

# Charles Payne, Fox News Sued by Political Commentator Who Says She Was Raped

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Fox Business host Charles Payne is being sued for gender-motivated violence just weeks after [being reinstated](#) following a sexual harassment investigation.

The *Making Money* host [was suspended](#) in July following a complaint by an unnamed woman.

Scottie Hughes, a political commentator who regularly appeared on the network, has come forward as the source of the harassment report in a lawsuit filed Monday in New York federal court. She says Payne raped her in 2013 and her invitations to appear on Fox shows "increased dramatically" after the assault.

Hughes issued a statement Monday through her attorney Douglas Wigdor. "What is most important to me is that justice will prevent other women from going through the nightmare I'm now living," she said. "On my behalf, Wigdor LLP will expose Fox's unconscionable conduct, including leaking my name to the media. I am grateful to my husband, family, friends and colleagues for the outpouring of love and support."

Hughes is suing Payne; Fox News; its parent 21st Century Fox; the company's legal and business affairs executive vp, Dianne Brandi; and its corporate communications lead, Irena Briganti. The claims also include defamation, discrimination and retaliation.

"Fox has hit a base, deplorable level that no one suspected possible," writes Wigdor in the complaint, which alleges that the company leaked Hughes' name to the *National Enquirer* after she filed her confidential complaint to investigators with Paul Weiss. "Despite being humiliated and shamed by Fox's portrayal of what had happened, Ms. Hughes opted to remain silent, naively believing that Fox would do the right thing and investigate Payne."

Hughes says Payne made no effort to hide his "sexually motivated favoritism" and she was too shocked and ashamed to tell anyone what had happened.

"Despite his sexual assault and rape, he managed to coerce Ms. Hughes, his subordinate, into a sexual relationship in exchange for career opportunities and benefits," writes Wigdor. "While there are, admittedly, many emails that Fox and Payne will no doubt use to suggest that a consensual relationship existed after the July 2013 sexual violence, describing what happened here as simply an 'affair' or 'consensual relationship' is misleading and wrong."

Hughes also says Payne often referenced other "'relationships' between certain Fox male hosts and subordinate female employees" and told her it was important for females to "have a male host who would 'go to bat' for you."

The commentator claims Payne became "enraged and physically violent" when she tried to end the relationship. After she broke it off in the summer of 2015, Hughes says Payne's wife called former Fox co-president Bill Shine to demand she be taken off the network and her appearances dwindled from several a week to a handful in a year.

"Sometime in the spring of 2017, Ms. Hughes's [appearance] booker was told, 'off the record,' by a colleague that Ms. Hughes had 'had an affair with someone at Fox and we were told not to book her,'" writes Wigdor in the complaint. "Also during this time, Ms. Hughes learned that she had been in the running for several high-profile positions in the Trump administration, but was taken out of consideration once it became known that Fox labeled her as 'not bookable.'"

Hughes contacted Paul Weiss after learning she had been blacklisted while Payne remained "unscathed." She says her manager was told the company would prefer a business solution because "a formal investigation would open a

can of worms."

A source with knowledge of the situation says it was Hughes' reps who asked for a "business solution" and, after the network declined to offer her a contributor role, her team leaked a draft complaint to the *L.A. Times*. The source adds that Payne was reinstated after evidence collected in the network's investigation showed the two had a "consensual affair."

After the network announced Payne would keep his job, Hughes was "outraged" and "forced to seek refuge in our legal system," according to the complaint.

Jonathan Halpern, a partner at the law firm of Foley & Lardner LLP issued a statement on behalf of Payne: "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."

A Fox News representative also issued a statement Monday: "The latest publicity stunt of a lawsuit filed by Doug Wigdor has absolutely no merit and is downright shameful. We will vigorously defend this. 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."

**Sept. 18, 6:37 p.m.** Updated to include statements from Payne's lawyer and Fox News.