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WKU students weigh Kavanaugh's confirmation

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 13 hrs ago

SUPREME COURT

Judge Brett Kavanaugh is Trump's nominee for the Supreme Court

The president praises Kavanaugh as 'one of the finest and sharpest legal minds of our time.'

By MATTHEW NUSSBAUM | 07/09/2018 09:06 PM EDT | Updated 07/09/2018 10:05 PM EDT



Western Kentucky University junior Caitlyn Couvillion attended a presentation Wednesday on U.S. Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, hoping to get a better grip on a nomination process now imperiled by a sexual assault allegation.

She left with a better understanding of how Kavanaugh might rule in relation to Justice Anthony Kennedy, who announced his retirement in June.

“They’re somewhat similar, (Kavanaugh’s) just more conservative,” Couvillion said.

WKU’s Department of Political Science hosted the presentation by associate professor Jeffrey Budziak. It’s part of several events the department organized to celebrate Constitution Week and promote civic engagement.

“The ability for President (Donald) Trump to replace Justice Kennedy really has the potential to shift the Supreme Court in a more consistently conservative direction,” Budziak said, describing Kavanaugh as “Republican as Republican gets.”

Although Kavanaugh could help overturn *Roe v. Wade*, Budziak noted that would likely shift abortion policy back to the states, rather than outlaw it nationwide.

“It will mean abortion will get more expensive,” he said, speculating that women of means could still travel to states where abortion is legal. For women without means, “abortion may be practically unavailable,” he said.

Kavanaugh could also cast a deciding vote that would immediately end affirmative action at the nation's higher education institutions, Budziak said.

Kavanaugh's confirmation has been threatened by a sexual assault allegation from Christine Blasey Ford.

Ford, a psychology professor from California, claims Kavanaugh assaulted her when they were in high school.

Ford's accusation has caused some Senate Republicans to call for a pause in the confirmation process, and she has been invited to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Monday. But Ford's attorneys said the FBI should investigate Kavanaugh before Ford testifies in a nationally televised hearing.

"We are now in a game of chicken," Budziak said.

Budziak drew parallels to testimony from Anita Hill, who in 1991 accused then-Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment.

With the rise of the #MeToo movement, which has brought down powerful men in journalism, politics and show business, Budziak said the public might receive Ford's testimony differently than Hill's.





“Anita Hill was largely not believed,” he said, noting that Thomas’ approval ratings went up as Hill testified.

Couvillion, a Louisville resident, said Senate Republicans should tread carefully if they do question Ford.

“I would hope that it goes a lot better” than Hill’s hearing, Couvillion said. “I’m very interested in the questions they’re going to ask if she does come and testify, just so that they don’t make it a victim-blaming game.”

Students raised several questions following the presentation, such as if the FBI could independently investigate Kavanaugh, whether the hearing will echo Hill’s nearly 30 years ago and whether the accusation should count against Kavanaugh, who was 17 when the alleged assault occurred.

The conversation touched on questions about what kind of burden of proof women should face when bringing sexual misconduct allegations and what level of punishment perpetrators should receive.

“It’s an interesting question about (a) what is the standard we should be applying here, and (b) even if we grant that Kavanaugh has met this standard, is withholding this job from him the remedy?” Budziak asked.



Aaron Mudd

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