

Fox News hit with 3 additional lawsuits alleging racial and sex discrimination

 poynter.org/2017/fox-news-hit-with-3-additional-lawsuits-alleging-racial-and-sex-discrimination/460699/

5/22/2017

A law firm representing current and former employees of Fox News announced Monday that it was bringing three additional cases against the embattled cable news network.

The latest claims, from employees at Fox News' accounting department and Fox News Radio, allege sexual harassment and racial discrimination, asserting that employees were mocked, threatened, passed over for permanent employment and terminated without just cause. The latest lawsuits bring the total count of plaintiffs leveling sexual harassment and discrimination claims represented by Wigdor to 23.

Wigdor LLP, also now represents a Black IT worker who claims former "The Five" co-host Bob Beckel made a racially insensitive remark in her presence (Beckel has [since been fired](#)).

"It has, and continues to be, our hope that 21st Century Fox will recognize its failures and take prompt remedial action to ensure that other employees are not discriminated against, harassed, and/or retaliated," attorneys Douglas H. Wigdor and Jeanne Christensen said in a statement. "If they do not do so voluntarily, we will continue to pursue all available remedies to ensure that they are compelled to do so."

In a statement, Fox said the latest claims are "without legal basis."

"We have consistently demonstrated that the Company is committed to a diverse workplace that is free from all forms of discrimination, takes any complaint of discrimination seriously, and in these particular matters took prompt, effective and, where necessary, strong remedial action," the statement read. "We believe these latest claims are without legal basis and look forward to proving that the Company at all times has acted appropriately, and lawfully, in connection with these matters."

In addition to filing the lawsuits, Wigdor sent a letter summarizing their contents to Ofcom, the British regulator that will determine whether Fox News parent News Corp will be [permitted to acquire](#) the U.K. broadcaster Sky News. The allegations could run afoul of Ofcom's "fit and proper" test, a hurdle that [prompted it to table its bid](#) to acquire Sky after the News of the World's 2011 phone hacking scandal.

The lawsuits are just the latest turbulence to roil the network in recent months; allegations of sexual harassment have also prompted the ouster of Fox News host Bill O'Reilly, former Fox News Chief Roger Ailes. The network has also lost its former co-president, Bill Shine, and Megyn Kelly, who departed last year for NBC News.

One of the new plaintiffs, an employee at Fox Radio, alleges that she was subject to "unrelenting sexual harassment" at the hands of Ron Flatter, a male co-worker. According to the complaint, she was asked not to report to complaint to HR but did so after Flatter made a physical threat.

"Only after the problem intensified to the point where Flatter physically threatened [the woman's] personal safety did she disobey Davis and report the problem to Collins, the head of HR," the complaint reads.

The second new plaintiff was an accounts payable coordinator at Fox News who reports that she was fired in early 2015 less than 72 hours after she told her supervisor, Special Projects Manager Kim Jacobson, that she was pregnant. Her superiors had never formally criticized her performance or disciplined her, according to the complaint.

The lawsuit also alleged the woman was subject to racial discrimination at the hands of Judith Slater, Fox News' former controller.

"By way of example only, Slater referred to her as 'girlfriend' in a mocking and stereotypical impersonation of a Black woman. Slater also regularly referred to the 16th floor of Fox's headquarters, where [the woman] and many other minority employees worked, as the 'ethnic floor.'"

Another new complaint was filed on behalf of a former accounts receivable specialist who claims she was fired shortly after she became pregnant and gave birth to her child. According to the lawsuit, she also endured racial discrimination from Slater.

"Because her desk was situated outside of Ms. Douglas's office and alongside other employees in Accounts Receivable/Payable and Collections...[the woman] was present and heard Slater's racist vitriol inflicted on other Black employees under Slater's control."

Benjamin Mullin

Benjamin Mullin is the managing editor of Poynter.org. He previously reported for Poynter as a staff writer, Google Journalism Fellow and Naughton Fellow, covering journalism innovation, business practices and ethics. He's also reported for USA TODAY College and The Sacramento Bee, and he was editor in chief of The Orion, Chico State's student-run newspaper. An Air Force brat who grew up around Northern California, he's still adjusting to the Florida sunshine.

