

ANA CABRERA (HOST): Let's get straight to the panel of CNN political commentators with us now former Trump campaign adviser Steve Cortes. Former Hillary Clinton manager Patty Solis Doyle and communications chief for Republican congressman Dana Rohrabacher, Tara Setmayer. Okay, Steve, I will start with you, the gentleman on the panel. Why is it hard for the president to condemn domestic violence and say it has no place in the White House or America for that matter.

STEVE CORTES: It is a great question. I hope he will. And I think he should. As you know, I'm very loyal to the president. I defend him on-air. I think that Saturday tweet was ill-advised. I think he needs to explicitly say our thoughts are with the victims of sexual harassment or domestic violence. Condemnation is on the perpetrators. In this case, Rob Porter is gone. And he should be gone. I think to some degree the president and General Kelly were poorly served by staff, by the FBI. It is not their job as Chief of Staff to do background checks. They only knew him in a professional setting where apparently he was one of those kinds of people who can act like that, one way in a setting and another way in another. The president and White House on domestic violence and sexual harassment need convey that better.

CABRERA: Hold on to that, though. The president endorsed Roy Moore. The man accused of child molestation. He defended Roger Ailes, Lewandowski, said on the campaign trail that some women weren't attractive enough to sexually abuse. So when again has the president made clear he finds violence against women abhorrent?

CORTES: By the way he elevated women in his White House and business career. Kellyanne Conway to chair a successful campaign. Hope Hicks. Secretary Neilson. Head of DHS. Homeland security. Perhaps in this White House one of the most important agencies of the federal government. He elevated women, empowered women throughout his career, throughout his life. He has to convey the message better. Again, listen, I'm admitting and conceding on that point he has to convey the message better that in all cases, all cases, domestic violence, sexual harassment of women is abhorrent. There is no D or R attached. We have seen it recently with Rob Porter. I would argue we saw it in the past with Bill Clinton. With Weinstein. It needs to, in all of those cases, revile it. We need embrace victims and tell perpetrators you will be held to account.

CABRERA: Patty, I'm wondering what you're thinking.

PATTY SOLIS DOYLE: Well, the reason that Donald Trump did not say that sexual abuse and domestic violence and all of these things violent acts against women are be abhorrent is because he has set a precedent, beginning with where if an abuser or harasser, a rapist, claims that he didn't do it, if he denies it, then it's okay. He did that with himself. He has 16 women accusing him of sexual harassment. He did it with Corey Lewandowski. He did it with Rob Moore. Now with Rob Porter. He tweets that these mere legal allegations ruin men's lives. That is an attack on every woman who has ever been beaten, raped, pushed to the ground. It is an attack on the wives of Rob Porter. That behavior is abhorrent to me.

I agree --

CABRERA: Hold on, guys. Let me get Kellyanne Conway also here as well. She represents this White House. Listen to what she told Jake Tapper about the allegations.

--video clip--

KELLYANNE CONWAY: I've seen it when the president is saying, talking about due process, he is right in this way. We are a country of laws and due process. Correct. We as individuals have the responsibility to individual everybody in each case. You have police reports. Women speak to the FBI under perjury. Police reports, photographs. When you look at all of this pulled together, you realize that Rob Porter did the right thing by resigning.

JAKE TAPPER: Sounds like you believe the women.

KELLYANNE CONWAY: I have no reason not to believe the women.

-- end video clip --

CABRERA: We have a White House staffer. A female saying she believes the women. Does that help?

TARA SETMAYER: No. I don't care what Donald Trump's mouthpieces have to say about this. He tries to clean up the mess that he created. He had an opportunity on Friday to come out and say everything that Kellyanne said and others that tried to clean up the mess, because he didn't say it, his default position is to lament over the fact that this credibly accused wife beater had to leave his job and he did nothing but heap praise on him and a wonderful career and oh, this is so sad. And what that did was it was such an affront not only to the victims of Rob Porter who he essentially called liars, the point made in the op-ed by an ex-wife, a very good point, because that's what he did. By not mentioning them and not having the opportunity to rise to the occasion to provide moral leadership and moral clarity from the office the presidency. Donald Trump failed at this over and over again. Because of his own transgressions with women, he is incapable of acknowledging that women should be believed. Because that would mean he would have to face his own accusations. I don't care whatever women he trods out to clean up his mess. Their words ring hollow, because the boss that she works for, will not admit it or rise to the occasion. To me, it rings very hollow coming from Kellyanne Conway or anyone else.

CABRERA: You have to remember, this guy did bring out Bill Clinton's accusers before one of the democratic debates. He has thrown Harvey Weinstein under the bus. Even though he defended the other accused men of abuse and harassment. Is this all about politics for the president?

CORTES: I sure hope it isn't. It is way too important an issue for our country. I will take issue with this. And I'm criticizing the president, which I don't often do. I am criticizing the president and White House. They need to convey what they believe sexual harassment or domestic violence of women. I don't think they're doing an effective job. I believe they are going to. Rob Porter is gone. He belongs to be gone. He has no business at the White House. I feel such empathy for the victims. The president needs to come out and talk about that. Once he does, here is the -- and here is the bigger issue too even.

SETMAYER: He won't. He's not going to.

CORTES: It's...

SETMAYER: It is Trump. There is not a "they." It is Trump that needs to do it and he is not going to. Just quickly, I want to defend the FBI here. It is ridiculous to blame the FBI. The FBI did their job like they do. And informed the White House. Informed the Chief of Staff John Kelly. And Don McGann was aware. It is shameful you are trying to lay this in their lap.

CORTES: There is no evidence General Kelly knew. No evidence General Kelly knew.

CABRERA: Hold on. Hold on. Our reporting is that he did have these things raised to him.

CORTES: I know there is reporting, but there is no evidence.

[At this point, all three women refute everything he's saying.]

SETMAYER: He was aware there was not a security clearance.

CORTES: And I choose to believe him.

SETMAYER: Why Rob Porter didn't get security clearance? Was John Kelly naive, or was he derelict in duty? Which is it? Neither one is a good thing.

CABRERA: Steve?

CORTES: If you want to call him derelict in duty or naive, good luck with that accusation. I believe he is an American hero.

CABRERA: He is an American hero in the military.

DOYLE: They do.

SETMAYER: They did for months!

(crosstalk)

CORTES: If you believe that, will you shine that same light on Team Clinton. Then will you shine that same light on Bill Clinton?

SETMAYER: Of course I did. I was a conservative. I fought against the Clintons for years. I am not a hypocrite like others trying to defend this White House. You can't hang that on me.

CORTES: Patti, will you shine that light on Bill Clinton.

DOYLE: I have been on record saying I cannot defend Bill Clinton's behavior.