

# Lawsuit accuses ex-Fox News co-anchor Ed Henry of 'violent' rape; alleges Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, Howard Kurtz harassed guest

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A lawsuit filed Monday accuses four Fox News personalities of sexual harassment, including an allegation that co-anchor Ed Henry "violently" raped a colleague.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan, comes after the network's announcement that it had parted ways with Henry after having been made aware of a past accusation of sexual harassment.

In addition to Henry, the federal suit accuses on-air personalities Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and Howard Kurtz of harassing a woman in various instances.

The lawsuit includes allegations by two women, Jennifer Eckhart, a producer for Fox Business, and Cathy Areu, who frequently appeared on the network. The contents are so graphic in parts that the complaint comes with a "trigger warning" about its sexual nature.

Henry, who was co-anchor of "Fox & Friends Weekend" before he was promoted to the network's weekday current affairs program "America's Newsroom," is said to have "sexually assaulted her [Eckhart] on office property and raped her at a hotel where Fox News frequently lodged its visiting employees," the complaint says. The suit also details lurid communications it alleges Henry sent to both women.

Henry is also accused of sending Areu, a regular guest on Fox News, "wildly inappropriate sexual images and messages — which are in her possession — throughout the first half of this year," according to the complaint.

Eckhart is suing Henry and the network for violation of sex trafficking laws and human rights laws and gender-motivated violence. Areu is suing for violations of human rights laws and gender-motivated violence.

Henry's attorney, Catherine Foti, said in a statement: "The Me Too movement has helped to bring to light a number of injustices in our society, and everyone that has suffered deserves to be heard. This is not one of those cases." The statement continued, "The evidence in this case will demonstrate that Ms. Eckhart initiated and completely encouraged a consensual relationship." Foti added that Eckhart had sent other "aggressively suggestive communications."

Foti had no further comment when asked to respond to Areu's allegations.

The suit alleges that Hannity offered \$100 to a group of men at Fox News to take Areu on a date. Carlson and Kurtz are alleged to have asked Areu to meet them at a hotel.

In a statement, Fox News, which is also named in the suit, said: "Based on the findings of a comprehensive independent investigation conducted by an outside law firm, including interviews with numerous eyewitnesses, we have determined that all of Cathy Areu's claims against Fox News, including its management as well as its hosts Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity and Howard Kurtz and its contributor Gianni Caldwell, are false, patently frivolous and utterly devoid of any merit."

Representatives for Carlson, Hannity and Kurtz were not reachable for comment at time of publication. Carlson, who hosts "Tucker Carlson Tonight," was host of the nightly program "Tucker" on MSNBC from 2005 to 2008.

In a statement provided by the law firm Wigdor LLP, which has represented 20 claims against Fox News, Eckhart said, "I stand for all victims who have been mistreated, harassed, assaulted, and even worse, at the hands of those in power, and the institutions that continue to support them."

The network said the two women were free to pursue their claims against Henry "as Fox News already took swift action as soon as it learned of Ms. Eckhart's claims," which were made June 25.

Wigdor lawyer Michael J. Willemin, who represents the women, countered the Fox News statement, saying "the complaint asserts that Fox News did nothing" even though it was aware of the claims against Henry for some years.

In a statement, Fox News responded, "There were not sexual harassment claims against Ed Henry at Fox News prior to Jennifer Eckhart's claim on June 25, 2020."

The explosive lawsuit represents a fresh round of serious sexual misconduct allegations for Fox News after the network fought to present itself as a much-changed organization.

Fox News parted ways with prime-time anchor Bill O'Reilly and the network's founder, the late Roger Ailes. Both men were also accused of wrongdoing, which both men denied.

The suit also claims that it is "widely documented in the public record that Fox News has not only cultivated and fostered sexual harassment and misconduct, but has consistently accepted and rewarded it."

"Nevertheless, Fox News would have the public believe that it is a different place from the Fox News that was run by former disgraced Chairman and CEO Roger Ailes," the suit says.

"Unfortunately, it is actually worse," the suit continues.

Fox News said in a statement, "We take all claims of harassment, misconduct and retaliation seriously, promptly investigating them and taking immediate action as needed — in this case, the appropriate action based on our investigation is to defend vigorously against these baseless allegations."

Several news organizations, including NBC News and CBS News, have dealt with allegations of serious sexual misconduct within their own ranks in recent years.