

BY KEN JACOBS ON
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Ruby Rippey-Gibney to break her silence on Gavin Newsom affair in upcoming Vanity Fair piece

The woman at the center of the scandal that nearly ended Gavin Newsom's political career is preparing to tell her side of the story for the first time, and the timing could hardly be worse for the California governor's presidential ambitions.

Ruby Rippey-Gibney, the former San Francisco City Hall aide who had an affair with Newsom while he was mayor and she was married to his campaign manager, plans to recount her perspective in an upcoming Vanity Fair piece, a source familiar with the matter told the New York Post. Rippey-Gibney and Vanity Fair did not respond to requests for comment.

The revelation lands as Newsom is widely expected to launch a 2028 presidential campaign after terming out of the governor's office next year. For nearly two decades, Rippey-Gibney has largely avoided speaking publicly about the affair that rocked San Francisco politics in 2007. Now she appears ready to change that, and the Democratic establishment has reason to pay attention.

The scandal that almost sank Newsom

The facts of the original episode remain damning on their own terms. Rippey-Gibney served as Newsom's appointments secretary at City Hall. Her then-husband, Alex Tourk, was Newsom's longtime political adviser and former campaign manager. When Tourk discovered the affair, he confronted Newsom and resigned.

Newsom held a news conference shortly afterward and offered a public apology that was heavy on contrition and light on detail:

"I want to make it clear that everything you've heard and read is true, and I am deeply sorry about that."

He also announced he was giving up alcohol and would seek professional help. At the same podium, he acknowledged the role drinking had played in the situation:

"My problems with alcohol are not an excuse for my personal lapses in judgment."

News organizations widely reported at the time that Newsom had entered an alcohol rehabilitation program. But during his 2018 gubernatorial campaign, Newsom told The Sacramento Bee those reports were wrong. He said he sought counseling from Mimi Silbert, president of the Delancey Street Foundation, but never checked into rehab.

"No, there's no rehab. I just stopped. There was no treatment, no nothing related to any of that stuff. I stopped because I thought it was a good thing to stop."

That contradiction, letting the public believe for years that he entered rehabilitation, then quietly walking it back a decade later, is the kind of record management that invites scrutiny. Voters were told one thing in the heat of the crisis and another when Newsom needed to look strong on a statewide ballot.

A pattern of managed narratives

Newsom's handling of the affair fits a broader pattern among Democratic figures who treat scandal as a communications problem rather than a question of character. He apologized, invoked alcohol, signaled he was getting help, won reelection as mayor later that same year, won the lieutenant governor's race in 2010, and captured the governor's mansion in 2018. The scandal never stuck, in part because Rippey-Gibney herself never pressed the issue publicly.

That restraint is worth noting. In 2018, during Newsom's first gubernatorial campaign, Rippey-Gibney posted on Facebook that while she supported the #MeToo movement, she did not believe her relationship with Newsom belonged in that category. She wrote that she was struggling with alcoholism and self-destructive behavior during that period of her life.

"Yes, I was a subordinate, but I was also a free-thinking, 33-year-old adult married woman & mother."

That was the extent of her public commentary, until now. What changed between that Facebook post and a decision to sit down with Vanity Fair remains an open question. The source familiar with the matter did not explain her motivation, and Rippey-Gibney herself has not spoken publicly about the forthcoming piece.

The broader landscape of Democratic insider scandals in Sacramento suggests Newsom's political circle has never been as tightly sealed as his public image implies.

What the people around Newsom said, and didn't say

Jennifer Siebel, who began dating Newsom in late 2006 and married him in 2008, had her own reaction when the scandal first erupted. She told the San Francisco Chronicle at the time:

"I shouldn't say this, but there are two sides to every story."

She apologized shortly after those comments were published. But the remark hinted at a version of events that has never been fully aired. If Rippey-Gibney's Vanity Fair piece provides that second side, it could reshape how voters evaluate Newsom's character heading into a presidential primary.

Former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, who preceded Newsom and has been supportive of his likely presidential run, told the Post that the affair caught him off guard. Brown noted he had a leading role in bringing the key players into City Hall.

"I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to [Rippey-Gibney], because her husband worked for me as well. I didn't pay any attention, until after the fact."

Brown dismissed the idea that the old scandal would carry political weight, saying voters are "no longer concerned about that kind of conduct as evidence of whether or not you're qualified." That may be true in deep-blue California. It is a different proposition in a national Democratic primary where candidates will be looking for any advantage.

As Democrats scramble to build a credible 2028 bench, Newsom's rivals will not need to raise the Rippey-Gibney story themselves. Vanity Fair will do it for them.

The political math

San Francisco political analyst David Latterman offered a candid assessment of the dynamics at play. He told the Post:

"What would be really sad is if Democrats make a bigger deal out of this than Republicans for self-flagellation."

That comment reveals something about the internal anxieties within the Democratic Party. The concern is not that Newsom did something wrong, that part was acknowledged years ago. The concern is that his own party's appetite for

moral credentialing could turn a resurfaced scandal into a primary liability. In a party that has built its brand on #MeToo accountability and power-imbalance awareness, a boss-subordinate affair with the wife of a loyal staffer is not a comfortable story to revisit.

Newsom himself seemed to recognize the tension during his 2018 campaign, telling The Sacramento Bee:

"Sometimes people make mistakes in their lives and you then work hard never to make them again, because you learn from them. I like to think I'm a better person, and I like to think that a lot of people have made mistakes, we just don't read about them."

That framing, mistakes happen, I've grown, let's move on, worked in a California governor's race. Whether it survives a national campaign with a first-person Vanity Fair account from the other party to the affair is another matter entirely.

Newsom's office did not respond to the Post's request for comment. Alex Tourk also declined to comment.

The Democratic Party has shown a growing willingness to confront its own members when scandal threatens electoral viability. Recent episodes of Democrats publicly calling out their own over mounting controversies suggest the party's tolerance for baggage is lower than it used to be.

What we don't know yet

Several important questions remain unanswered. No publication date has been announced for the Vanity Fair piece. It is unclear whether Rippey-Gibney wrote the piece herself as a first-person essay or sat for a reported interview. The specific details she intends to share, beyond her general perspective on the affair, have not been disclosed.

Newsom's recently released memoir reportedly touches on his romantic history, but the article does not specify whether the Rippey-Gibney affair is addressed directly in the book. If it is, the Vanity Fair piece could serve as a direct rebuttal to whatever version Newsom chose to put in print.

The broader question is whether the story matters to voters in 2028. Willie Brown says it doesn't. The #MeToo framework that Rippey-Gibney herself once declined to apply may have shifted enough to make the power dynamics harder to dismiss.

And the simple fact that a man slept with his campaign manager's wife while she worked for him at City Hall, then rode the apology tour to higher office without the woman ever getting to speak, carries its own weight, regardless of political era.

The pattern of Democratic figures navigating scandal without lasting consequence is familiar enough to be its own genre. Newsom has been among the most skilled practitioners. But managed narratives depend on the cooperation of everyone involved, and cooperation, it seems, has an expiration date.

The real test ahead

Gavin Newsom has spent nearly two decades treating the Rippey-Gibney affair as a closed chapter, a youthful lapse, an alcohol problem addressed, a marriage that survived, a career that thrived. The political infrastructure around him accepted that framing. California voters ratified it repeatedly at the ballot box.

But a presidential campaign is not a California reelection. National primary voters will encounter this story fresh. And they will encounter it not through Newsom's carefully managed apology, but through the words of the woman who lived it.

Rippey-Gibney's silence protected Newsom for eighteen years. Her decision to speak may tell us less about what happened in 2007 than about what Newsom's version left out. For a politician who has built his brand on progressive values and personal accountability, that gap between narrative and reality is the one place where no amount of polish can help.

When the people who kept your secrets start talking, the problem isn't what they say. It's what you didn't.