

Current TV and Keith Olbermann Locked in Bitter Entertainment Lawsuit

by Anthony Caruso on April 18, 2012

Keith Olbermann's exit from Current TV has sparked a bitter entertainment lawsuit. His termination earlier this month has resulted in a series of legal filings and contentious public statements. Olbermann had hosted his "Countdown" program on the network, which is run by its founder Joel Hyatt and former U.S. Vice President Al Gore.

Olbermann was the first to file suit. His breach of contract lawsuit claims that he is owed as much as \$70 million in cash and equity compensation. According to Reuters, the lawsuit maintains that Current violated the deal by terminating him without basis, disparaging him in the press, disclosing confidential contract terms, refusing to give him editorial control over election coverage, and using a substitute guest host whom Olbermann did not pre-approve.

The lawsuit also takes aim at the management of Current TV. "After being enticed to leave MSNBC, Keith Olbermann was disheartened to discover Al Gore, Joel Hyatt, and the management of Current are no more than dilettantes portraying entertainment industry executives," his lawsuit states.

The suit also criticizes the production values on Current's version of "Countdown," including several incidents when studio lights allegedly went out. "Olbermann thought he had made a deal with a legitimate network and instead got an unprofessional cable-access show," his lawsuit states.

In its countersuit, Current TV claims that Olbermann failed to show up for work and fulfill other duties under his five-year contract. Accordingly, it wants the court to declare that Olbermann is not owed any monetary compensation.

"Current seeks a determination that it is no longer obligated to pay a dime to Mr. Olbermann who, having already been paid handsomely for showing up sporadically and utterly failing to keep his end of the bargain, now seeks to be paid tens of millions more for not working at all," the lawsuit states.

The lawsuit also quotes comments Olbermann made on the CBS "Late Show with David Letterman" regarding the failure of the show. "I screwed up really big on this," Olbermann said on the show, according to CBS News. "It's my fault that it didn't succeed in the sense that I didn't think the whole thing through." He filed his lawsuit shortly after those comments were made.

Now those words will likely come back to bite him. The countersuit states, "Two days later Olbermann apparently forgot what he said, filing a frivolous Complaint riddled with

falsehoods and distortions in which he refused to take any responsibility whatsoever for that termination.”

The legal filing demonstrates that personalities in the public spotlight must always be careful about what they say to the media when a lawsuit is pending. In many cases, it is advisable to consult with an experienced entertainment attorney before commenting publicly on any ongoing dispute. We are guessing Olbermann failed to do that in this case.