

Fox News Besieged by New Bias Lawsuit and Federal Inquiry

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Wendy Walsh, who said Bill O'Reilly harassed her, is meeting with British regulators Monday on a proposed Fox merger. Christina Gandolfo for The New York Times

New troubles for Fox News arose on Thursday as a lawsuit accused it of gender discrimination and one of the women who have accused Bill O'Reilly of sexual harassment said she would appear before the British regulatory group that is assessing 21st Century Fox's attempted takeover of Sky, the satellite TV giant.

At the same time, a federal investigation into Fox News continues. The inquiry, which began in September, appears to focus in part on settlements made by the network's parent company, 21st Century Fox, and how they were paid and accounted for internally, two people with knowledge of the matter said.

A former public relations chief for Fox News has been subpoenaed and granted immunity from prosecution, one of the people said. The former executive, Brian Lewis, started at Fox News when it was founded in 1996 and was once considered one of the closest aides to Roger Ailes, the former chairman who was forced out last summer amid a sexual harassment scandal. He was [fired in 2013](#) and left the network with a settlement.

[Mark Kranz](#), the former chief financial officer for Fox News, also was subpoenaed and has immunity, according to two people with knowledge of the matter. Mr. Kranz, who oversaw the network's finances when it paid millions of dollars in settlements, was appointed to his position by Mr. Ailes in 2004, and resigned last year, a week after Mr. Ailes had done so.

The people who spoke about the investigation insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss it.

The investigation is being conducted by two prosecutors assigned to the securities fraud unit in the office of Joon H. Kim, the acting United States attorney for the Southern District of New York, and the United States Postal Inspection Service.

James M. Margolin, a spokesman for the United States attorney's office, declined to comment. Lawyers for Mr. Lewis and Mr. Kranz declined to comment. News of the subpoena for Mr. Lewis was [earlier reported](#) by The Wall Street Journal.

Fox News has said in a statement that it had been in communication with federal prosecutors for months, and would cooperate with the inquiry.

Already facing several lawsuits, Fox News was hit with another one on Thursday, a Fox News Radio reporter filed a state lawsuit asserting that she was subjected to gender discrimination over several years by two supervisors and that, less than 24 hours after reporting the problem, she was told the company was eliminating her position.

In one instance, the woman, Jessica Golloher, said Fox sent a male colleague in London to join her in Russia for coverage of the 2014 Sochi Olympics. She was instructed to serve as his Russian translator, according to the lawsuit, and told to "piggyback" onto and "defer" to his actions. When she complained, a supervisor told her "this is how we are doing this," according to the lawsuit.

Ms. Golloher also said that her supervisors failed to take meaningful action after she complained about a male colleague based in New York who she said made rude and disparaging remarks and treated her as incompetent, often dictating word for word what he wanted her to say on air.

Ms. Golloher also accused her supervisors of regularly denying her requests to report on the ground in foreign countries, even though, in some cases, male colleagues were sent on similar reporting trips. The supervisors requested photos of her on reporting trips, according to the suit, and made comments on her appearance.

Early last month, a Fox News human resources executive emailed employees encouraging them to contact one of several individuals with complaints about workplace behavior. Less than two weeks later, on April 17, Ms. Golloher emailed one of the contacts, Michele Hirshman, a lawyer at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. The firm followed up, but before she had a chance to reply, and less than 24 hours after she sent the email, the suit said, Ms. Golloher was told her position was being eliminated because of budget concerns.

Saying that assignments in Ms. Golloher's area of expertise were being given to freelancers instead, the suit calls the reason for her dismissal "entirely pretextual, as it is apparent that Fox will replace Ms. Golloher."

Fox News said in a statement: "Jessica Golloher's claims are without merit. Her allegations of discrimination and retaliation are baseless. We will vigorously defend the matter."

Ms. Golloher is represented by the Wigdor law firm, which also represents two employees of The New York Times in [a pending federal lawsuit](#) against the company, alleging age, race and gender discrimination.

On Monday in London, Wendy Walsh, a former guest on Mr. O'Reilly's Fox News show, and her lawyer Lisa Bloom will meet with the regulatory group, the Office of Communications, or Ofcom.

The meeting is a sign that the sexual harassment scandal that has tarnished Fox News and its parent company, 21st Century Fox, in the United States could be taken into consideration by British regulators as they weigh whether to approve the Sky deal. 21st Century Fox currently owns 39 percent of Sky, and acquiring full ownership has long been a goal of the entertainment company's executive chairman, Rupert Murdoch.

Ms. Walsh has said that Mr. O'Reilly did not follow through on an offer to make her a network contributor after she declined an invitation to his hotel suite in 2013.

Ms. Walsh has said that she is not seeking a settlement, enabling her to publicly discuss her accusations against Mr. O'Reilly and her views about sexual harassment issues at Fox News.

Ms. Walsh's account of the episode was included in [a New York Times investigation](#) published last month, which revealed that Mr. O'Reilly or the company had reached settlements with five women who had accused him of inappropriate behavior toward them. Mr. O'Reilly was ousted by the company on April 19.

In April, Ms. Bloom wrote Ofcom officials. "The similarities between the current harassment scandal and the [phone-hacking scandal](#) reveal the company's approach to business and management — a lack of oversight, intervention, and decency," she said [in the letter](#), referring to the 2011 scandal involving the Murdoch-owned News of the World.

This week, the Wigdor firm also outlined its clients' complaints against Fox News in a letter to Ofcom. Wigdor has represented women in sexual harassment complaints against Fox News and is representing several current and former Fox News employees in a racial discrimination suit against the network.