

Fox Anchor Says Network Does Little About Racial Diversity

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New York (AP) -- A Fox News Channel anchor who is black has joined a racial discrimination lawsuit against his company, saying Wednesday that the network marginalized him and has little interest in promoting diversity.

Kelly Wright, who primarily works an overnight shift at Fox, said at an emotional news conference that his efforts at promoting diversity at Fox have largely failed. He said former Fox host Bill O'Reilly rejected a piece Wright had prepared after racial protests in Ferguson, Missouri, because it showed blacks

in "too positive" a light.

"This hurts," Wright said.

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The lawsuit adds to troubles at Fox that had largely been focused on the treatment of women. Former Fox News Chairman Roger Ailes lost his job last summer and O'Reilly was fired last week after harassment charges surfaced. So far, there's little evidence that the problems have affected cable news' top-rated network with its audience. Fox said late Tuesday the latest lawsuit contained "copycat complaints" and denied its allegations, and didn't have any comment after Wright's news conference.

Wright said he was moved to speak after off-air colleagues complained publicly about racial hostility, primarily coming from a recently fired comptroller at the network, Judith Slater. She has denied any wrongdoing through a lawyer. Thirteen people — eight who still work at Fox — joined the lawsuit, which also expanded to include the behavior of others.

"I can no longer sit in silence, collect my paycheck and act like I didn't experience racial bias on my own level as an on-air personality," Wright said. He said he wasn't part of any left-wing effort to hurt Fox and that he admires and likes many of the people there, "but I don't like what they do."

He said he was the only black male anchor at Fox and that his career had stalled with promised opportunities never materializing.

"Somewhere along the line there's an inbred way of thinking that the audience we have attracted perhaps wants to watch only one color on the air," he said. "I think we can definitely do better."

A female anchor who is black, Harris Faulkner, has a prominent role on Fox's daytime show "Outnumbered."

The lawsuit alleges that Fox employees took their complaints about Slater in 2008 to Dianne Brandt, chief counsel at Fox, and were told that nothing would be done about her because Slater "knew too

much" about the behavior of Ailes, O'Reilly and others. Fox has specifically denied the allegations against Brandi.

This charge led Douglas Wigdor, the plaintiff's lawyer, to suggest that it was time to clean house among management at Fox. Ailes' former top deputy, Bill Shine, is co-president of the network and Brandi still works there.

Catherine Foti, Slater's lawyer, criticized Wigdor for using inflammatory language dating back to the days of slavery in his complaint. Wigdor had compared Fox's workplace to a plantation.

"These frivolous charges are solely aimed at generating headlines, inflaming racial tensions and poisoning potential jury pools and judges," Foti said.

Wigdor said his law firm has heard from others at Fox even since the lawsuit was filed Tuesday in New York State Supreme Court in the Bronx, and suggested it will expand further. His clients are looking for financial compensation, he said.

"Our hope is that Fox will take a more conciliatory approach," he said, "although I doubt that."

Among the new charges:

—A Bangladeshi man, Musfiq Rahman, said he mistakenly wandered into Ailes' office in 2014, prompting the then-boss to build a wall to prevent other unauthorized entries. Rahman said he was no longer permitted on Ailes' floor without an escort.

—A former financial worker, Mark LeGrier, said Slater retaliated when he complained to Brandi about her by subjecting him to "humiliating and weekly vicious attacks" about his performance. He left after nine months, "on the verge of a nervous breakdown," the lawsuit said.

—After President Donald Trump announced a halt in immigration from seven countries, Slater allegedly asked black employees "who is going to Africa?" because she intended to start looking for replacements. Trump's election prompted her to warn black employees that they would not be able to return to the country if they left, the lawsuit said.

—A financial employee who is black, Griselda Benson, alleged that when she returned from a surgery, Slater said that her "people" were high maintenance with their health and were driving up the company's health insurance premiums.