham Platner, is shaking up the crucial U.S. Senate race in Maine. *Politico* has new bombshell reporting from a woman who dated Graham Platner, who says Platner forced her to have sex with him nearly five years ago, despite her repeated objections from that reporting. “The woman, a 41 year old Maine resident named Jenny Racicot, detailed the alleged incident to *Politico* in three interviews over the course of the past two weeks. *Politico* also spoke with a man Racicot dated and confided in the years after the alleged incident and reviewed documents, including emails between her and her therapist, and messages between Racicot and an acquaintance whom she warned against getting involved with Platner years before he ran for office, Racicot said she had an on and off again relationship with Platner, who is now the Democratic Senate nominee in Maine, for more than two years before he entered her rural Maine home uninvited one night in late 2021, deeply intoxicated, and he forced himself on her while she repeatedly told him to stop. She said she cut off contact with him after telling him the encounter was not consensual. ‘I remember him grabbing my pelvis and being really forceful of me,’ she said. ‘I remember the specific moment where I thought to myself, like, this is no longer my choice.’” Platner has denied the allegations, telling *Politico*: “These allegations are troubling, serious and false. Any accusation of non-consensual behavior is categorically untrue. Graham Platner released a video just moments ago in which he says he’s taking time to reflect on a path forward. Take a listen.

GRAHAM PLATNER: I wanted to directly address the troubling, serious and false allegations against me. Any accusation of non-consensual behavior is categorically false. Over the last ten months, I have been deeply humbled by the faith Mainers have put in me. You have welcomed me into your homes, into your places of work, and to your restaurants, into your houses of worship. You have shown that a different kind of politics, one that puts the interests of people over corporations is not just possible, but is inevitable. This movement. We have built the largest volunteer base in the history of Maine politics, the hundreds of thousands of grassroots donors and supporters across the ideological spectrum. We were united in a love of Maine, a belief that our politics must change, and a focus on defeating Susan Collins. So, regardless of the inaccuracy of the reporting, but mindful of the political reality it will inflict, we are taking the time to reflect on the best path forward for the state that I love, the people that I love, the movement I belong to, and the goal of defeating Susan Collins. Those were the goals when we launched this campaign and they remain my goals today. On June 9, 154,058 Mainers, the most in primary history, voted to reject a broken politics beholden to Washington and the donor class, they voted for hope for change to take back our economy, to take back our power, and to take back our Senate seat. Throughout it all, you never turned your back on me, and I will not turn my back on you now. Every one of you deserves to see that vision come to fruition and see Susan Collins defeated. And we will use every tool at our disposal to do so. As Maine goes, so goes the nation. As always, thank you.

HYLTON: I want to bring into this conversation miss now congressional reporter Mychael

Schnell and host of the Fast Politics podcast, contributing writer for the New York Times, Molly Jong-Fast, also with us, my friend and colleague, MS NOW anchor and correspondent, Ayman Mohyeldin. It is great to have all of you guys here with me. I want to start with you, Mychael, to break down what we know at this point about this reporting. And I know that you're out to your sources on the Hill. Tell me what you expect to hear or what you might already be hearing from them as they process this, these allegations from *Politico*.

MYCHAEL SCHNELL: Yeah. Serious allegations from *Politico*, the latest shoe to drop when we talk about the controversies that have been dogging Graham, his candidacy and campaign, as you laid out, this is an allegation involving a woman who said that she met Graham Platner back in 2019, when they met on a dating app. The alleged assault happened in 2021. Graham Platner had said he wanted to come over and see her. They were in a consensual relationship at that point, she said she was not in the mood, but Graham Platner then let himself into her home, walked up her stairs, found her lying on a couch. He then got on top of this woman and she had said, you know, please get off me. She didn't. She was — she was not interested in engaging at that moment. She also says that she — he smelled of alcohol. She then removed herself from the room and went towards her bedroom with Graham Platner following her. And then this woman tells *Politico* that he at that point forced her to have sex. Afterwards, he had fallen asleep and in the next morning he had left her home again. These allegations happening in 2019, we are still waiting for reaction from some of Graham Platner's top supporters on Capitol Hill, of which he has many. Graham Platner, as you just played, denying these allegations, but notably saying that he's going to figure out how to move forward. The big date that we should all be paying attention to right now is July 13. According to Maine law, candidates have until the second Monday in July, which is again a week from today, July 13, where they can still remove themselves from the ballot when they can drop out. But the party can then nominate a replacement to be the standard bearer for that party. Notably, Janet Mills has still been on the ballot throughout this entire time. She got 20 percent — nearly 20 percent of the vote during that Democratic primary, a non — but still a substantial amount of percent for somebody who wasn't even running but was still on the ballot. So, certainly with Graham Platner saying we're going to assess how to move forward, drawing a lot of eyeballs in terms of that July 13 date. But again, right now, no indication of how he plans to handle this. And we are still waiting to hear from some of his top supporters on Capitol Hill.

HYLTON: Ayman, what did you make of that video from Graham Platner? Because while he's denying these allegations, he's also interestingly, at one point in the video, he starts to speak in past tense as though he's about to or may potentially in the next in the minutes, hours, days, suspend this campaign.

AYMAN MOYHELDIN: Yeah, I mean, there's a lot to unpack there. And I think that Graham Platner right now certainly has a credibility problem, and a lot of that has to do with what he says in previous statements. When allegations come forward, he'll come forward and say there's nothing else to come out, only for something else to come out. And that makes it harder and harder for his allies to politically defend him. And you're talking about the video that he just made. There's a few elements there that I thought were important. One, the part that he says I'm going to reflect on, on the way forward, and to Mychael's point about what that might mean

politically for him. But towards the end of that statement, he also adds the part about how many voters voted for him the most in Maine's history, and the fact that he does not want to betray the people of Maine who voted for him, and he says they've stood by him and he's not going to betray them. So, again, it's a bit of an open-ended statement. What does that mean? Is he going to do a potentially, in the eyes of many, the right thing of stepping aside and keeping the door open for somebody else, does that mean he's going to stay in this race and fight these allegations? But to Mychael's point and to the point that *Politico* makes, these are different allegations and for a few reasons. One, the way *Politico* described it, saying he has not previously been accused of sexual assault, I think is a different type of threshold in terms of allegations. Although he's been dogged by allegations of conduct and misconduct with women, the way it is characterized by *Politico* is that this is the first time he is being accused of sexual assault. But also the other important part in this is the receipts that this woman has.

HYLTON: Yeah.

MOYHELDIN: The fact that she had told other people about an interaction with Graham Platner that made her extremely uncomfortable, and according to *Politico*, crosses that threshold. That is something that I think we're seeing for the first time that gives so much more credibility to her story and to her allegations, even if Graham Platner is denying them. If it's one thing that we have, you know, talked about through the MeToo era is believe women and certainly women who have told other people about their experiences, I think, crosses a threshold that I think is going to put a lot of intense pressure on Graham Platner's campaign, but also on his allies who have stood by him throughout previous allegations.

HYLTON: To that comment about the sort of post MeToo era and the debate that sort of happened in the Democratic Party after this, the series of allegations around Graham Platner, part of, I think what made it complicated for some Democrats to fully believe the woman who was at the center of the last round was that she was associated with right-wing politics. But this woman, she — I want to read part of what's out here. One of the reasons she says to *Politico*: "I didn't come forward sooner was the huge moral conflict that I had between supporting his politics." So, she is saying, I actually agree with Graham Platner, his position, his politics. She's clearly more on the left, but not supporting him as a person. "I just want the truth out there. I just want people to have a whole scope of who he is as a person." Molly, I want your take on what we're hearing in these in this new report from *Politico* —

MOLLY JONG-FAST: Right.

HYLTON: — but also the fallout that you're expecting now as Democrats try to sort through what they need to do on behalf of the voters, the American people, because of this.

JONG-FAST: Yeah. Look, I mean, it's one thing to have one, you know, to have this first tranche. Remember, there were — there was an earlier group of women, and now this is yet another tranche of allegations, and I think that, you know, when you look at the polling on this, I just was looking at a poll that said 75 percent of people said that if there were more allegations, he should drop out. And I think this constant stream and even — you see the polling for him,

since the last batch of allegations, his numbers have gone down. I do think, like, look, I am baffled that the vetting and the vetting process for this candidate, number one. I mean, this is just, you know, the fact that they're just constant, you know, allegations, I think really is a sign that there just was not proper vetting here. And, you know, you may, again, align with him politically, but the truth is like, this is not a candidate who is ready for prime time in on any stretch of the imagination. And Democrats have, you know, there's a feeling in the party that that candidates like this are not for the party. And, you know, there has been a backlash to Me Too, but it has not been like this. The other thing I would say is, is that clearly this is a person who has who, you know, at least from these allegations that when drinking does not remember their behavior. That's what all these allegations say. So, another reason why how I don't know how we got here, but this 20 — this 17 — July 7 — July 1 deadline seems to be key. And I think you see a person who is really coming forward when there's still time for him to drop out, which I think is also shows that there's some feeling of like, this was just what she had to do. And — and the fact that there's so much on the women here when clearly this is, you know, multiple women, multiple allegations is just very upsetting.

HYLTON: Yeah. Molly, you can tell from her conversation with *Politico* that she's clearly wrestling with the consequences of her coming forward, of her putting her reputation, her own personal story out there. She's had that conversation with her therapist that *Politico* reports on, and you can tell this is something that she's dealing with in real time and that she cares, it seems, about our democracy, and it makes you wonder about the timing here as well.

JONG-FAST: Sure.

HYLTON: What — what do you think the path looks forward like at this point?

JONG-FAST: The other the other thing I would say is in the text messages —

HYLTON: Yeah.

JONG-FAST: — she's so protective of him. You know, she says, well, he's clearly got this PTSD, which reminds me so much of how women just, you know, the way the culture protects men, right? I mean, she's saying, well, he's got this PTSD and it's not exactly, you know, consensual. I mean, my god, like it. This should not be how it is. Like, this is so upsetting. You know, as a woman, as a feminist, as a mother of a daughter of a daughter, like this is not how it should be that women are, you know, trying to defend, trying to make excuses for someone. He, you know, she is saying in these allegations. And so, I do — I think it's really upsetting. I — I think that he, at least you see in this video, clearly a sense that he kind of has, you know, he's — he knows what's happening. And again, who knows what's going to happen. But in my mind, it would be very hard for me as a Democrat to vote for someone like this.

HYLTON: You know, Ayman, when Graham Platner was on with our colleague Chris Hayes, he told him that nothing else was coming. Chris asked him directly, is there something else out there? Will there be more allegations? And he said, no. He brushed it off.

MOYHELDIN: This is the crisis that Graham Platner has created by his own doing, because throughout the allegations that have come forward over the course of his campaign, and there have been a few different buckets of allegations, whether it was the Nazi tattoo, whether he knew what it was, the — the previous allegations of misconduct with women, and now the sexual assault allegations, per *Politico*. Every time there is an allegation or a question about his conduct, he either says it was because of, as in the case of the tattoos, he was drunk. He didn't know what he was doing. It's attributable to mental challenges that he had or mental health challenges that he had. But then he would try to close the chapter by saying there shouldn't be anything else to come out. As you said, when he had that interview, he said there were no more allegations. And for somebody who has had a troubled past and has acknowledged that he's had a troubled past and is a flawed candidate, there have been more than, you know, ample moments for him to come forward in full disclosure and say, there have been a lot of mistakes that I have made, with as many specifics as you can, so that the people who are voting for him, the citizens and the residents of Maine, are aware of what those allegations are. Now, does that mean he has to come forward and name every single person? No, that's — that's not the case. But there's always this sense when Graham Platner came forward to defend himself, that his apologies while he tried to project them as being sincere, always kept the door open, that there still may be more allegations, and at some point you have to wonder, when is it up? You know, enough is enough in terms of all of these problems that are — keep — that are being, you know, coming forward as a result of the reporting, and I think that is the challenge that Democrats have. People have staked their reputation by standing alongside Graham Platner, people who have endorsed him and have stood by him when these allegations were coming forward in multiple different venues. And now I think it's — it's — it's going to be a very challenging 24 hours for him to see how he goes forward from here.

HYLTON: Yeah. I mean, there's the people who put their reputations on the line, and they endorsed him —

MOYHELDIN: Yeah.

HYLTON: — and traveled with him and backed him up after the last round of allegations. But there's really two groups of people who I feel most heartbroken for, which is the woman at the center of the story, and then the voters of Maine, who so many of them have been crying out, wanting change, desperate for a younger person to represent them in the Senate, someone with new ideas to bring to the table. Democrats have been trying in that state to strategize about how to get rid of Susan Collins for a long, long time and finally believe that they had a glimmer of hope here. And I imagine they're feeling crushed right now. Mychael, you know, I know that you're still waiting to hear back from sources on the Hill, but give me your best understanding of what happens now. There's this July 13 deadline. What do they do?

SCHNELL: So, Graham Platner would have to withdraw from this race by July 13, one week from today, according to Maine law. I have it pulled up right here. You would have to withdraw by the second Monday in July. Again, that's next week in order to allow the state party to then appoint someone else to take the place. Because if you think about it, if he were to withdraw after July 13 and there's no — there's no confirmation that Democrats would actually have a nominee

on the ballot. So, if Graham Platner were to withdraw within a week, by July 13th, then the state party would have another two weeks by July 27 to appoint another individual to take the torch for the party and be on the ballot as their nominee. Now, of course, Janet Mills comes into a lot of folks minds, the former governor of the state, somebody who has in the past won statewide for the governorship, someone who was on the ballot during the primary brought in nearly 20 percent of the vote. And she has very slyly made it clear that she was still on the ballot, and she still pulled in a fifth of the vote. So, it's a big question. The two things we'll be watching now is, does Graham Platner actually withdraw by July 13 in a week from now? He opened the door to it in that video. And then who does the state party choose to take his spot by July 25th?

HYLTON: So, in theory they could choose someone other than Janet Mills?

SCHNELL: Sure, yeah. The state party can choose whoever, whomever they want in that position as long as. And this is, of course, the key part that Graham Platner withdraws himself by 5 p.m. on July 13.

MOYHELDIN: I was going to add to that really quickly, and I think this is the dilemma potentially for the Democratic Party in Maine. Do you potentially replace Graham Platner with somebody whose policies Graham Platner espoused, which is what the majority of people who voted for Graham Platner in the primary wanted? Or do they go with somebody who got the second most number of votes? And those are two very important talking points, because when you think about what the voters of Maine wanted in Graham Platner, knowing how flawed of a candidate he was, knowing about these allegations, and still not that, not the recent ones from today, but all of the previous ones, and still showing up in record numbers to vote for his policies, knowing that he's a flawed candidate, you can make a compelling argument that you have to try to find somebody within the Democratic establishment in Maine that represents closest to Graham Platner viewpoints. And there were stark differences between him and Janet Mills and Janet Mills, although being, you know, receiving the second most number of votes has the — the standing to be able to say, I got the second most number of votes. I got a fifth of the overall number of votes from the primaries. I've been elected to state office, and that may also then have a backlash, because it's not the policies that people wanted when they went to the polls.

HYLTON: Yeah, and Janet Mills does have these serious, you know, vulnerabilities, both because voters were concerned about her age. She would be the oldest senator if she came into office. They had she has different conflicts with Native American communities in the state. I mean, there were just a number of challenges. She really didn't travel the state to the extent that Graham Platner did. So, in addition to the sort of ideological battle, there was also sort of a structural battle going on between the two of them. And I think that's going to leave the party with a lot of questions.