

Fox Business Guest Says Rape Allegation Got Her Kicked Off Air

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by Claire Atkinson

A former Fox Business Network guest analyst has accused the network in a lawsuit of removing her from air after alleging over the summer that she was raped by host Charles Payne four years ago.

Scottie Nell Hughes, who had appeared on Fox Business and Fox News and was at one point hoping to join the Trump administration, filed the suit two weeks after Fox cleared Payne of any wrongdoing and returned him to air following its own internal investigation.

The civil suit also comes as [Fox News has been buffeted by similar allegations](#) by [other women who have accused other men](#) at the network of sexual harassment. Fox News has parted ways with several of the executives accused of wrongdoing but has cleared Payne.

Charles Payne's lawyer, Jonathan Halpern, of Foley & Lardner, released a statement calling Hughes' claims "outrageous" and saying his client "vehemently denies any wrongdoing and will defend himself vigorously against this baseless complaint."

Hughes claims in the explosive lawsuit filed Monday with the Southern District of New York that she was the victim of sexual assault by Payne in 2013.

Hughes says that in July of that year, Payne "pressured his way into Ms. Hughes' hotel room for a 'private discussion'" and then raped her after she allegedly asked him to "stop."

"Tragically, Payne sexually assaulted and raped Ms. Hughes," the lawsuit reads.

It was not clear late Monday whether Hughes ever reported the assault to police. The suit claims Hughes was "too shocked and ashamed" to speak out about the incident.

Her lawyers acknowledge that Hughes subsequently carried on an affair for two years with Payne, who was married. The suit denies the relationship was consensual and says Payne used his position of power to pressure Hughes into sex by making clear that he could "help advance her career and opportunities."

"What constitutes a consensual affair between adults in a relationship outside of the workplace is not the same as a relationship between a male employee in a position of authority and a female subordinate in the workplace. Payne used his position of power to pressure Ms. Hughes into submission," Hughes' lawsuit states.

She further alleges in the suit that Fox News leaked her name to the National Enquirer and gave details that portrayed the two as having carried on a consensual affair.

Hughes, who has also appeared on CNN, claims in the suit that she was pursuing a contributor deal with Fox News that never materialized and offers to appear on air dropped off rapidly after she rebuffed continuous romantic advances by Payne.

Hughes says she reported the harassment to a law firm hired by Fox to investigate alleged sexual misconduct in June of this year and Payne was suspended on July 6 after those initial claims were made against him, but returned

to Fox Business and his show “Making Money,” on Sept. 8, after Fox investigated the matter using an outside law firm.

Hughes, who is represented by the law firm of Wigdor LLC, which is representing other accusers of Fox personalities, is seeking a jury trial and an unspecified amount of damages.

Hughes’ lawsuit accuses not just Charles Payne of wrongdoing but also names two Fox executives whose personal attorneys could not be immediately reached for comment, and parent company Twenty-First Century Fox as defendants. Hughes said in a statement provided by her law firm, “My complaint speaks for itself. What is most important to me is that justice will prevent other women from going through the nightmare I’m now living.”

In a statement provided to NBC News, Fox News took aim at her attorneys, saying: “The latest publicity stunt of a lawsuit filed by (founding partner) Doug Wigdor has absolutely no merit and is downright shameful.

“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 something willing to file this bogus case.”

CORRECTION (Sept. 19, 2017, 4:30 a.m. ET): An earlier version of this article misstated the name of Charles Payne’s lawyer. It is Jonathan Halpern, not Halper.