

# Fox News Should Let "Gagged" Accusers Speak, Lawyer Tells U.K. Regulator

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Getty Images

From left: Fox's Lachlan, Rupert and James Murdoch

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**New York-based Douglas Wigdor was the second U.S. lawyer representing people who have filed legal cases against the conglomerate to talk to Ofcom in London this week.**

21st Century Fox's legal battles were in focus again in London on Thursday afternoon as a U.S. lawyer representing 21 people who are suing the company claiming racial and sexual harassment at Fox News met with representatives of British media regulator Ofcom as part of its review of Fox's bid to take full control of pay TV giant Sky.

New York-based attorney Douglas Wigdor, founding partner of Wigdor LLP, after the meeting said that he told Ofcom that Fox should waive confidentiality stipulations from settlements that he argues people were forced to sign.

"I told Ofcom that the only way for them to get the full truth of what the Murdoch media has done to its victims is for the company to remove the chokehold clauses that bind victims to silence," Wigdor said in a statement. "These are Fox's 'hidden figures' — talented, brave people who fought for their rights, but were threatened, bullied and permanently gagged. 21st Century Fox must let them speak to Ofcom."

The "hidden figures" comment was in reference to Fox's 2016 film *Hidden Figures*, the true story of the brilliant African-American women behind a big NASA operation.

"When you have a company that acts more like 18th Century Fox rather than 21st Century Fox by breaking the laws against discrimination, harassment and retaliation — you have to ask yourself, is this the sort of company that you want controlling Sky Plc?" he added. "That's the question before Ofcom, and the only way they can really understand the scale of this scandalous culture is by speaking to gagged victims."

An Ofcom representative reiterated to *The Hollywood Reporter* that the regulator would not comment on its review process, including the Thursday meeting.

"21st Century Fox has demonstrated its clear commitment to providing a positive, safe and inclusive workplace free of harassment and discrimination," Fox said in a statement. "The company's management has taken prompt and decisive action to address reports of sexual harassment and workplace issues at Fox News."

"Regarding Mr. Wigdor's promotion of his class action lawsuit, we take allegations of any form of discrimination extremely seriously and would note that his claims center on the unacceptable behavior of a single employee who, as was publicly disclosed by the company, was fired immediately, before any claim was filed," it added. "The company has overhauled Fox News Channel's leadership, management and reporting structure, and there have been fundamental changes to the channel's on-air talent and primetime programming lineup. The transformed leadership at Fox News brings it closer in line with a long-held commitment to a diverse workplace at 21 Century Fox, where women serve as the chair and CEOs of its Fox film studio as well as its Fox television studio and the Fox television network."

Ahead of his Thursday meeting with Ofcom, Wigdor had also said in a statement: "While Mr. [Rupert] Murdoch has inexplicably declared that 'nothing is happening at Fox News,' I look forward to appearing before Ofcom and sharing my unique insight regarding the 21 former and/or current employees we represent who have been treated unlawfully due to their race and/or gender."

That comment referred to Fox executive chairman Rupert Murdoch's response to a BBC reporter in a recent ambush interview. Asked if he was worried about how the "Fox scandal" might affect the deal to fully acquire Sky or if "what's happening at Fox News" would be bad for future deals, the mogul replied that "nothing's happening at Fox News."

Wigdor earlier this month sent a letter to Ofcom CEO Sharon White. He also said that he was qualified to practice in the U.K. and studied at Oxford, making him "uniquely qualified" to weigh in on whether Fox's planned takeover of Sky is in the public interest.

Ofcom and the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) have been reviewing various aspects of Fox's \$14.4 billion bid for all of Sky, in which it already owns a 39 percent stake. Ofcom is looking at the deal's effects on the number of media voices in Britain and analyzing whether Fox is a "fit and proper" owner.

Radio host Wendy Walsh — who said that she lost her regular segment on Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor* after declining to join host Bill O'Reilly, who was recently forced out by the company, in his hotel room — and her lawyer Lisa Bloom met with Ofcom officials on Monday.