

EMPLOYER RUPERT MURDOCH TURNED OUT TO BE A MORE IMPORTANT TUCKER CARLSON “SPY” THAN THE NSA

In a piece that I otherwise find unpersuasive, Josh Marshall argued that the reports that Fox News President Suzanne Scott didn't tell Tucker why he was being fired explain why we're getting such a conflicting range of explanations for his summary shit-canning.

It's been reported that Suzanne Scott, CEO of Fox News, didn't tell Carlson why he was being fired when she gave him the news. If that's true, that pushes me more to consider this possibility. It also might explain why you have all this miscellany of often contradictory theories and explanations about what “contributed” to the decision. Maybe no one at Fox has any idea and all the sources are basically speculating about possible vulnerabilities they believe must be the answer.

Axios reported that Scott made the decision with Lachlan Murdoch to fire Tucker Carlson Friday night, though other outlets more credibly report that Rupert was also personally involved.

Fox surely anticipated that Tucker would sue, which may be why Scott didn't give Tucker an explanation for his firing, yet. But that has created a void of uncertainty about the firing.

It is true that Abby Grossberg, the former Tucker producer who has sued Fox in SDNY for the hostile work environment at Fox generally and specifically on Tucker's show, and sued Fox in

Delaware for how they dealt with her testimony in the Dominion case, has an incentive to emphasize her role in the firing (as she has). I agree with Opening Arguments that the DE suit is far more likely to be related (a paragraph from her SDNY suit that has attracted attention, in which Tucker seemingly speaks favorably about statutory rape, is not tied to her own complaints and was already public). But I also think that the DE suit also includes a bunch of stuff designed to leverage Fox's legal exposure that has nothing to do with the actual complaint. Plus, Tucker has little to do with the main thrust of the complaint; Scott and other corporate people do, so firing Tucker won't help. Also note, as far as I understand it, the recordings Grossberg referred to in her suit seem to be transcribed interviews not otherwise aired on TV, not private recordings of Tucker.

Of note, the claim that Tucker asked but Grossberg was unable to get a Proud Boy lawyer to claim the insurrection was caused by FBI informants, for example, makes no sense.

Upon information and belief, in early-March 2023, Mr. Carlson attempted to spin and manufacture another false narrative to defray blame from Fox News about the January 6th insurrection, this time, characterizing the Capitol attack as an FBI coup, and not the logical result of Fox News's reckless 2020 election fraud coverage. Specifically, Mr. Carlson requested that his team investigate the ongoing Proud Boys trial, which he asserted was "taking forever" because the "Biden Administration [wa]s trying to hide the huge number of FBI spies it had placed in the group." As Head of Booking, Ms. Grossberg was twice directed to reach out to Dan Hull, one of the defense attorneys representing the Proud Boys, who indicated to her that he was available to come on to the TCT show as

a guest but emphatically denied Mr. Carlson's theory. Instead, Mr. Hull insisted that "no one made my client go up the hill. The Proud Boys wanted to," and the FBI angle Mr. Carlson sought to peddle was "on the conspiracy side." When Ms. Grossberg relayed Mr. Hull's message to Tom Fox, a Senior Producer for TCT and her superior, he blithely replied "That doesn't fit with what Tucker is looking for. You'll have to find someone else who will say that." Ms. Grossberg was told to ask Mr. Hull yet again if he would reconsider, to which Mr. Hull replied, "Please just tell [Tucker], if I get on the show, I will walk out if he asks about the FBI setting it up. [...] Blaming the FBI for Jan 6th doesn't cut it." Mr. Carlson then requested that Ms. Grossberg investigate whether any other defense attorneys, including Steven Metcalf, would tout the conspiracy on air.

Dominic Pezzola lawyer Roger Roots seems to have, as a primary purpose, floating the kinds of conspiracy theories that will attract attention on Tucker's show or Jim Jordan's committee. And in his closing arguments, Nick Smith made wild leaps to push the informant angle. So the lawyers willing to make these claims were certainly available (if unwilling to risk a gag order by going on TV). Plus, Tucker's propaganda about January 6 long predated the Dominion exposure

But Grossberg's claim might be where this claim, from the LAT, came from (which has, in turn, led to the improbable claim that Epps' complaints about Tucker's coverage played a key role).

Murdoch also was said to be concerned about Carlson's coverage of the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The host has promoted the conspiracy theory that it was provoked by government agents, and Carlson has

called Ray Epps – an Arizona man who participated in the storming of the Capitol but did not enter the building – an FBI plant, without presenting any evidence.

Tucker's conspiracy theories about January 6 have been far more unhinged than anything Fox has been sued for by a voting machine company, and that's saying something. But, again, they're not a recent development – back in June 2021, Tucker defamed Thomas Caldwell's spouse Sharon based off an unsubstantiated conspiracy theory.

All of which leads me to suspect that this, also from Axios, may best explain what brought Fox to firing Tucker.

A slew of material was uncovered during pre-trial discovery that implicated Carlson. More information could be out there that could be legally damaging for Fox as it stares down more defamation cases.

None of the rest of Axios' explanations make sense (as Grossberg's DE suit does, Axios lists stuff that would not implicate Tucker personally). Many of the other public explanations make no sense.

But what does seem plausible is that between Dominion, Smartmatic, and Grossberg's twin suits, Fox lawyers have spent a lot of time reading through digital records of Tucker's statements. And – again, it seems plausible – one or many of the things they've seen there made it clear Fox could no longer sustain the legal exposure Tucker (and his Executive Producer Justin Wells, who was also shit-canned) represented, possibly even for reasons unrelated to any of the lawsuits.

There's an irony here.

Back when Tucker first revealed that he had been picked up in NSA intercepts of texts and emails

he exchanged with Russian go-betweens, he claimed the NSA was trying to take him off the air. That was in 2021, and his FOIA to the NSA suggested the contacts had gone back to January 2019. In his more recent March complaint that his efforts to cozy up to Putin got “spied on” by the NSA, he revealed the NSA had read his Signal texts, as well as the emails he sent purportedly setting up an interview with Putin.

For all his wailing that the NSA’s access to such comms was an attempt to get him fired, it didn’t happen.

But once Rupert’s lawyers reviewed Tucker’s communications, it did.

I’m not arguing that Tucker’s coziness with Putin got him fired (though Glenn Greenwald keeps complaining, in two languages, that Tucker was fired for falsely claiming that members of the African People’s Socialist Party were arrested because of their opposition to the Ukraine war, rather than because they were on the FSB payroll).

I’m stating a truism. In virtually all cases, “surveillance” of your communications by your employer can have a far more immediate and lasting impact than surveillance of your communications by the NSA.

Update: Daily Beast says the final straw was the number of times he called Sidney Powell the c-word.

Update: In comments, wasD4vld referenced this Aaron Blake piece making a similar point.

Update: Murdoch property WSJ reports that one of the big factors was the disparaging comments Tucker made about others.

On Monday, Mr. Carlson’s famously combative stance toward members of Fox News management and other colleagues caught up with him, as the network abruptly announced it was parting ways with him, just minutes after informing

Mr. Carlson of the change.

The private messages in which Mr. Carlson showed disregard for management and colleagues were a major factor in that decision, according to other people familiar with the matter. Although many portions of the Dominion court documents are redacted, there is concern among Fox Corp. executives that if the redacted material were to become public, it would lead to further embarrassment for the network and parent company.

[snip]

The Dominion court filings are filled with examples of him disparaging colleagues, from calling for the firing of Fox News reporter Jacqui Heinrich for fact-checking Mr. Trump's false claims about the 2020 election to complaining about the network's news coverage, including the decision to call Arizona for Mr. Biden on election night.