

# Civil Suit Against Former Fox News Anchor Ed Henry Alleges Rape, Sexual Misconduct

[npr.org/2020/07/21/893394261/civil-suit-against-former-fox-news-anchor-ed-henry-alleges-rape-sexual-misconduct](https://www.npr.org/2020/07/21/893394261/civil-suit-against-former-fox-news-anchor-ed-henry-alleges-rape-sexual-misconduct)

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***Editor's note:*** This report includes graphic descriptions of sexual assault accusations.

A female former producer at Fox News and another woman who appeared frequently as an on-air commentator on the network have filed a civil lawsuit Monday accusing former longtime anchor Ed Henry of rape, sexual misconduct and harassment.

Prominent Fox News commentators Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and Howard Kurtz are also named as defendants in the suit and are accused of sexual misconduct. The suit was filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Fox News issued a statement on behalf of Hannity, Carlson and Kurtz, calling the claims in the suit "false, patently frivolous and utterly devoid of any merit."

Fox News, which in recent years has been hit by numerous accusations of sexual misconduct that forced out founder Roger Ailes and top host Bill O'Reilly, announced on July 1 that it had fired Henry after investigating an accusation of sexual misconduct against him by a former employee.

In 2016, Henry was demoted by the network from his job as White House correspondent and took a leave of absence following allegations of an extramarital affair with a Las Vegas hostess and stripper. However, he returned to Fox News later that year, taking a position as chief national correspondent. Henry was later added as a co-anchor on *Fox & Friends Weekend*.

As NPR's David Folkenflik reported earlier this month, Henry was promoted despite one of his colleagues having warned senior executives that reinstating him could damage Fox's efforts at reforming its workplace culture.

The complaint filed on Monday graphically presents multiple allegations of sexual abuse suffered by Jennifer Eckhart, a former associate producer at Fox Business, who said that Henry suggested he could help advance her career in exchange for sex.

The lawsuit asserts that "Fox News continues to protect and reward perpetrators of sexual harassment and refuses to take accountability for putting such persons in positions of power from which they can subject women to sexual misconduct, sexual assault and, in the case of Ms. Eckhart, rape."

Eckhart's complaint alleges that Henry "preyed upon, manipulated and groomed her," coercing her into sexual intercourse. Among the most serious of the allegations, Eckhart says that in 2015, Henry forced her to perform oral sex on him at the Fox News building in New York. She also alleges that in 2017, he handcuffed her as part of "violent, painful rape" in a Manhattan hotel room.

The complaint includes a number of graphic text messages that Henry allegedly sent Eckhart following the 2017 incident.

Eckhart's suit, which seeks a monetary award, also alleges that Henry violated federal sex trafficking laws.

Henry's lawyer, Catherine Foti, has characterized the allegations against her client as "fictional."

In a statement Foti said: "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. This is not one of those cases. The evidence in this case will demonstrate that Ms. Eckhart initiated and completely encouraged a consensual relationship."

Eckhart and co-plaintiff Cathy Areu are represented by Douglas Wigdor, a veteran of sexually charged suits against Fox News. The company has said it has made broad cultural changes since Ailes' ouster in 2016, but Wigdor and some former Fox News staffers say it has been slow to root out deeply embedded patterns of sexist behavior and actions.

In a statement, Eckhart said: "My decision to speak out was not an easy one, but I refuse to let fear of retaliation, victim shaming and further attacks intimidate me into remaining silent."

Areu alleges in the complaint that Henry sent her "a slew of wildly inappropriate sexual images and messages" including photographs and video. According to the complaint, Henry also sent numerous texts suggesting that she have sex with him.

Areu, who was a regular guest on *The Sean Hannity Show* and *Tucker Carlson Tonight* until 2018, also accused host Sean Hannity of conducting a mock dating auction with her as the prize.

"Mr. Hannity, on set and in front of the entire studio crew – and completely unsolicited – threw \$100 on the set desk. He then began calling out to the men in the room and demanding that someone take Ms. Areu out on a date for drinks," according to the complaint.

In December 2018, after appearing on his show, the complaint alleges that Carlson told Areu "that he would be alone in New York City that night, and specifically said that he would be staying alone in his hotel room without any wife or kids."

According to the complaint, "Mr. Carlson was probing to see whether Ms. Areu was interested in a sexual relationship." When Areu "sidestepped Mr. Carlson's advances and declined to spend the night at his hotel," the host "promptly retaliated against Ms. Areu, who was featured on his show only three times in 2019 and has not appeared once in 2020."

Areu, who was also a regular guest on Kurtz's *MediaBuzz*, alleges that the host tried to get her to come alone to his hotel room on the premise of discussing a full-time job at the network. After she refused, Kurtz "punished" her by thereafter limiting her appearances on his show, according to the complaint.

In a statement, Areu said: "Like Ms. Eckhart, I too was fearful to come forward. However, I simply could not stay silent given the tremendous harm that Mr. Henry and others at Fox News have caused for women affiliated with the company."

Fox News, in its statement, insisted that the network takes "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."

*Disclosure: Ed Henry is married to NPR Chief Washington Editor Shirley Henry.*