

## Lawsuit Claims Fox News, Trump Conspired on DNC Staffer Murder Story

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The murder of Democratic National Committee staffer Seth Rich last year is now the subject of a [lawsuit](#) in New York against Fox News Channel.

Rod Wheeler, a Fox News commentator and private investigator, alleges unpaid Fox News contributor Ed Butowsky and reporter Malia Zimmerman used fake quotations from Wheeler in a [now-retracted story](#) about Rich. The lawsuit, filed in the Southern District of New York, alleges Butowsky and Zimmerman “kept in regular contact” with Trump administration officials on the story, and that President Donald Trump himself read the article before it was published. The story linked Rich to last year’s leak of DNC emails by WikiLeaks.

It’s the latest suit from attorney [Douglas Wigdor](#), who has several discrimination lawsuits pending against the network. Wigdor said Wheeler reached out to him about the lawsuit, which claims defamation and racial discrimination by Fox against him. Wheeler, who is black, claims Fox News discriminated against him by denying him the same airtime and employment opportunities as his white colleagues.

Reached by phone Tuesday morning, Butowsky said he was still reading through the allegations.

“The whole thing is a bunch of bullshit,” he said, before hanging up to take a call from his attorney.

According to the complaint, Butowsky, a Dallas-based investor, connected with Wheeler, a former homicide detective, in February, and offered to pay for Wheeler to investigate Rich’s murder. He told Wheeler, according to the complaint, that he was working with Zimmerman, who was also investigating the murder.

“As it turned out, Butowsky and Zimmerman were not simply Good Samaritans attempting to solve a murder,” the lawsuit claims. “Rather, they were interested in advancing a political agenda for the Trump Administration.”

The lawsuit alleges that after Fox published the story May 16, Wheeler called Butowsky to ask for an explanation of what he said were fake quotes and representations from him in the story. Butowsky said they were included “because that is the way the President wanted the article,” according to the complaint.

Jay Wallace, president of news at Fox News, said in a statement that the assertion Zimmerman’s story was published to detract from the Russian collusion investigation is “completely erroneous.”

“The retraction of this story is still being investigated internally and we have no evidence that Rod Wheeler was misquoted by Zimmerman,” Wallace said.

Additionally, Wallace denied allegations of discrimination levied by Wheeler against Fox, describing the dispute between Zimmerman and Wheeler over allegedly falsified quotes in his story having “nothing to do with race.”

The suit comes as the Trump administration faces ever-increasing scrutiny over alleged ties to Russia and its interference in the 2016 elections. On Monday, the Washington Post [reported](#) that Trump himself

directly dictated a misleading statement put out after news broke that his son, Donald Jr., had a meeting with a Russian lawyer last year. The complaint alleges Fox and Butowsky wanted to use the Rich story to distract from the attention the White House was drawing over Russia.

Rich, 27, was shot and killed while walking home late one night in July 2016. His killer has remained at large, even as his death has sparked conspiracy theories that point to his work at the DNC and the circumstances surrounding his death. WikiLeaks has offered a \$20,000 reward for information leading to a conviction. Rich's family has pushed back against suggestions of politically motivated foul play, saying he was most likely the victim of a failed robbery attempt.

Contact Cogan Schneier at [cschneier@alm.com](mailto:cschneier@alm.com). Contact Colby Hamilton at [chamilton@alm.com](mailto:chamilton@alm.com). On Twitter: [@bcolbyhamilton](https://twitter.com/bcolbyhamilton)