

## Donald Trump 'collaborated with Fox News' on fake story about death of DNC staffer, claims lawsuit

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President Donald Trump has been accused of collaborating with Fox News to push a claim that a murdered employee of the Democratic National Committee, not the Kremlin, leaked emails damaging to Hillary Clinton.

Mr Trump was alleged to have "reviewed" a Fox News story before it was published as part of an attempt to distract from investigations into Russian hacking during last year's US election.

The claim has been made in court papers filed in New York by Rod Wheeler, a private investigator who looked into the shooting death of the Democratic employee, Seth Rich, in July 2016. He is suing Fox News for defamation, claiming the broadcaster fabricated quotes from him.

His claim alleged that the story was put out to "shift the blame from Russia and help put to bed speculation that President Trump colluded with Russia in an attempt to influence the outcome of the Presidential election".

Mr Rich was shot dead in what Washington police believe was a botched robbery.

Mr Wheeler was brought in to investigate the case by Ed Butowsky, an investor and high profile supporter of Mr Trump who appeared frequently on Fox News, according to the claim.

Two days before the Fox News article was published on its website, on May 16, Mr Butowsky sent Mr Wheeler a text message saying: "Not to add any more pressure but the president just read the article. He wants the article out immediately. It's now all up to you."

Mr Butowsky later said he had been joking that the president had read the article.

A month before it was published, on April 20, Mr Butowsky and Mr Wheeler had met with Sean Spicer, Mr Trump's then press secretary, at the White House.

Mr Spicer said the meeting was a favour to a long-time supporter, Mr Butowsky, and that the two men had "informed" him about the upcoming Fox News story. But he said he was not aware of any contact with Mr Trump.

Fox News removed the story from its website a week after it was published, saying that "it was not initially subjected to the high degree of editorial scrutiny we require for all of our reporting".

Mr Wheeler, who is black and has himself been a contributor to Fox News since 2005, is also suing the broadcaster for racial discrimination. Fox News has said there is no "concrete evidence" that Mr Wheeler was misquoted.

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*Credit: REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque*