

Meet the Trump-supporting attorney who could take down Fox News

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Earlier this month, [21st Century Fox](#) suffered a major blow to its multi-billion-dollar bid to take over [Sky](#), the British broadcast media giant.

Citing concerns with the culture and quality at Fox News, Culture Secretary [Karen Bradley](#) ordered a wholesale review of the company's broadcasting standards. The Sky takeover, already a year in the works, would be pushed another six months. Fox would likely have to pay its investors a fine for the delay. And on top of that, the company would have to undergo its most stringent government investigation in years.

And one soft-spoken, Trump-supporting lawyer in Manhattan may be to blame.

Douglas Wigdor is a founding partner of Wigdor LLP, a high-powered employment law firm known for taking on some of the biggest companies in the US.

The 48-year-old attorney was born and raised in [New York](#) – Long Island, to be exact – but speaks with no trace of a New York accent. When he's not on TV, or having his picture taken, he dons a pair of round, tortoiseshell glasses. From the time he was a child, he says, "I just knew I wanted to be in the courtroom".

Law school at The Catholic University of America, a masters degree from Oxford, and a brief stint as district attorney for Suffolk County have refined that vision. Now, he says, "helping people who were victims of discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and going up against a big company that has unlimited resources, to me, is something that

sort of gets me up in the morning”.

If Mr Wigdor is David in this personal mythology, then he has found his Goliath in 21st Century Fox. The attorney now represents no fewer than 25 people who claim to have been harassed, discriminated against, or retaliated against while at the company.



Earlier this year, Mr Wigdor flew to England to tell [Ofcom](#), the British communications regulator, about all of these complaints.

Sitting in his sleek, downtown office on a recent afternoon in New York, the attorney told me he did so out of a “great affinity for the English people”. (Mr Wigdor’s wife is English; both of their children hold UK passports.)

While the information may not have swayed Ofcom – the agency said in June that it would not order a broadcasting standards investigation – it appears to have had an effect on the Culture Secretary.

Internal communications obtained by *The Guardian* show Ms Bradley was concerned by the [sexual harassment](#) allegations against Fox higher-ups, and with the network’s now-retracted story about a [murdered Democratic staffer](#). On 12 September, she overruled Ofcom and directed the Competition and Markets Authority to [start an investigation](#).

Asked about this development, Mr Wigdor replied in his usual, diplomatic manner, calling it “the right thing to do for the British people”.

“I’m a vocal advocate of transparency and informed decisions,” he told me, adding that his only motivation is to make sure Ofcom gets the “full set of facts”.

A clip of President Donald Trump's Thursday press conference is played on 'Fox And Friends', seen on a monitor outside of the Fox News studios (Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Mr Wigdor has a habit of speaking like he is in a deposition; talking slowly and choosing his words carefully. He jots frequent notes to himself in a fastidious, grid-lined red notebook. His office, the walls of which are covered in various legal awards, is spotless.

In litigation, however, Mr Wigdor can be blistering. He has taken to calling 21st Century Fox “18th Century Fox” and accusing them of “plantation style management” in official statements. A former law professor of his, David Lipton, told me the attorney always had a sharp sense of humour, which reveals itself in Mr Wigdor’s more theatrical public statements.

The attorney filed his first suit against 21st Century Fox, then known as [News Corp](#), in 2009. The case concerned a Latina reporter for the News Corp-owned *New York Post*, who claimed her coworkers had showed her pictures of a man’s genitalia, and repeatedly referred to her as “Cha Cha #1”. The case was settled out of court.

Later, Mr Wigdor sued the *Post* again, claiming they had defamed one of his clients. That client was Nafissatou Diallo, the maid who famously accused French politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn of sexual assault. The *Post* ran an article claiming Ms Diallo was a prostitute who continued to work in the sex trade while under the protection of the New York County District Attorney’s office. That case was also settled out of court.



These days, however, Mr Wigdor has turned his attention to [Fox News](#).

In January of this year, news broke that Mr Wigdor had helped Fox reporter Juliet Huddy reach a settlement with the network, after she complained of sexual harassment by popular anchor [Bill O'Reilly](#).

In April, the *New York Times* reported that Mr O'Reilly had settled sexual harassment complaints with numerous other women, to the tune of almost \$13m. The anchor was [fired that month](#).

In March, Mr Wigdor filed a class-action, racial discrimination suit against Fox on behalf of two black employees. One employee claims she was told her hair was “too ethnic”. Another says she was asked whether all of her children were fathered by the same man.

By April 25, Mr Wigdor had added nine more current and former Fox employees to the suit – all alleging racial discrimination. Bill Shine, then the co-president of Fox News, stepped down six days later. (Fox News denies that the incidents were related, and says the woman responsible for most of the discrimination has been fired.)

In May, Mr Wigdor took on the case of a black employee in Fox's Internet Technology Department. The employee claims Bob Beckel, then-host of Fox's “The Five,” quickly exited a room the employee had entered. Asked why he left in such a hurry, the host allegedly said it was because the employee was black.

Mr Beckel was [fired shortly thereafter](#), for making an “insensitive remark to an African-American employee,” according to a Fox News spokesperson.

On August first, Mr Wigdor dropped perhaps his biggest bombshell yet: A [provocative lawsuit](#) claiming Fox News had fabricated its story about the murder of Democratic National Committee staffer Seth Rich. The suit alleges Fox producers and contributors colluded with the Trump administration to write an article capable of distracting from a negative news cycle.

The suit also alleges that the complainant, who is black, was subjected to racial discrimination while at Fox – bringing the number of Fox employees who have filed racial discrimination charges to 16.

Fox News has since filed a motion to dismiss the complaint. Jay Wallace, the company's News and Editorial Executive, said the claims of fabrication are "completely erroneous," and denied the racial discrimination claims as well.

Former police detective Rod Wheeler says Fox News fabricated their story about the murder of 27-year-old Seth Rich (YouTube/Fox News)

In the course of the year that Mr Wigdor filed his suits, 21st Century Fox says it has dramatically overhauled its leadership, management, and reporting structures.

In addition to letting go of the aforementioned executives and hosts, the company also accepted the resignations of former CEO [Roger Ailes](#) and former Chief Financial Officer Mark Kranz. At the same time, they hired three women to serve as executives for Fox News – hires the company says reflect its "commitment to gender equality".

21st Century Fox hired a new, global Chief Human Resources officer, and installed a new head of Human Resources at Fox News. The company says it has conducted a review of its human resources training practises, and now emphasises the importance of maintaining a "civil and respectful workplace".

None of this, however, was Mr Wigdor's goal. What the attorney wants, he told me, is to vindicate his clients, compensate them for their suffering, and hopefully score some punitive damages against Fox, too.

Mr Wigdor doesn't want to change the culture at Fox. In fact, he doesn't think he can.

The Murdochs, he says, "just believe that they're above the law".

Donald Trump speaks to Rupert Murdoch as they walk out of Trump International Golf Links in Aberdeen, Scotland (REUTERS)

Pursuing such high-profile cases, however, comes with its risks.

In April, a man called the offices of Wigdor LLP and threatened to blow them up. According to Mr Wigdor, he called back multiple times, calling the attorney a "n*****-lover" and threatening to kill his family. He was later charged with aggravated harassment and making terrorist threats.

According to police, the man was angry about the Fox suits.

That same month, Mr Wigdor was publicly slammed by [Marc Kasowitz](#), an attorney for Bill O'Reilly, and also – notably – for President [Donald Trump](#).

Mr Kasowitz claimed Mr O'Reilly had been subjected to "a brutal campaign of character assassination that is unprecedented in post-McCarthyist America".

"This law firm has uncovered evidence that the smear campaign is being orchestrated by far-left organisations bent on destroying O'Reilly for political and financial reasons," Mr Kasowitz claimed.

Mr Wigdor laughed off the comments, pointing out that he watches Fox News regularly and donated to Mr Trump in the 2016 election.

Arthur Spatt, the judge who Mr Wigdor clerked for after law school, told me he wasn't surprised that his mentee took on such high-profile cases with ease.

"He is that type of person," Mr Spatt said.

What type of person is that?

“A winner.”



What is surprising to many who know him, however, is Mr Wigdor’s vocal support for Mr Trump.

During the election, the attorney donated a “substantial amount” to Mr Trump’s campaign. He was even introduced to the President once, through a high school friend who worked as one of Mr Trump’s political advisers. Recalling the meeting, Mr Wigdor seems proud.

But these days, Mr Wigdor is at war with the President’s favourite channel – the one he reportedly keeps blaring at all hours throughout the White House. What’s more (as evidenced by the comments from Mr Kasowitz), the attorney’s work now occasionally puts him in the crosshairs of the very White House he helped elect.

“There are some lawyers though who do, I think, let their politics influence what cases they would take,” Mr Wigdor said when asked about the contradiction. “I don’t.”

With an almost surgical removal, Mr Wigdor explained how he separates his work from his politics: As an attorney, his job is to prosecute unlawful acts – regardless of who committed them.

“First and foremost, I’m a lawyer representing clients,” he said. “That’s my job.”

The President, Mr Wigdor admits, is “not a saint”.

“But my personal views were that there’s a lot of waste fraud and abuse in the government,” he told me, “and my hope was that he would come and sort of clean that up – as he calls it, ‘drain the swamp’.”

Whether the attorney would support Mr Trump in a re-election bid remains to be seen. (Many of the decisions he has made as president, Mr Wigdor says, “haven’t been good”.)

But in the meantime, the attorney will focus on companies, like Fox, that he says take the law for granted.

“My litmus test is has there been an unlawful act. And if there's' been an unlawful act, that's a case where I'm interested vindicating the rights of that person,” he said.

“Otherwise, it's just a little complicated.”