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U.S. to pay nearly \$1M to settle sexual assault case against former top general

Retired Gen. John Hyten has denied the allegations, and an Air Force investigation failed to corroborate the accuser's claims.



A now-retired Army colonel made headlines in 2019 when she publicly accused then-Gen. John Hyten of sexually assaulting her when she worked for him in December 2017. | Andrew Harnik/AP Photo

By LARA SELIGMAN
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The U.S. government will pay nearly \$1 million to a retired Army colonel who in 2019 accused a former senior military officer of sexual assault, according to [court documents released Thursday](#).

The agreement came to \$975,000, according to a statement by [Ariel Solomon](#) of [Solomon Law Firm](#), the lawyer representing the plaintiff. Retired Gen. John Hyten has

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denied the allegations, and an Air Force investigation was unable to find evidence of wrongdoing.

Now-retired Army Col. Kathryn Spletstoser made headlines in 2019 when she publicly accused then-Gen. Hyten, who at the time had been nominated to serve as the military's second-highest military officer, of sexually assaulting her when she worked for him in December 2017.

Spletstoser, who was Hyten's aide while he served as head of U.S. Strategic Command in 2017, accused the general of unwanted sexual advances and inappropriately touching her in a hotel room during a prominent national security conference in California.

The Air Force in 2019 said it could not corroborate Spletstoser's accusations. Prominent lawmakers [came to Hyten's defense](#) and eventually confirmed him for the vice chair job. He served until 2021.

Hyten argued that Spletstoser couldn't sue him because the nature of the allegations was "incident to military service." This is a key element of the Feres Doctrine, which prohibits service members from suing the government for injuries experienced in the performance of their duties.

But a federal judge ruled in October 2020 that Spletstoser [could proceed with her case](#), arguing that the alleged assault could not "conceivably serve any military purpose."

The case, *Kathryn Spletstoser v. United States of America*, was brought in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. Hyten, who retired in 2021, now works at Blue Origin, an aerospace and defense company founded by Amazon's Jeff Bezos.

Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh referred questions to the Department of Justice, which declined to comment. Multiple attempts to reach Hyten through colleagues and Blue Origin went unanswered.

Solomon, Spletstoser's attorney, said the decision is a victory for her client, and caps a controversial case that has dragged on for four years.

The details of the lawsuit rocked the national security community when they first emerged in 2019. Spletstoser alleged that Hyten came to her hotel room while they were attending the Reagan National Defense Forum in Simi Valley, Calif. Once inside, the lawsuit states, Hyten grabbed her and rubbed against her, ejaculating in his shorts. Spletstoser also alleged that he later retaliated against her for rejecting his advances.

"Colonel Spletstoser is a combat veteran, who represented the United States with grit and grace throughout her military career," Solomon said in her statement. "This victory

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is an important step in the right direction, however, to obtain justice for other countless survivors of military sexual trauma, Congress must act.”