

SUIT ALLEGES, ICE CHIEF SEXUALLY INTIMIDATES, PRACTICES RETALIATION AND DISCRIMINATES AGAINST MEN



A discrimination and retaliation lawsuit involving the top levels of the federal government's immigration enforcement agency has further added to the sense of confrontation that has seen major disagreements and disputes between senior officials and employees. A top federal immigration official in New York, has alleged that he was moved out of a high-level position in the agency to accommodate a woman, who was less-qualified than him, insinuating that he was more suitable for the job than her. He has alleged that he was shunted out because he was a man. He claims that Napolitano gave Dora Schriro his job because of her "long-standing relationship" with her. Schriro had worked as director of the Arizona Department of Corrections when Napolitano was governor of the state. The official, James Hayes, goes beyond accusing the agency of gender bias and claims that the agency's chief of staff, Suzanne Barr, indulged in "sexually offensive behavior." This, says Hayes, contributed to an intimidating and prejudiced work environment for male employees. The lawsuit alleges that Suzanne Barr "created a frat house-type atmosphere that is targeted to humiliate and intimidate male employees." The suit alleges that during a work trip, she summoned a male staffer to her room, calling him over the phone and yelling sexual abuse at him and telling that she wanted to perform oral sex on him. The suit says that in the spring of 2009, Miss Barr "removed the entire contents of the offices of three male employees, including nameplates, computers and telephones, to the men's bathroom at ICE headquarters". A spokesman for the agency said, that following the allegations, Barr voluntarily left the agency on paid leave, till an internal review looks into the allegations of misconduct and gender bias. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement, is the arm of homeland security responsible for the detention and deportation of immigrants and the charges have created a sense of turbulence and instability within the agency. The National ICE Council, the union that organizes upwards of 7000 enforcement agents has been opposing the policy changes that the agency's director John Morton has introduced and is critical to his style of functioning. The union has alleged that Morton did not seek the opinion of the agents in the field about what effects the new policies this would have. Morton, who was appointed in 2009 by the homeland security secretary, Janet Napolitano, has made wide ranging changes in immigration enforcement during his tenure. Last week, in response to a petition by the union, posted on its website, seeking public support for ICE officers who are "upholding the law," more than 55,000 people appended their signatures in support. The discrimination lawsuit filed in May by Hayes names Napolitano as the sole defendant. A federal official on conditions of anonymity, since he did not have authorization to speak on the matter said, that in her , almost four years of service, no employee no worker had made sexual harassment complaints against Barr. Prior to filing the suit, Hayes had accused the agency of discrimination last year, when he made a formal complaint to the agency's Equal Employment Opportunity office. That complaint however, did not mention anything about sexual harassment. Brian Hale ICE director of public affairs said the agency "will respond directly and strongly to this lawsuit in court."