



Sen. Maggie Hassan's former staff assistant admitted to two misdemeanor crimes for her role in the release of personal information of Republican senators who backed Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination. | Jacquelyn Martin/AP Photo

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Ex-aide pleads guilty in Senate hacking case

By JOSH GERSTEIN | 07/30/2019 05:52 PM EDT | Updated 08/05/2019 04:50 PM EDT

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Samantha Davis, 24, a former staff assistant to Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.), appeared in U.S. District Court just a few blocks from the Capitol on Tuesday afternoon to admit to two misdemeanors for her role in events that culminated in the release of personal information of Republican senators backing the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.

During the hourlong hearing, there was no indication that Davis was aware of or involved in the "doxing" carried out by the fired Hassan aide, Jackson Cosko, 28. However, Davis admitted that she gave Cosko keys to Hassan's office on one occasion, knowing he would tamper with computers in the office.

Davis also acknowledged that she had noticed on several occasions that Cosko had taken the keys from her purse and she had not reported it. She also admitted that she lied to investigators the first two times she was interviewed about intrusions at Hassan's office.

Last month, Judge Thomas Hogan gave Cosko a stern sentence — four years in prison — for breaking into Senate computers and releasing the home addresses and phone numbers of Sens. Lindsey Graham, Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee on Wikipedia in retaliation for their roles in Kavanaugh's confirmation.

Hogan said Davis could face up to 18 months in prison. Prosecutors have indicated they won't seek prison time, but might ask for home confinement or that Davis spend time in a halfway house. Public defender A.J. Kramer suggested he was hopeful she would be sentenced to probation.

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Davis stood at a courtroom lectern as Hogan detailed her admissions in an agreed statement of facts hammered out with prosecutors.

"You were good friends," Hogan said of Davis and Cosko. "You knew he had no right to enter the office unescorted. ... You were aware Mr. Cosko was angry about his termination.

"Mr. Cosko told you to wipe down all the computer keyboards, the computer mice and to unplug" equipment, the judge added. The effort failed because another staffer showed up at work early, the judge said.

There was little discussion of why Davis aided Cosko, but the judge said at one point that Cosko had lent Davis money to cover her rent and asked for a favor in return. He called in that favor by asking her to hand over her office keys in October — the one time she admitted doing so.

After laying out those facts, Hogan asked her whether they were accurate.

"Yes," Davis said.

Kramer said the plea agreement was the result of "lengthy negotiations." The evidence-tampering crime Davis admitted to is charged as a violation of the Washington, D.C., city code and not federal law.

A spokesman for Hassan's office said Davis worked as a staff assistant there from August 2017 until December 2018, when she was fired over her role in Cosko's scheme.

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Hogan, an appointee of President Ronald Reagan, set sentencing for Oct. 28. Kramer asked for a morning hearing so Davis might be able to return to Wisconsin that same day. "I don't mean to be presumptuous," the defense attorney said.

Hogan moved another hearing to hold the sentencing that morning, but told Davis he couldn't make any promises at this point about what her sentence would be. "We'll see what happens," the judge said.

Through her lawyer, Davis declined to comment after the court session.

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