

Fox News commentator says in lawsuit she was raped by TV anchor

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(Reuters) - Fox News political commentator Scottie Nell Hughes on Monday filed a lawsuit accusing the television anchor Charles Payne of raping her and the network of retaliating against her when she reported the event to Fox's lawyers.

In a lawsuit filed in federal court in Manhattan against Twenty-First Century Fox Inc, the parent of Fox News, Hughes said Payne raped her in a New York City hotel room in 2013 and pressured her into a continuing sexual relationship in exchange for frequent guest spots on Fox shows.

Hughes said that when she ended the affair and later reported the alleged assault to lawyers for Fox, the network blacklisted her from its shows and leaked information about her to the media.

Jonathan Halpern, a lawyer for Payne, said the claims were baseless and that Payne denies wrongdoing. Payne, the host of "Making Money" on Fox Business Network, earlier this month returned from a two-month suspension over the allegations.

"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 said.

In a separate statement, a Fox News spokesperson denied Hughes' claims and called the lawsuit a "publicity stunt" and "downright shameful."

Fox News has been rocked by a series of sexual harassment claims since last year, which have led to the resignation of former Chief Executive Roger Ailes and the departure of Bill O'Reilly, formerly the network's top anchor.

Hughes' lawyer, Douglas Wigdor, has filed several sex and race discrimination lawsuits on behalf of current and former Fox employees and contributors.

In her lawsuit, Hughes said that after the alleged rape, invitations for her to appear on Fox shows increased dramatically. When Payne was given his own show in 2014, Hughes appeared four nights per week, according to the lawsuit.

Hughes said she ended her relationship with Payne in 2015 and was invited to appear on Fox only a few times over the next 10 months. In June, Hughes reported the alleged rape to lawyers hired by Fox to probe sexual harassment allegations, according to the lawsuit.

Hughes said that in response, Fox told news reporters that she and Payne were having an affair and leaked personal emails they had sent to each other.

Hughes is suing Fox News for sex discrimination, retaliation, and defamation in violation of New York City and state laws. She is also suing Payne for gender-motivated violence under city law.

The case is Hughes v. Twenty-First Century Fox Inc, U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, No. 1:17-cv-07093.

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