

A lawsuit filed in federal court claims a Fox News report about slain Democratic National Committee (DNC) staffer Seth Rich was reviewed prior to publication by President Trump and manipulated at the request of the White House.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in New York by a private investigator and Fox contributor who says his quotes in the story, which was later retracted, were fabricated by Fox.

“Fox News was working with the Trump administration to disseminate fake news in order to distract the public from Russia’s alleged attempts to influence our Country’s presidential election,” states the lawsuit filed by Rod Wheeler, a former Washington, D.C., homicide detective who investigated Rich’s death.

The complaint was filed by Douglas Wigdor on behalf of Wheeler. Wigdor serves as legal counsel for several cases alleging discrimination or harassment by Fox News executives.

“The accusation that FoxNews.com published Malia Zimmerman’s story to help detract from coverage of the Russia collusion issue is completely erroneous,” a Fox News spokesperson said in an email statement provided to The Hill. “The retraction of this story is still being investigated internally and we have no evidence that Rod Wheeler was misquoted by Zimmerman.

“Additionally, FOX News vehemently denies the race discrimination claims in the lawsuit — the dispute between Zimmerman and Rod Wheeler has nothing to do with race.”

Fox's president of news, Jay Wallace, told [NPR](#), which first reported the lawsuit, that there was no "concrete evidence" that Wheeler was misquoted. NPR said that Wallace did not address a question about the story's allegedly partisan origins, and it said Fox News declined to allow Zimmerman to comment.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Hill.

Wheeler, who frequently appeared as a guest on Fox News to discuss the case, said he never said quotes attributed to him that his investigation “shows there was some degree of email exchange between Seth Rich and Wikileaks” and that “someone within the D.C. government, Democratic National Committee or Clinton team is blocking the investigation from going forward.”

The lawsuit states that Wheeler was the only quoted, named source in the story and that he did not make the statements.

It alleges that the statements were falsely attributed to Wheeler “because this is the way the president wanted the article.”

Wheeler has previously backtracked on claims he has made about the Rich investigation.

In a May [interview](#) with Fox 5 in Washington, he was asked by a reporter if he had sources in the FBI saying there was information to link Rich, who was shot and killed in the early hours of July 10 in Northwest, to WikiLeaks.

“Absolutely. Yeah. That’s confirmed,” Wheeler said.

Wheeler then told other media outlets that he did not get this information from the FBI, according to Fox 5. He then told Fox 5 it had been a “miscommunication.”

Several conspiracy stories circulated after Rich’s death that sought to draw a link between the 27-year-old staffer’s work at the DNC and the email controversy that dominated the 2016 presidential campaign, including that Rich intended to deliver damaging emails about Democratic presidential candidate [Hillary Clinton](#)

[Hillary Rodham Clinton Lawsuit claims Trump involvement in retracted Fox story on Seth Rich North Korea targeted emails of Clinton advisers: report GOP rep on Trump dictating Russia meeting statement: Best to have ‘maximum amount of transparency’ MORE](#) to Wikileaks.

No evidence has ever surfaced to back up that theory or to suggest Rich had any inside knowledge of the hacking of the DNC. The intelligence community later concluded that Russia had hacked the DNC in order to influence the outcome of the election.

Rich’s family was reportedly unhappy with Wheeler’s statements to the media that suggested a connection between Rich and WikiLeaks.

“The family has relayed their deep disappointment with Rod Wheeler’s conduct over the last 48 hours and is exploring legal avenues to the family,” a spokesperson for Seth Rich’s family told Fox 5.

Wheeler’s lawsuit names Fox on-air guest Ed Butowsky and Zimmerman, saying they “fabricated two quotations and attributed them to Mr. Wheeler.”

Butowsky, a wealth manager and Trump supporter, periodically appears on the network as a guest to provide financial analysis. Zimmerman is a Fox News investigative reporter.

The lawsuit cites a text message from Butowsky to Wheeler that states the president “wants the article out immediately.”

“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. But don’t feel the pressure,” the text of the message in the lawsuit reads.

The lawsuit argues that Trump wanted the story published because it established that Rich provided WikiLeaks with the DNC emails, which would shift the blame from Russia.

“[Wheeler] was subsequently forced to correct the false record, and, as a result, lost all credibility in the eyes of the public,” the lawsuit states.

Wheeler, a Fox News contributor, seeks damages for mental anguish and emotional distress and lost earnings at his private investigation firm.