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The Capitol Report for the Week of May 14, 2018

Women's group calls for Flynn to withdraw from governor's race

Milwaukee attorney Matt Flynn will remain among the field of candidates for Wisconsin’s Democratic gubernatorial primary, despite calls for him to drop out because of his role defending the Milwaukee Archdiocese in sexual abuse lawsuits.

Women’s March Wisconsin recently called on Flynn to withdraw from the race, but Flynn’s campaign manager, Bryan Kennedy, said the criticism amounts to an attempt “to take someone who is a likely frontrunner out of this race, and to attack him for priest sex abuse when he’s the one who actually cleaned up the problem.”

Flynn is one of nine top Democratic candidates looking to take on GOP Gov. Scott Walker in the Nov. 6 general election. The Democratic primary is Aug. 14.

When Flynn, a retired partner with the Quarles & Brady law firm in Milwaukee, first launched his campaign last fall, he fielded hits from the state GOP regarding his work on behalf of the archdiocese. The party labeled Flynn as a “dirty defense attorney” guilty of “putting Wisconsin families at risk.”

The issue was again brought up again after The Wisconsin Gazette published an article quoting abuse victims who said they were “appalled” by Flynn’s bid.

Then, in a statement on May 6, Women’s March Wisconsin said Flynn should bow out of the race. The call came after Sarah Pearson, the group’s co-chair, approached Flynn following a Democratic debate in Madison. In an encounter [filmed live on the group’s facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/womensmarchwi/videos/441254126312039/), she asked Flynn about his “involvement in the cover-up and transfer of pedophile priests.”

Pearson pointed to a series of church documents released in 2014 that the group said revealed he “directed and knew of secret transfers of dozens of child-molesting clergy, many of which went on to abuse more children.”

Flynn declined to comment on the documents, telling Pearson to instead be on the lookout for a campaign statement. The video also showed him dismissing the Wisconsin Gazette article as “fundamentally untrue, in many, many respects.”

After a nearly two-minute conversation, Flynn again referred Pearson to the campaign’s upcoming statement before thanking her and walking away.

Pearson then addressed the camera, saying it’s “highly inappropriate that his candidacy has continued despite the fact that he’s clearly covered up sexual abuse of children and allowed pedophiles to continue working in capacity with children. That’s fundamentally wrong, and we’ll be calling on him to end his candidacy.”

In Flynn’s May 7 statement, he said that once he was aware of the abuse, he “knew that to be in alignment with my conscience, I had to do something, not merely voice disapproval.”

“In my work almost 20 years ago, I worked with others to put into place procedures to identify and remove abusive priests, notify the authorities, and prevent their transfer,” he said. “It was imperative that we work to create a system that would ensure that crimes such as these could never be committed and allowed to persist.”

While Flynn’s statement claimed it was the first time he had talked publicly about his involvement with the archdiocese, he’d previously defended his work.

Flynn told WisPolitics.com in October that the scandal “pained me more than I can tell you.” Still, he was proud of his work for the archdiocese, saying his efforts and those of others led to an end of the practice of transferring priests accused of abuse to other parishes without any warning of past allegations.

The Democratic convention will be held June 1-2 in Oshkosh. Other Democratic candidates include Tony Evers, Andy Gronik, Mike McCabe, Mahlon Mitchell, Kelda Roys, Paul Soglin, Kathleen Vinehout and Dana Wachs.

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