

Ed Henry accused of rape in civil suit that also targets Fox News, Sean Hannity and Tucker Carlson

[usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2020/07/20/ex-fox-news-star-ed-henry-accused-rape-civil-suit/5474612002](https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2020/07/20/ex-fox-news-star-ed-henry-accused-rape-civil-suit/5474612002)

Fox News is facing more allegations of sexual misconduct as two women filed a lawsuit Monday in which former anchor Ed Henry is accused of rape and network executives are accused of knowing of his alleged behavior and ignoring it long before he was fired this month.

The lawsuit, some of it so graphic that it includes a "trigger warning" notice, was filed in federal civil court in the Southern District of New York.

It alleges a litany of sexual misconduct, ranging from sexual harassment to forced oral sex, against Henry, as well as allegations of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, discrimination and retaliatory conduct against other network stars, including Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and Howard Kurtz.

The lawyers representing the accusers, Douglas H. Wigdor and Michael J. Willemin, declined to comment to USA TODAY on whether the crimes alleged in the lawsuit are being investigated by law enforcement. The two lawyers also represent numerous accusers of convicted sex offender Harvey Weinstein who have sued him in civil court for damages.

The lawsuit was filed by Jennifer Eckhart and Cathy Areu, the first a former associate producer on Fox Business, and the other a former frequent guest as a news analyst on Fox shows.

"Fox News continues to protect and reward perpetrators of sexual harassment and refuses to take accountability for putting such persons in positions of power from which they can subject women to sexual misconduct, sexual assault and, in the case of Ms. Eckhart, rape. Some of the names in leadership may have changed since (former CEO) Roger Ailes' regime, but Fox News' institutional apathy towards sexual misconduct has not," the lawsuit asserts.

Fox News rejected some of the lawsuit in a statement to USA TODAY as "patently frivolous and utterly devoid of any merit," while pointing to Henry's firing as the "appropriate" response.

Eckhart was the anonymous accuser whose allegations against Henry led to his firing on July 1, according to the lawsuit. The "America's Newsroom" co-anchor was terminated after Fox News said it received a complaint on June 25 from a former employee's attorney regarding "willful sexual misconduct in the workplace years ago."

Eckhart says in the lawsuit that Henry raped her and "left her injured, bruised and battered with bloody wrists" in a New York hotel room "sometime in 2017" and that Fox executives were informed "in graphic and specific detail" about her claim.

He also allegedly took pictures of her on his cellphone. "Ms. Eckhart did not consent to any part of this violent, painful rape," the lawsuit says.

The lawsuit asserts Fox executives knew that Henry had been accused of sexual misconduct long before June 25. "Mr. Henry was not terminated after Fox News learned of these complaints. Upon information and belief, he was not even disciplined," the lawsuit says.

The lawsuit seeks a jury trial and unspecified monetary damages.

Henry released a statement to USA TODAY on Monday through his lawyer, Catherine Foti.

"The MeToo 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 said.

"The evidence in this case will demonstrate that Ms. Eckhart initiated and completely encouraged a consensual relationship. Ed Henry looks forward to presenting actual facts and evidence, which will contradict the fictional accounts contained in the complaint. That evidence includes graphic photos and other aggressively suggestive communications that Ms. Eckhart sent to Mr. Henry."

Earlier, in September 2015, the lawsuit says, Eckhart says Henry forced her to perform oral sex in a guest office on the 17th floor of the Fox News building.

Areu accuses Henry of sexual harassment, specifically by sending her "a slew of wildly inappropriate sexual images and messages – which are in her possession" through the first half of 2020.

She accuses Hannity (she was a relative regular on his show until March 8, 2018) of humiliating her on set by throwing \$100 on the desk and calling out to men in the room to take her on a date for drinks at a bar.

"Ms. Areu was completely mortified and made clear that she was incredibly uncomfortable with Mr. Hannity's misogynistic behavior by quietly pleading with one of her friends in the room to accept the money so that the humiliation would end," the lawsuit says.

A frequent guest on Carlson's show in 2017 and 2018, the lawsuit says he tried to proposition her to join him alone in a hotel room in December 2018, and when she refused he "promptly retaliated against Ms. Areu, who was featured on his show only three times in 2019 and has not appeared once in 2020."

The lawsuit says Areu, who was also a frequent guest on Kurtz's "Media Buzz" show, believes Kurtz tried to get her to join him in a hotel room in January 2019, at a time when she reached out to him seeking a full-time job at Fox. When she declined his "advances," he refused to meet with her about a job.

"Mr. Kurtz was punishing Ms. Areu for refusing to join him at his hotel. As if this were not already obvious enough, shortly after this, Mr. Kurtz stated to Ms. Areu, in sum and substance, 'you're the only woman here who won't come to my hotel room.' Ms. Areu has only appeared approximately three times on 'Media Buzz' following her rejection of Mr. Kurtz's advances," the lawsuit says.

Fox denounced the lawsuit and promised to fight it on behalf of its employees other than Henry.

"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 & Howard Kurtz ... are false, patently frivolous and utterly devoid of any merit," the network said in a statement to USA TODAY.

"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. Ms. Areu and Jennifer Eckhart can pursue their claims against Ed Henry directly with him, as Fox News already took swift action as soon as it learned of Ms. Eckhart's claims on June 25 and Mr. Henry is no longer employed by the network."

Fox has battled allegations of sexual misconduct in the past, including against network chief Ailes, who died in 2017. Former Fox News anchor Gretchen Carlson, one of the women who came forward with allegations against Ailes, got a reported \$20 million settlement in 2016 after she sued the network, claiming Ailes demoted then fired her when she rejected his sexual advances.

The culture under Ailes was subsequently given the Hollywood treatment: "Bombshell," which earned Charlize Theron an Oscar nomination for playing Megyn Kelly this year, is based on the 2016 real-life sexual misconduct allegations against Ailes. It follows the story of how some of Fox's female personalities, including Carlson and Kelly, set out to expose the network's hostile work environment of sexual harassment and how Ailes allowed it to thrive.

Fox has since moved to distance itself from the alleged culture under Ailes.