

## Lawyer in Seth Rich Suit Insists Politics Played No Part in Fox, Trump Claims

newyorklawjournal.com



*Simon Wigdor*

New York lawyer Douglas Wigdor, a backer of President Donald Trump in last year's election, said Wednesday he didn't let politics affect his decision to file a headline-grabbing [lawsuit](#) this week on behalf of Fox News commentator and private investigator Rod Wheeler.

Wheeler's lawsuit includes claims that Trump encouraged a fake news story about the death of Democratic National Committee staffer Seth Rich to deflect the spotlight from federal prosecutors' probe of Russian connections with his campaign.

"I'm a lawyer advocating on behalf of my client. I don't have a political litmus test to determine whether I take a case on or not," said Wigdor, who runs a prominent plaintiffs employment firm in New York and who [donated](#) \$27,000 in connection with a fundraiser for Trump.

Wheeler's Manhattan federal court [complaint](#) names as defendants Fox News Network, the network's parent company, reporter Malia Zimmerman and Ed Butowsky, an Addison, Texas-based unpaid Fox News contributor and financial adviser. It alleges that Butowsky and Zimmerman used fake quotations from Wheeler in a [now-retracted story](#) about Rich's murder, which sparked conspiracy theories related to hacked DNC emails.

The lawsuit claims that Butowsky and Zimmerman kept in regular contact with Trump administration officials on the story, and that Wheeler was told the president read the article prior to its publication.

Wheeler, who is black, also claims Fox News defamed and discriminated against him on the basis of race.

Wigdor said he has filed lawsuits against Fox News on behalf of more than 20 clients, mostly former employees, that remain pending against the network. When Wheeler sought out his representation, Wigdor said, it was not a difficult decision to take the case.

"We spent a great deal of time sifting through the documents and we felt confident of his story," Wigdor said. "The only motivation I have is to prove and substantiate that claim. [Despite] the extent to which the media and other people want to politicize my complaint, I know my role is do whatever it takes to prove his defamation."

Still, he added: "To the extent that the president was involved in creating fake news to shift the narrative away from the Russian hacking scandal to the murder of Seth Rich, that would cause concern for anyone."

Wigdor said he's not concerned that political motives could be driving Wheeler, whom he identified as "a conservative." White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters Monday that Trump had no knowledge of the false story before it was posted and that it was "completely untrue" that the White House had any role in shaping it.

Butowsky, who did not return a call for this story, [told a reporter](#) he never met Trump and that his text message to Wheeler about the president reading the article was "tongue-in-cheek."

Wigdor said the politically charged case has not caused any concerns among his firm's clients. "No existing or former client has told me that they were upset I was representing [Wheeler]," Wigdor said. As for his anti-Trump friends, he said: "They know that I'm a lifelong Republican."

Back in April, Wigdor [touted his support for Trump in a spat with Marc Kasowitz](#) of Kasowitz Benson Torres, his adversary in litigation involving ousted Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly. Kasowitz, who is also a personal lawyer to the president, had suggested that Wigdor was pursuing harassment claims against O'Reilly as part of a left-wing "smear campaign."

"As someone who supported and contributed to the Trump campaign and who routinely watches Fox News, I can categorically deny, and find it offensive, that my firm is being accused of being controlled by far-left organizations," Wigdor said in a statement at the time. "To the contrary, we have and will continue to vindicate the rights of all employees to ensure that they are treated fairly and lawfully regardless of who they work for or what political beliefs such employer may support."