

Fox Hit With Fresh Retaliation Suit Over Alleged Host Rape

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By [Kat Greene](#)

Law360, Los Angeles (September 18, 2017, 10:36 PM EDT) -- A former Fox News contributor accused the network of blacklisting her for television appearances after she reported her alleged rape and continued harassment by Fox Business host Charles Payne, in a suit filed in New York federal court Monday.

Scottie Nell Hughes, a political contributor with significant connections to the Republican party, says her star had been on the rise at Fox until she ended an ongoing allegedly abusive relationship with Payne. After that, not only did Fox keep her off its own airwaves, but it urged other networks to do the same, according to the suit.

Hughes had finally ended her relationship with Payne and turned to the independent investigators looking into allegations of sexual harassment of women employees at the company, but instead of protecting her, Fox leaked her name to the tabloids as part of a story claiming her relationship with Payne had been consensual, according to the complaint.

"Fox has done nothing to change," the suit said. "By viciously retaliating against Ms. Hughes in such a public and personally damaging way, Fox shows that it is willing to blame female victims of sexual discrimination, and assault, in order to support male harassers, especially on-air talent."

Hughes said that in 2013, Payne had pressured his way into her hotel room and then forced her into sex despite her telling him to stop. In the years that followed, he insisted on keeping her in a relationship, saying it was the only way to boost her career, according to the complaint.

After she broke it off, the faucet turned off for bookings at Fox, and then petered out at other networks, too, the suit contends. This spring, a booking agent let it slip that Fox had advised other networks not to hire her, according to the complaint.

Hughes says she was also looked over for positions in President Donald Trump's administration because she'd been labeled by Fox as "not bookable."

The suit includes claims for discrimination, retaliation and defamation, as well as a claim of gender-motivated violence specifically against Payne.

Hughes is represented by Doug Wigdor, the attorney behind a litany of suits filed in recent months against Fox and its executives. Wigdor represents [local affiliate reporter](#) Lidia Curanaj over her alleged mistreatment by the company; a group of workers [alleging they were retaliated against](#) after complaining of harassing conduct; and a [radio reporter](#) who said her contract wasn't renewed just days after she called [Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison LLP](#) to file what she thought would be an anonymous complaint.

Wigdor also [represents Rod Wheeler](#), a Fox contributor who gave quotes for a story that linked the Democratic National Committee's email leak to a slain campaign staffer.

A representative for Fox said in a statement that Hughes' lawsuit was another "publicity stunt" by Wigdor, calling it "downright shameful."

"We will vigorously defend this," the representative said. "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."

Wigdor shot back in a statement of his own that Hughes hadn't actually struggled to find representation for her allegations, and that the company's assertion she had is "yet another desperate attempt at avoiding the real issues and blaming the victim."

"Fox cannot spin its way out of this crisis — especially when only Fox is to blame for what happened," Wigdor said.

Jonathan Halpern of [Foley & Lardner LLP](#), who represents Payne, said in a statement his client "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," Halpern added.

Hughes is represented by Douglas Wigdor, Jeanne M. Christensen and Michael J. Willemin of [Wigdor LLP](#).

Payne is represented by Jonathan N. Halpern of Foley & Lardner LLP. Counsel information for the other defendants couldn't be immediately determined.

The case is *Scottie Nell Hughes v. [Twenty-First Century Fox Inc.](#) et al.*, case number 1:17-cv-07093, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

--Additional reporting by Christopher Crosby, Braden Campbell and Adam Lidgett. Editing by Pamela Wilkinson.