

Ex-Fox News guest alleges she was raped by host Charles Payne, sues network

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Otis

Fox News, coming off a year of scandal related to a series of sexual harassment claims, was hit with another lawsuit Monday by a political commentator who says a network employee raped her.

Scottie Nell Hughes alleges in a Manhattan Federal Court suit that Fox Business anchor Charles Payne raped her and the network retaliated against her when she reported the attack.

Hughes' lawsuit accuses the network of "victim-shaming" and leaking false information to the press that suggested Hughes and Payne had a consensual affair.

Hughes, 37, met Payne, the anchor of "Making Money," in 2013, her suit says. That July, while in New York, Payne "pressured his way into Ms. Hughes' hotel room for a 'private discussion'" and raped her, the court papers say.

Payne, 56, then coerced Hughes into a sexual relationship with him from 2013 to 2016 in exchange for "career opportunities and benefits," according to her suit.

Payne allegedly made it clear to Hughes that her appearances on Fox shows would evaporate if she ended the relationship, court papers say.

When she did try to break it off, Payne allegedly "became enraged and physically violent." Hughes' lawsuit claims when she did sever ties with Payne in 2016, her bookings at Fox dwindled over a 10-month period and then ended completely. Her booking agent was told by a colleague that Hughes "had an affair with someone at Fox and we were told not to book her," the suit says.

According to Hughes' lawsuit, her manager reached out in July to the Paul, Weiss law firm, which was hired to perform an internal investigation of Fox News amid an avalanche of sexual harassment scandals that reached all the way up to former network chairman and CEO Roger Ailes.

The lawyers offered a "business solution" to the rape and retaliation allegations and promised to reach out to Fox network execs about getting Hughes off the blacklist, the lawsuit says.

A few hours later, Hughes' manager got a phone call from a National Enquirer reporter asking about the romance gone bad between his client and Payne — a false story the network leaked to discredit Hughes, her court papers say.

The network [suspended Payne in July](#) while it conducted an internal probe of Hughes' claims. Earlier this month, the married anchor was restored to his on-air position when the network finished its investigation.

Payne denied Hughes' "baseless complaint" Monday in a statement from his lawyer.

Fox vehemently denied the allegations.

"The latest publicity stunt of a lawsuit filed by (Hughes' lawyer) Doug Wigdor has absolutely no merit and is downright shameful," a Fox spokeswoman said. "We will vigorously defend this."

Wigdor fired back.

"Fox cannot spin its way out of this crisis — especially when only Fox is to blame for what happened," he said.
"Sadly, nothing has changed at Fox."