

Fox News commentator files lawsuit saying she was raped by Charles Payne

 [theguardian.com /media/2017/sep/19/fox-news-commentator-files-lawsuit-saying-she-was-raped-by-charles-payne](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/sep/19/fox-news-commentator-files-lawsuit-saying-she-was-raped-by-charles-payne)

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[Fox News](#) has been hit with another lawsuit after Scottie Nell Hughes, a political commentator, alleged she was raped by host Charles Payne and that the broadcaster subsequently blacklisted her as a guest.

Hughes's lawsuit names [21st Century Fox](#), Fox News and Payne among the defendants, adding to the sexual and racial harassment scandal facing the Murdochs at Fox.

Hughes alleged that Payne "pressured his way" into her hotel room in New York in July 2013 for a "private discussion" and then sexually assaulted and raped her.

[Fox](#) and Payne vigorously deny the allegations against him.

Hughes claims that after she approached Fox lawyers about the alleged assault she was blacklisted and no longer appeared on network shows, which potentially cost her a job in the Trump administration.

Her claims add that when she then went public with claims of harassment against Payne the company leaked to the media that she was involved in an affair with him. Emails suggesting she was in a consensual relationship with Payne also became public. The lawsuit says it would be "misleading and wrong" to describe Hughes and Payne's relationship as an "affair or consensual relationship".

The sexual harassment scandal at Fox News has led to a string of high-profile figures leaving, including the chairman Roger Ailes, who has since [died](#), and leading presenter [Bill O'Reilly](#).

[Karen Bradley](#), the UK culture secretary, cited the scandal as a concern as she referred Fox's proposed £11.7bn [takeover of Sky](#) for a lengthy investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority, on the grounds of commitment to broadcasting standards and media plurality.

[James Murdoch](#), chief executive of Fox, defended the company's handling of the scandal last week, saying it had dealt with the initial allegations against Ailes within two weeks of him learning of the claims.

"The first we heard about the Roger Ailes allegations was a New York Times story that a lawsuit was about to be filed and then it was filed," he said. "We looked at it, we hired an independent outside law firm to investigate it, we looked at the allegations and in less than two weeks we made the decision and we had to move on from Roger Ailes.

"That was actually not a hard a decision – what he did was wrong and you just have to say it clear and say it loud, that is unacceptable behaviour in an organisation."

However, Hughes was critical of Fox. In a statement, she said: "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.

"On my behalf, Wigdor [the law firm] will expose Fox's unconscionable conduct, including leaking my name to the media. I am grateful to my husband, family, friends and colleagues for the outpouring of love and support."

In response, Fox said the lawsuit had "no merit" and is "downright shameful" and added: "The latest publicity stunt of

a lawsuit filed by Doug Wigdor [Hughes's lawyer] has absolutely no merit and is downright shameful. We will vigorously defend this.

"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."

Payne returned to the air on Fox Business Network this month, after being suspended pending an investigation. His lawyer said his client "vehemently denies any wrongdoing and will defend himself vigorously against this baseless complaint".

The statement added: "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."

Wigdor criticised Fox's statement. He said: "Fox cannot spin its way out of this crisis – especially when only Fox is to blame for what happened.

"The 'representatives' that Fox refers to in its statement include her agent and a lawyer not admitted in New York, so the suggestion that Ms Hughes was shopping for a lawyer is yet another desperate attempt at avoiding the real issues and blaming the victim. Sadly, nothing has changed at Fox."