Joe Biden to address sex assault accusations Friday

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Joe Biden will break his silence Friday about a former aide’s allegations that he sexually assaulted her in the 1990s, according to the broadcaster set to interview the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee.  
  
Biden’s morning appearance on MSNBC comes as he faces mounting pressure, including from President Donald Trump, to address the allegations, and as top Democrats rushed to the party flagbearer’s defense.  
  
“Tomorrow in a @Morning\_Joe exclusive, former Vice President @JoeBiden (will) respond for the first time to the recent allegation of sexual assault,” the cable television channel’s public relations team said Thursday on Twitter.  
  
Biden’s campaign has denied the claim that he assaulted a 29-year-old staff assistant who worked in his US Senate office.  
  
But the 77-year-old White House hopeful has yet to personally respond to the bombshell accusation by Tara Reade, now 56.  
  
Trump, who himself faced more than a dozen accusations of sexual harassment and assault before he became president, said he knew little about the claims against Biden, even as his re-election team and Republican campaign operations aggressively push the controversy.  
  
“I think that he should respond,” Trump told reporters at the White House.  
  
“It could be false accusations,” he added. “I know all about false accusations, I have been falsely charged numerous times.”  
  
According to Reade, Biden assaulted her in 1993 in a hallway on Capitol Hill.  
  
“He went down my skirt but then up inside it and he penetrated me with his fingers,” Reade said in a late March interview on the Katie Halper Show podcast.  
  
Other women have accused Biden of touching or embracing them inappropriately in the past, and Reade’s initial claims were similar — and less severe than her most recent allegations.  
  
The New York Times reported it interviewed Reade on multiple occasions, along with her friends and others who worked for Biden in the 1990s.  
  
The paper said it uncovered no pattern of misconduct.  
  
– Pelosi defends –  
  
Biden has pledged to pick a woman as his running mate, and on Thursday he launched a committee to help him search for and vet a vice-presidential candidate.  
  
“Selecting a vice presidential candidate is one of the most important decisions in a presidential campaign and no one knows this more than Joe Biden,” campaign manager Jen O’Malley Dillon said in a statement.  
  
The committee co-chairs include congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti.  
  
US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who this week endorsed Biden for president, addressed the issue at her Thursday press conference, which focused on the coronavirus pandemic.  
  
“There was never any record” about the assault, and “nobody ever came forward to say something about it apart from the principal involved” until 27 years later, she said.  
  
Biden is “a person of great values” who has fought for women’s rights throughout his career, she said.  
  
Biden, relegated to campaigning from home due to the coronavirus crisis, appeared on an Instagram live chat Thursday with soccer champion Megan Rapinoe, but the issue was not addressed.  
  
Several women seen as candidates to be Biden’s running mate, including Senator Kamala Harris and former Georgia state lawmaker Stacey Abrams, have expressed support for Biden regarding the allegations.  
  
“I know Joe Biden and I think he’s telling the truth and this did not happen,” Abrams told CNN Tuesday.  
  
The Reade allegations present a thorny problem for Biden’s campaign.  
  
Harris and Senator Amy Klobuchar, another potential running mate, played leading roles in opposing the 2018 confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court over unproven accusations of sexual assault.  
  
Trump said Kavanaugh was “falsely charged” by Christine Blasey Ford, who accused Kavanaugh of assaulting her at a party in the early 1980s.  
  
(AFP)