

*CBS Mornings*

07/09/26

7:00:19 a.m. [TEASE]

5 seconds

VLADIMIR DUTHIERS: Plus, Democrat Graham Platner quits the Maine Senate race, what it could mean for the control of the U.S. Senate.

(...)

7:00:45 a.m. [TEASE]

9 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Platner Drops Out]

ADRIANA DIAZ: Maine Democratic Senate nominee Graham Platner drops out of the race amid rape allegations, which he denies.

GRAHAM PLATNER: Some will think it's an admission of guilt, and it most certainly is not.

(...)

7:02:17 a.m.

9 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking Overnight; Sen. Candidate Platner Drops Out of Maine Race]

DIAZ: First, we're going to start with what broke overnight. Democratic — Democrat Graham Platner announces he is withdrawing from the U.S. Senate race in Maine. The decision could impact the control of the U.S. Senate

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7:07:14 a.m.

5 minutes and 52 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking Overnight; Sen. Candidate Platner Drops Out of Maine Race]

DUTHIERS: Now to the political meltdown in Maine that could impact control of the U.S. Senate. Overnight, Democrat Grant Platner said he is dropping out of his state Senate race. It follows allegations of rape and physical abuse, which he denies. Democrats are scrambling to find a new nominee. Caitlin Huey-Burns is in Maine. Caitlin, good morning.

CAITLIN HUEY-BURNS: Good morning to you, Vlad. Well, even in announcing that he was leaving the race, Platner remained defiant dismissing those allegations and arguing it was the party system trying to force him out, but now the hard work begins as Democrats here trying to pick up the pieces under a very tight deadline. After a week of mounting allegations, vanishing support, and a showdown with state Democratic Party officials —

PLATNER: We are suspending campaign operations.

HUEY-BURNS: — Graham Platner says he intends to drop out of Maine's Senate race. The announcement comes after two women who claim they dated Platner in the past accused him of sexual and physical abuse.

PLATNER: I know that some will think it's an admission of guilt, and it most certainly has not.

HUEY-BURNS: Jenny Racicot and Lindsey Fifield detailed their allegations in interviews this week.

LYNDSEY FIFIELD [on CNN's *The Lead*, 07/07/26]: It was domestic abuse.

JENNY RACICOT [on CNN's *The Lead*, 07/06/26]: He violated multiple layers of consent that night.

HUEY-BURNS: Platner has continuously denied these allegations.

PLATNER: Those in power who have the ability to do so are using these allegations as an excuse to take away all of the things that we need to run a campaign.

HUEY-BURNS: Maine Democrats have until July 27 to pick a new candidate to take on longtime incumbent Republican Susan Collins. There's already a crowded field of contenders, including Dr. Nirav Shah, Maine's former health director.

NIRAV SHAH: The pathway to flipping the Senate from red to blue goes through Maine.

HUEY-BURNS [TO SHAH]: How anxious are Democrats feeling right now?

SHAH: We are feeling a thousand emotions all at once. [SCREEN WIPE] But the one that I would say is overriding is the eagerness and the commitment to defeating Susan Collins in the fall.

HUEY-BURNS: Former state Senate President Troy Jackson and Maine beer company founder Dan Kleban also announced they're seeking their party's nomination, but a defiant Platner says the decision should come from voters.

PLATNER: Decisions should not be made in back rooms by people in places of political power.

HUEY-BURNS: Okay, so where does this all go from here? Well, the state Democratic Party here has now decided they'll hold a nominating convention by the end of the month, but they're still trying to figure out exactly what that would look like. So still a lot more work to do for Democrats here, Vlad.

DUTHIERS: All right, Caitlin. Thank you very much. Let's bring in CBS News political contributor, and Democratic strategist Joel Payne. Joel, good morning.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking Overnight; Political Impact of Platner Dropping Out]

JOEL PAYNE: Good morning.

DUTHIERS: So, Graham Platner has categorically denied the allegations against him. He says he did nothing wrong. He seems, though, to be blaming the Democratic establishment for forcing him out. Joel, is that because party leaders concluded he was simply unelectable because — or because Democrats feel that there's some kind of moral obligation here for candidate facing an allegation like this to withdraw, regardless of whether or not it's been proven? And, ultimately, shouldn't that judgment be for the voters and not the establishment?

PAYNE: Well, Vlad, it's somewhat appropriate that that's where Platner went before announcing that he was suspending his campaign. He kind of, you know, offered up [a] very strong critique of the establishment because his campaign itself was a commentary on the establishment and the power that he hoped to rebalance between working people and between those in power. And so, the fact that he offered this commentary and this critique is not surprising because this was essentially a proxy war about that. I think what we go from here is Democrats trying to pick up the pieces and you hear a lot of commentary online about, well, how did we get here? Who's fault is this? Is it the fault of the people that identified Graham Platner? Is it the fault of the establishment class who did not offer up the type of candidates who would appropriately challenge a Platner in the primary? And to me, I think there's medicine for everybody to take and I think what Democrats across the country and in Maine are doing right now is trying to learn the lessons of how we got here with Platner, and where do we go next? And how do you refocus on trying to defeat Susan Collins in November?

DUTHIERS: All right. So, then how do you go about finding someone who could fulfill the obligations that he has made to the voters who are supporting him? In other words, finding someone who can be elected in that very same lane.

PAYNE: Yeah. And look, Platner nodded to this, and others have as well. It is important that this decision is transparent, and open, and public. I think a lot of Democrats are learning the lessons from what happened with Joe Biden in 2024. Very different circumstance, obviously, but same impact voters chose somebody, and then because of decisions out of their hands, that person was not on the ballot, ultimately, when they chose them in a primary. I think what Democrats want to do is make sure that Maine voters, particularly those who are reached by Platner's working-class, economic populism message —

DUTHIERS: Yeah.

PAYNE: — feel represented, and they don't feel like the type of candidate with the type of focus and the type of agenda that they believe in, that that is not represented on the ballot in November.

DUTHIERS: So —

PAYNE: And Caitlin talked about there's going to be a nominating convention by the end of the month. You've talked about some of those candidates, whether it's Troy Jackson or Nirav Shah —

DUTHIERS: — yeah.

PAYNE: — Dan Kleban, there will be lots of folks, I imagine, who jump in and lots of opportunities for people to weigh in.

DUTHIERS: So, so, Joel, very quickly, is this still winnable for Democrats?

PAYNE: I think it is still winnable for Democrats, but I would point out even with more traditional candidates in the past, Shenna Bellows in 2014 and a Sara Gideon in 2020, Susan Collins was able to defy political odds against her. So, she is a tough Republican to defeat under any circumstance. I don't think Democrats have made it easier for themselves this time around.

DUTHIERS: Alright, Joel Payne, always appreciate talking with you, my friend. Thank you.

PAYNE: Thanks.