

Bill Cosby refuses to address sexual assault allegations in NPR interview

BY EMILY YAHR
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — Bill Cosby, in the midst of a serious PR crisis as accusations about him sexually assaulting women make headlines around the world, has decided to stay silent.

In an interview on NPR's "Weekend Edition" that aired Saturday (where Cosby and his wife appeared to talk about loaning works to the National Museum of African Art), Cosby, 77, didn't say a word when host Scott Simon asked him about the allegations. In the past, Cosby has repeatedly denied these claims.

"This question gives me no pleasure, Mr. Cosby, but there have been serious allegations raised about you in recent days," Simon said, without specifically saying what the allegations in question were.

There's a long pause. "You're shaking your head no. I'm in the news business, I have to ask the question: Do you have any response to those charges?" Simon said.

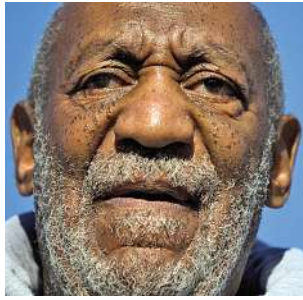
Another long pause. "Shaking your head no," Simon continued, and said again: "There are people who love you who might like to hear from you about this—I want to give you the chance." And again, no response.

The interview comes a couple days after Cosby's name quietly disappeared from the "Late Show With David Letterman" guest line-up for next week. Cosby was supposed to appear on the show on Wednesday. Then, late this week, his name was gone and replaced with talk show host Regis Philbin.

There's no word on whether the cancellation was Cosby's idea or the show's. Letterman's publicist told the Associated Press that "We can't comment on the guest booking process."

Considering the way the Cosby camp so blithely promoted a new Twitter game (the chance to "meme" Cosby by putting a clever caption under his picture), it's possible they had no idea how severe the image crisis had become. The "meme" game ended in disaster and was pulled in a matter of hours.

Although Cosby has been accused of sexual assault in the past by more than a doz-



ASSOCIATED PRESS
Entertainer and Navy veteran Bill Cosby speaking during a Veterans Day ceremony, at the All Wars Memorial to Colored Soldiers and Sailors in Philadelphia this month. Cosby's upcoming appearance on CBS' "Late Show with David Letterman" has been canceled amid a growing uproar over allegations that he sexually assaulted several women in past decades.

en women — including in a civil lawsuit settled in 2004 — the story didn't get much consistent mainstream attention until this fall, when during a stand-up routine, comedian Hannibal Buress called Cosby a rapist.

This point was made by Barbara Bowman, one of the women who have accused Cosby of sexual assault, in an essay that appeared on The Washington Post website Thursday. Bowman detailed her experience in a first-person account called "Bill Cosby raped me. Why did it take 30 years for people to believe my story?"

Bowman wrote that in 1985, Cosby (at that point a star on "The Cosby Show") offered to be her mentor — then "brainwashed me into viewing him as a father figure, and then assaulted me multiple times."

Bowman said she's told her stories many times (offering to testify in the 2004 civil suit, but it was settled before she had a chance) and no one paid attention until Buress, a man, spoke out.

"I have never received any money from Bill Cosby and have not asked for it. I have nothing to gain by continuing to speak out. He can no longer be charged for his crimes against me because the statute of limitations is long past," she wrote. "That is also wrong. There should be no time limits on reporting these crimes, and one of my goals is to call for legislation to that end."

DEFENDING

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"I am in full support of the current system at a higher (pay) rate," said Chris Northrop, president of the Maine Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, which has 200 members statewide. "I think that Maine should stay with our current system. It would be great if we could support the individual defenders better."

Norman Lefstein is an Indiana University law professor who has written extensively about indigent legal defense in the U.S. He believes Maine isn't necessarily wrong in going against the tide of public defender's offices. Its situation may not warrant it.

"I don't think there is, in and of itself, anything wrong with a state that ranks 41st in population and 39th, I think, in land, in square miles, not having a public defender. I don't think there's one way of doing things that is necessarily the only way," he said.

Generally, Lefstein favors a system that includes both a strong, well-funded public defender's office and good, well-paid private lawyers who see indigent clients. But he believes Maine would do well to at least pay its lawyers more and better assess how they do their jobs.

"They've taken an important first step (with the commission), but I don't think they're anywhere near there," he said.

The commission agrees. Last year it recommended raising lawyer pay from \$50 an hour to \$70 an hour for a time, then \$75. Another proposal in front of the Legislature's Judiciary Committee suggested raising it to \$65 an hour. Both failed.

Instead, pay was set at \$55 an hour, an increase of \$5. It was the first pay raise for state-appointed defense lawyers in 15 years.

The commission will bring back its raise request this legislative session.

Executive Director John Pelletier believes Maine's public defenders are among the best lawyers in the state, but he wishes the commission had the staff to better oversee them.

While no one has claimed defense lawyers are doing a poor job, oversight can help spot problems when they do arise.

"Because of the small number (of commission administrators) and far-flung courthouses, the commission at this time is unable to provide that kind of in-



SUN JOURNAL FILE PHOTO

An emotional Mack Williams Jr. and his lawyer, Robert Ruffner, stand before Androscoggin County Superior Court Justice MaryGay Kennedy during a plea agreement to two counts of aggravated assault in Androscoggin County Superior Court in Auburn on Sept. 8.

Average cost of defending cases for select crimes

Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services

| Case type | Cases opened | Average amount |
|------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Misdemeanor | 7,201 | \$335.66 |
| Felony | 6,167 | \$682.94 |
| Lawyer of the day (In custody) | 2,462 | \$188.54 |
| Child protection petition | 1,936 | \$505.80 |
| Probation violation | 1,872 | \$330.47 |
| Lawyer of the day (not in custody) | 1,264 | \$191.34 |
| All other (total)* | 3,934 | \$476.69 |

house oversight over attorney performance," he said.

Although a pay raise and better oversight would cost the state more, proponents say it would still be less expensive than funding a public defender's office.

According to a national study in 2010, Maine had one of the lowest indigent legal expenditures in the country. Only Hawaii, North Dakota and South Dakota spent less.

Currently, Maine spends about \$14 million on indigent legal services. New Hampshire, which has a similar population, spends about \$21 million.

However, the cost could rise in Maine. Pelletier plans to ask for another \$2 million next year to keep up with the demand for legal services. A pay raise to \$70 an hour would add \$4 million on top of that.

It's an issue that will likely get attention in the future. Gov. Paul LePage authorized an additional \$1.8 million in funding for indigent legal services in 2012 and 2013. The need concerns him, his spokeswoman said.

"Due to the ever-expanding costs associated with indigent legal services under the current approach, the administration has been reviewing the current structure and determining whether there are ways to provide quality service at lower costs," Adrienne Bennett said.

"However," she said, "it is too early to provide any details about any definitive proposals."

At the district court in

Lewiston, Howaniec tried to get the bail reduced for his new client. The state wanted \$50,000 cash. Aiken's mother, a police officer in New York, told Howaniec over the phone that she could probably get \$5,000 or \$10,000.

Howaniec pushed for \$5,000. He knew it would be a hard sell — a large amount of what appeared to be crack was found in a drawer in the hotel room. And since the area had a problem with New Yorkers coming to Lewiston-Auburn to sell drugs, courts were not eager to let out-of-state defendants who had few ties to the community walk out of jail.

But Howaniec emphasized the fact that Aiken was a high school graduate, a guy who worked at Dunkin' Donuts in New York and had been actively trying to get the same work in Lewiston. He pressed the judge to consider a lower bail, an amount closer to what was common in other drug-trafficking cases.

The judge set bail at \$40,000.

Just before Aiken was led out of the courtroom, Howaniec gave him his business card. He was Lawyer of the Day, responsible for defending Aiken just for that appearance. A defense lawyer would have to be assigned to handle the rest of his case.

But Aiken's mother was set on hiring a lawyer — not using a public defender.

In the few minutes he spent looking at the court documents, Howaniec knew there were problems with the state's case. He knew he could fight the charges for his client, no matter how he was paid.

"Some people, they prefer to actually retain you because they think you're going to work harder if you're retained. Which is a myth," he said.

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