

Former Fox News host Ed Henry accused of rape in new lawsuit

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New York (CNN Business) A lawsuit filed in federal court against Fox News on Monday accused former host Ed Henry of rape and alleged that he retaliated against two women who rejected his advances.

The lawsuit was brought by Jennifer Eckhart, a former Fox Business Network producer and online personality who made the rape allegation against Henry, and Cathy Areu, a journalist who appeared frequently on Fox News.

Henry was abruptly fired by Fox News on July 1 after the network said it received a complaint of sexual harassment from years ago.

Catherine Foti, an attorney representing Henry, said in a statement that Henry engaged in what she described as a consensual relationship with Eckhart.

"The Me Too movement has helped to bring to light a number of injustices in our society, and everyone that has suffered deserves to be heard," Foti said. "This is not one of those cases."

"The evidence in this case will demonstrate that Ms. Eckhart initiated and completely encouraged a consensual relationship," Foti added. "Ed Henry looks forward to presenting actual facts and evidence, which will contradict the fictional accounts contained in the complaint. That evidence includes graphic photos and other aggressively suggestive communications that Ms. Eckhart sent to Mr. Henry."

The lawsuit also alleged that Areu was subjected to sexual harassment by three other Fox News hosts: Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and Howard Kurtz.

In a statement, a Fox News spokesperson rejected claims of harassment regarding those three hosts. The statement said a "comprehensive independent investigation" that included interviews with "numerous eyewitnesses" was conducted by an outside law firm, and described Areu's allegations as "false, patently frivolous and utterly devoid of any merit."

"We take all claims of harassment, misconduct and retaliation seriously, promptly investigating them and taking immediate action as needed — in this case, the appropriate action based on our investigation is to defend vigorously against these baseless allegations," the Fox News spokesperson said.

The Fox News spokesperson added, "Ms. Areu and Jennifer Eckhart can pursue their claims against Ed Henry directly with him, as Fox News already took swift action as soon as it learned of Ms. Eckhart's claims on June 25 and Mr. Henry is no longer employed by the network."

An allegation of rape

The lawsuit said that Henry started flirting with Eckhart in 2014, when she had recently graduated from journalism school. The lawsuit said Eckhart made clear she was "not romantically interested" in Henry, but that he persisted in his advances and she ultimately agreed to have drinks with him one night.

After finishing their drinks, the lawsuit said, Henry invited Eckhart to his room. When they arrived at the room, the lawsuit said Henry "ripped off her clothes" and that she ultimately had sexual intercourse with him "fearing that her career would be over if she refused." The lawsuit described Henry as continuing to pursue Eckhart, despite her attempts to rebuff him. In one instance in September 2015, Eckhart alleged, Henry forced her to perform oral sex on him in a guest office at Fox News' New York City headquarters. In 2017, the lawsuit said, Eckhart agreed to meet Henry for another drink. After Henry disclosed he was about to be promoted to an anchor role at the network, the lawsuit said, he invited Eckhart "to take a walk and discuss her career at his hotel," to which Eckhart agreed "out of concern for her job."

When the two entered the hotel room, the lawsuit alleged that Henry — who the lawsuit said had expressed interest in bondage — "applied metal handcuffs" to Eckhart's wrists and threw her onto the bed, despite her objections. The lawsuit said Henry "proceeded to take naked photographs" of Eckhart, despite Eckhart having "pleaded for him to stop" and delete the photos.

"When Mr. Henry was done taking photographs, he proceeded to forcefully rape Ms. Eckhart while she was still restrained and helpless in handcuffs," the lawsuit said. "While raping Ms. Eckhart, Mr. Henry performed sadistic acts on Ms. Eckhart, which included, among many other things, violently hitting her in the face multiple times."

According to the lawsuit, Eckhart "made every possible effort to cease all communications" with Henry afterward. The lawsuit said, however, that he "continued to harass and retaliate against her for rejecting his continued advances."

According to the lawsuit, Eckhart notified Fox News human relations and her supervisor on February 10, 2020, that she was "experiencing a toxic work environment." The lawsuit says no one ever followed up with her, but that the company retaliated against her by "informing her that her employment would be terminated" in June after more than seven years of working for the network.

More allegations of harassment

Eckhart wasn't the only target of Henry's advances, according to the lawsuit. The lawsuit said Henry sent Areu "a slew of widely inappropriate sexual images and messages" in 2020.

One such message, according to the lawsuit, included a video of a mock job interview in which the woman "exposes her vagina" and the interviewer "indicates that she got the job." The lawsuit said Henry knew Areu wanted to be employed by Fox News and "was telling her, in no uncertain terms, that he would assist her career if she had sex with him." The lawsuit said that after a May 21 phone call, in which Areu did not agree to Henry's

advances, Henry called her a "jerk" and cut off contact with her.

The lawsuit also described one instance in 2018 in which Hannity allegedly "threw \$100" on a desk and "began calling out to the men in the room and demanding that someone take" her out on a date.

Also in 2018, the lawsuit said, Carlson told her he would be alone in his hotel room in New York. The lawsuit described Carlson as "probing to see" whether Areu "was interested in a sexual relationship."

And in July 2019, the lawsuit said, Kurtz invited her to meet in the lobby bar of the hotel he was staying at. It alleged he later implied he was upset she had not gone to his hotel room.

The lawsuit said that when Areu refused to go along with what Hannity, Carlson, and Kurtz asked for or suggested, her appearances on their shows were dramatically reduced.

A Fox News spokesperson said that the investigation conducted by the outside law firm determined all of Areu's claims to be false.