

Fox News And Charles Payne Face Lawsuit Around Alleged Rape

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Scottie Nell Hughes, a political commentator who often appeared on cable news channels, including Fox News, has filed a complaint against 21st Century Fox, Fox News and Charles Payne alleging that Fox Business host Payne raped her in 2013 and that the network retaliated against her after she came forward with her claims earlier this year. The charges listed are gender motivated violence, gender discrimination, retaliation and defamation.

"We intend to aggressively litigate Ms. Hughes's claims and hold Fox accountable to the fullest extent under the law," said Doug Wigdor, Hughes' attorney, in a statement. Wigdor represents many plaintiffs involved in lawsuits against Fox News.

Payne, the host of Fox Business Network's *Making Money*, has been at the network since it launched in 2007 and returned to air earlier this month after the network had suspended and investigated him following Hughes' original claims in late June.

"The latest publicity stunt of a lawsuit filed by Doug Wigdor has absolutely no merit and is downright shameful. We will vigorously defend this," Fox News said in a statement.

"My client Charles Payne vehemently denies any wrongdoing and will defend himself vigorously against this baseless complaint. We are confident that when the evidence is presented in this case, Mr. Payne will be fully vindicated and these outrageous accusations against him will be confirmed as completely false," said Payne's lawyer, Jonathan Halpern, in a statement.

These allegations were revealed in further detail today in the lawsuit, in which Hughes claims that in 2013, Payne "pressured" himself into her hotel room and into having sexual intercourse with her despite her objecting by saying "no" and "stop". Over the next two years, she says, she was continually coerced into a sexual relationship with Payne, and this allowed her various career opportunities and chances to be on his show. But Fox News or Fox Business Network never hired Hughes as an employee or paid contributor.

Hughes alleges that when she ended her relationship with Payne in 2016, he and the network retaliated by not having her on air, and when she came out with her allegations this summer, she says the network leaked a story about her relationship with Payne, referring to a story that ran in the *National Enquirer* that says the affair was consensual.

"In July of 2013, I was raped by Charles Payne," Hughes told [The New York Times](#). "In July of 2017, I was raped again by Fox News. Since then, I have been living an absolute hell."

Fox News is holding strong in its position that it did its due diligence and that Payne is innocent. "It's worth noting that Doug is Ms. Hughes' third representative in the last six months to raise some variation of these claims which concern events from four years ago, since it apparently took some time to find someone willing to file this bogus case," the network said in its statement.

A source with knowledge of the situation pointed out that Hughes only made allegations after her contract with CNN ended, and that her lawyers "began asking for a 'business solution' to the allegations--demanding that Fox hire Hughes as a contributor."

While it was Hughes who requested to make known her allegations to Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and

Garrison, the law firm that has been investigating sexual harassment issues at Fox News for the past year, the source familiar with the situation says she also declined to turn over all of her emails or be interviewed by the law firm.

The allegations and Fox's investigation into Payne come after over a year of troubles for the network, which has been embroiled in scandals regarding sexual harassment and assault since the summer of 2016, when Gretchen Carlson accused the network's former chairman Roger Ailes of sexual harassment and retaliation. That brought to light a culture that many employees and former employees alleged sexual harassment was accepted and women feared to report it. Since then, there has been slew of oustings, including those of star anchor Bill O'Reilly and co-president Bill Shine, as well as an extended internal investigation.

In addition to the turmoil this has caused the network, it has also cost Fox over \$50 million. According to recent [regulatory filings](#) by parent company 21st Century Fox, the company spent said \$50 million between June 30, 2016 and June 30, 2017 to settle sexual harassment and discrimination allegations at the Fox News division. This does not include the severance packages doled out to ousted employees, which amounted to \$40 million for Ailes and \$25 million for O'Reilly, both of whom denied any wrongdoing.

The allegations could also be hindering future business opportunities, as they have perhaps led to increased scrutiny of 21st Century Fox's proposed acquisition of Sky PLC, which is in review for approval by British government regulators.

