

# SONYA HEITSHUSEN REPORT



MAY 2022

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Name: Sonya Dee Heitshusen

Birth: May 6, 1967

Family: Partner, Luke Wilson  
Twice divorced

Education: BS, Journalism, Iowa State University

Military: None

Professional Experience: Communications Director for the Auditor of State  
Office  
Journalist, WHO and WOI  
New Heights Enterprises

Political Experience: None

## **TIMELINE**

May 6, 1967	Born in Marengo, IA
1985	Began studying at Colorado State University
1992	Graduated from Iowa State University
2001	Left WOI-TV
2001	Began working in pharmaceutical sales
2003	Hired by WHO
2004	Divorced Vincent Oliver
April 16, 2007	Married Steven Wandro
2016	Divorced Steven Wandro
July 31, 2020	Laid off from WHO-TV
November 2020	Hired to work in the office of the Iowa State Auditor

## DRUNK DRIVING

- **In 2017, Sonya Heitshusen wrote, “My life wasn’t going according to plan either ... I tried to block out the pain and one way I did that was by drinking too much”**
  - In a Feb. 27, 2017, op-ed in the Des Moines Register, Sonya Heitshusen wrote, “Back in the 1990s, I was an anchor at Channel 5. Oftentimes, anchors mentor young reporters; try to guide them, proof their scripts and give them constructive criticism.  
  
“There was a young reporter at Channel 5 then who worked really hard but never seemed to make slot. When I say ‘making slot,’ I mean she couldn’t get her stories done on time. When that happens, it obviously puts the anchor (me) and producers in a difficult situation.”<sup>1</sup>
  - According to the same op-ed, “As Erin struggled to become pregnant, I struggled with problems of my own. My life wasn’t going according to plan either. I got divorced, a second time. I tried to block out the pain and one way I did that was by drinking too much.”<sup>2</sup>
- **In 2014, Sonya Heitshusen was arrested for drunk driving after she was pulled over by officers for driving on the wrong side of the street at 1AM**
  - In a June 10, 2014, article, the *Daily Mail* reported, “Two news anchors working for the same Iowa station have both been arrested for drunk driving just hours apart.  
  
“Emmy award-winning journalist Sonya Heitshusen, 47, was arrested early on Saturday after her WHO-TV colleague, 25-year-old Erik Wheater, was busted by Des Moines cops on Friday morning.  
  
“Heitshusen, who anchors the 5pm news, allegedly refused to step out of her car and take a sobriety test when she was pulled over by officers for driving on the wrong side of the street at 1am Saturday.”<sup>3</sup>
- **Sonya Heitshusen had bloodshot eyes and slurred speech and swayed as she stood, according to the police report. Once she was at Polk County Jail, Heitshusen allegedly had to use the wall of the testing room for balance and fumbled with the phone when she tried to make calls**

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<sup>1</sup> Sonya Heitshusen, as told to Courtney Crowder, “How my best friend lifted me up after a drunken driving conviction: Sonya Heitshusen,” *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 28, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Sonya Heitshusen, as told to Courtney Crowder, “How my best friend lifted me up after a drunken driving conviction: Sonya Heitshusen,” *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 28, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Lydia Warren, “Two anchors for same Iowa news station get busted for drunk driving within 24 hours,” *Daily Mail*, June 10, 2014

- In a June 10, 2014 article, the *Daily Mail* reported, “She had bloodshot eyes and slurred speech and swayed as she stood, according to the police report shared by the Des Moines Register.

“She was taken to the Polk County Jail, where she was charged with drunken driving.

“Once there, she allegedly had to use the wall of the testing room for balance and fumbled with the phone when she tried to make calls.”<sup>4</sup>

➤ **In October 2014, Sonya Heitshusen pleaded guilty to the drunken driving charge, and faced up to a year in jail and a fine of \$1,250**

- In an Oct. 30, 2014, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “A long-time Des Moines television reporter and anchor arrested for drunken driving over the summer has pleaded guilty to the charge, court records show.

“Sonya Heitshusen, a WHO-TV reporter, pleaded guilty to first-offense operating while intoxicated. The charge, to which she originally entered a not-guilty plea, stemmed from a June 7 incident.

“Heitshusen, 47, of Des Moines, was pulled over near downtown Des Moines’ entertainment district around 1 a.m. driving the wrong way down a street, authorities said. Police said she at first refused to exit her vehicle, then had trouble balancing and refused any field sobriety or breath tests.”<sup>5</sup>

- According to the same article, “She now faces up to one year in jail and a fine of \$1,250. Her sentencing is set for Dec. 15.”<sup>6</sup>

➤ **Sonya Heitshusen was sentenced to two days of jail time (with two days credit upon OWI 1st program) and a \$625 fine**

- According to the case docket for the State of Iowa v. Sonya Dee Heitshusen, Sonya Heitshusen was sentenced to two days in jail, with credit for one day time served and credit for two days upon completion of OWI 1st program, and a \$1,250 fine, with \$625 waived/trial. Sonya Heitshusen paid a total of \$953.75 in fine, costs and surcharge.<sup>7</sup>
- According to the Urban Dreams OWI School website, “Our weekend OWI jail diversion program is an alternative to jail for people convicted of first-offense operating while intoxicated.

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<sup>4</sup> Lydia Warren, “Two anchors for same Iowa news station get busted for drunk driving within 24 hours,” *Daily Mail*, June 10, 2014

<sup>5</sup> Regina Zilbermintz, “WHO anchor pleads guilty to OWI charge,” *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 30, 2014

<sup>6</sup> Regina Zilbermintz, “WHO anchor pleads guilty to OWI charge,” *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 30, 2014

<sup>7</sup> State of Iowa v. Sonya Dee Heitshusen, Case no. 05771 OWOM078263, Polk County Superior Court, June 7, 2014

“Along with being an alternative to jail, our program provides the mandatory Iowa Department of Transportation Drinking Drivers Education training over 48 consecutive hours, all in one weekend.

“COURT APPROVAL IS A MUST TO ATTEND. Time spent at our program will count as the mandatory two days in jail.”<sup>8</sup>



Photo via *Des Moines Register*

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<sup>8</sup> “What is Urban Dreams OWI School Jail Diversion?” Urban Dreams OWI School website Accessed May 20, 2022

## **OTHER VIOLATIONS**

➤ **Sonya Heitshusen has faced at least seven traffic charges in Iowa**

- According to the Iowa Judicial System website, Sonya Dee Heitshusen has had the following traffic violations in Iowa.<sup>9</sup>

<b>Case</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Charge</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
State of Iowa, vs Heitshusen, Sonya D.	01/02/1997	Speeding Over 55 Zone (16 Thru 20 Over)	\$93 fine
City of Ames vs Heitshusen, Sonya D.	03/14/1995	Illegal Parking	\$27 fine
City of Ames vs Heitshusen, Sonya D.	05/21/1997	Speeding On Certain Streets (1 Thru 5 Over - \$10 Fine	\$28 fine
City of Council Bluffs Vs Heitshusen, Sonya D.	05/03/2002	Speeding - 11 Thru 15 Over - Zones 55mph Or Less	\$54 fine
City of Des Moines Vs Heitshusen, Sonya D.	06/27/2004	Obedience To Official Traffic-Control Devices	\$85.25 fine
State vs. Heitshusen, Sonya D.	07/22/2005	Violation, Financial Liability Coverage	Dismissed
State vs. Heitshusen, Sonya D.	06/07/2014	Driving On Wrong Side Of Two Way Highway	Dismissed (Part of OWI case)

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<sup>9</sup> Trial Court Case Search: Sonya Heitshusen, Iowa Courts, Accessed May 20, 2022



## AUDITOR LAWSUIT

- **In June 2021, Iowa State Auditor Rob Sand alleged that Gov. Kim Reynolds violated the state’s self-promotion law by appearing in a video to promote mask wearing during the pandemic**

- In a June 4, 2021, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “State Auditor Rob Sand is alleging Gov. Kim Reynolds violated the state’s self-promotion law by appearing in a video last year to promote mask wearing during the pandemic, but Reynolds says the public awareness campaign falls under the law’s exemption for disaster emergencies.

“Sand’s office released a special report Thursday detailing its investigation into a TV, radio, newspaper and digital advertising campaign called ‘Step Up, Stop the Spread.’ Reynolds’ office started the campaign in November, just after the governor issued a limited statewide mask mandate as cases spiked to their highest levels. In a video that aired on Iowa television stations, Reynolds appears in the governor’s formal office with her name and title onscreen and tells Iowans about steps to take to avoid the virus, like mask wearing, social distancing and isolating from others. The video also featured health care officials, Democratic former Gov. Tom Vilsack, wrestling icon Dan Gable and Carson King, an Iowan who used a viral internet moment to raise money for the University of Iowa children’s hospital.”<sup>10</sup>

- **Gov. Reynolds’ staff said neither they nor the board were consulted before Sand released the report. Sonya Heitshusen said it was standard practice for the auditor’s office not to contact the examined entity until the auditor provides the organization with a copy of the report the day before its public release**

- In a June 4, 2021, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “Reynolds’ staff said neither they nor the board were consulted before Sand released the report.

“‘Auditor Sand didn’t once ask to meet with our team regarding his concern or his investigation. If he had, we would have pointed him to this essential part of the law that he clearly missed,’ Reynolds’ chief of staff, Sara Craig, said in a statement referring to the disaster emergency exemption.

“Sonya Heitshusen, a spokesperson for Sand, said it’s standard practice in a case like Thursday’s report for the auditor’s office not to contact the examined entity until the auditor provides the organization with a copy of the report the day before its public release.

“The ethics board’s executive director, Mike Marshall, said Thursday that the board has received the auditor’s report and will be reviewing it. He said Sand’s office did not contact the board about the matter before releasing the report.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Gruber-Miller, “Auditor says Reynolds broke the law,” *Des Moines Register*, June 4, 2021

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Gruber-Miller, “Auditor says Reynolds broke the law,” *Des Moines Register*, June 4, 2021

➤ **The Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board voted unanimously to find that Kim Reynolds did not violate the law**

- In an Aug. 17, 2021, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “Gov. Kim Reynolds did not violate Iowa's ban on using taxpayer funds for self-promotion when she appeared in advertisements last year encouraging Iowans to wear masks during the COVID-19 pandemic, an Iowa ethics board found.

“The Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board voted unanimously Thursday afternoon to find Reynolds, a Republican, did not violate the law. State Auditor Rob Sand had accused Reynolds of violating the law in a June report.

“In the report, Sand, a Democrat, said Reynolds' appearance in television and radio advertisements last year to promote mask wearing ran afoul of the law because the advertisements were paid for using federal funds.

“Sand has said he is considering running for governor next year.”<sup>12</sup>

➤ **In October 2021, State Auditor Rob Sand faced a lawsuit related to the controversial report**

- In an Oct. 12, 2021, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “Iowa’s Democratic state auditor is facing a lawsuit related to a controversial report he issued accusing Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds of violating ethics laws — claims a state ethics panel rejected.”<sup>13</sup>

➤ **The Kirkwood Institute claimed that Rob Sand was violating the state’s open records law by withholding communications with an Associated Press reporter and a liberal blogger relating to the report**

- In an Oct. 12, 2021, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “The Kirkwood Institute, a conservative public interest law firm, claims Rob Sand is violating the state’s open records law by withholding communications with an Associated Press reporter and a liberal blogger relating to the report.”<sup>14</sup>

➤ **Sonya Heitshusen responded by criticizing the filer of the lawsuit, saying, “Because the Governor herself ignores open records requests, a political hack who previously attacked Rob Sand with baseless legal claims is now attempting to drag him down to her level”**

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Gruber-Miller, “Reynolds’ COVID ad didn't violate self-promotion law, board says,” *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 17, 2021

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Lathrop, “Iowa auditor sued for refusing to release emails about rejected accusation against Gov. Kim Reynolds,” *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 12, 2021

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Lathrop, “Iowa auditor sued for refusing to release emails about rejected accusation against Gov. Kim Reynolds,” *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 12, 2021

- In an Oct. 12, 2021, article, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “Sand’s office has responded by attacking Ostergren, but declined to address the merits of the suit

“‘We will respond to the lawsuit and the nature of the email in court,’ auditor’s office spokeswoman Sonya Heitshusen said in an email.

“‘Because the Governor herself ignores open records requests, a political hack who previously attacked Rob Sand with baseless legal claims is now attempting to drag him down to her level,’ she said.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Lathrop, “Iowa auditor sued for refusing to release emails about rejected accusation against Gov. Kim Reynolds,” *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 12, 2021

## INCOME TAX

- **Sonya Heitshusen does not support a complete repeal of Iowa’s income tax**
  - In a May 10, 2022, Q&A in the *Des Moines Register*, when asked if she supported a total elimination of the state income tax, the *Des Moines Register* reported, “Not currently. We need to assess the impact of the latest tax cut, which will result in a \$1.9 billion reduction in state revenue. A wait-and-see approach is also prudent considering the amount of economic uncertainty and instability around the world. I’m a fiscal conservative and I believe in returning money to taxpayers when there is an excess in state coffers. However, we need to ensure there is enough state revenue to adequately fund the basics, such as public education and public safety. Tax cuts must also be fair and equitable for working families.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Where the candidates for Iowa House District 28 stand on education, climate change and taxes,” *Des Moines Register*, May 10, 2022

## SECOND AMENDMENT

- **Sonya Heitshusen said that “we need to have laws in place that if you’re going to own a gun, you should have to take a class”**
  - In a March 24, 2022, podcast interview with Ken Root, when asked how she would address gun control, Sonya Heitshusen replied, “As far as guns. That’s more complicated. I don’t, I think everyone has the right to have firearms. But I think as a gun owner, you also must be responsible. So we need to have laws in place that if you’re going to own a gun, you should have to take a class.”<sup>17</sup>
  
- **Sonya Heitshusen said that Iowa was wrong to repeal its concealed carry permit rules, and said that she supports universal background checks**
  - In a March 24, 2022, podcast interview with Ken Root, when asked how she would address gun control, Sonya Heitshusen replied, “I believe that the law that was repealed that required a permit to carry a concealed weapon was wrong. We should have classes in which you have to have some knowledge about this weapon that can be deadly that you are carrying. So we should have universal background checks. If you’re going to own a gun, you have to be a responsible gun owner. And also we need to enforce the laws that are on the books as far as if you are a felon and in possession of a firearm, you need to do some time. We have way too many guns on the streets, I believe, that are in the possession of criminals. So those guns need to be taken away. If you are a law abiding citizen, you have every right to own a firearm.”<sup>18</sup>
  
- **In 2013, Sonya Heitshusen tweeted that gun control is part of a “multi-pronged approach to ending violence”**
  - On Dec. 14, 2013, Sonya Heitshusen tweeted, “Remembering #Newtown. Multi-pronged approach to ending violence. #guncontrol #mentalhealth #parenting.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Anchor Speaks podcast, March 24, 2022

<sup>18</sup> The Anchor Speaks podcast, March 24, 2022

<sup>19</sup> [twitter.com/newzgirl/status/411846366558568448](https://twitter.com/newzgirl/status/411846366558568448)

## CLIMATE

- **Sonya Heitshusen says that the politicization of climate change has hampered the response, and she criticized legislation that scaled back efficiency programs**
  - In a May 10, 2022, Q&A in the *Des Moines Register*, when asked what the state should do to manage climate change, Sonya Heitshusen responded, “First, acknowledge it exists. The politicization of climate change has hampered the response. Iowa dropped to 36th in energy efficiency in 2020 because of legislation that scaled back efficiency programs. State and local governments should take the lead by investing in renewable energy. This is environmentally and fiscally smart. A report released by the auditor’s office last year showed a potential savings of \$375 million through solar installations at the local level. We should also offer consumers more green options, such as purchasing blocks of entirely green energy. We also need to clean up our waterways by fully funding the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Fund, which voters approved in 2010.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Where the candidates for Iowa House District 28 stand on education, climate change and taxes,” *Des Moines Register*, May 10, 2022

## ABORTION

### ➤ **Sonya Heitshusen is pro-choice**

- In a March 24, 2022, podcast interview with Ken Root, when asked how she would address abortion, Sonya Heitshusen replied, “Abortion, I am pro-choice. I believe a woman should have the right to choose, should be between her and her doctor, what happens, what she chooses to do with her own body.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The Anchor Speaks podcast, March 24, 2022

## COVID

➤ **In November 2020: Sonya Heitshusen wrote, “Shame on all of us for not working harder to prevent the spread”**

- In a Nov. 21, 2020, tweet, Sonya Heitshusen wrote, “Especially heartbreaking because much of the suffering could have been prevented. Shame on all of us for not working harder to prevent the spread. Additionally, our healthcare workers deserve our never ending gratitude and wages that match their commitment and bravery.”<sup>22</sup>



➤ **In February 2021, Sonya Heitshusen criticized Gov. Kim Reynolds for removing restrictions on masks, businesses and gatherings**

- In a Feb. 6, 2021, Facebook post, Sonya Heitshusen wrote in response to Gov. Reynolds removing mask, business and gathering restrictions, “As of 2 days ago, 37 states had mask mandates. Why now, especially when new Covid variants are being detected in Iowa?”

“The science is clear: Wearing a mask limits the spread of Coronavirus. The Iowa Dept of Health recommends wearing a mask.”<sup>23</sup>



<sup>22</sup> [twitter.com/newzgirl/status/1330338168067985411](https://twitter.com/newzgirl/status/1330338168067985411)

<sup>23</sup> [www.facebook.com/SonyaHeitshusen/posts/pfbid02u4Apafymp4skxYqybFgoLbztEKZJcGRxR6ZNhRex8w4PjdJNi3vQZgFbPB7XVVLWl](https://www.facebook.com/SonyaHeitshusen/posts/pfbid02u4Apafymp4skxYqybFgoLbztEKZJcGRxR6ZNhRex8w4PjdJNi3vQZgFbPB7XVVLWl)



- In a Feb. 5, 2021, article, KCCI reported, “Gov. Kim Reynolds has eliminated most of her COVID-19 restrictions in the latest health proclamation.

“According to the Governor’s Office, the proclamation removes indoor mask requirements in public spaces, gathering limits and restrictions on businesses starting 12:01 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 7.

“‘The proclamation strongly encourages Iowans, businesses and organizations to take reasonable public health measures consistent with guidance from the Iowa Department of Public Health,’ said Pat Garrett, a spokesperson for the Governor’s Office.”<sup>24</sup>

➤ **In May 2020, Sonya Heitsbusen said that she wore a mask everywhere she went and “side-eyed” the people that did not, adding, “you infect my mother’s health care worker, I’ll hunt you down!”**

- On May 11, 2020, Sonya Heitsbusen tweeted, “I feel the opposite - I wear a mask everywhere I go in public. And I ‘side-eye’ the people who aren’t. Sorry, not sorry, about being judgy. But you infect my mother’s health care worker, I’ll hunt you down!”<sup>25</sup>



***Editor’s Note:** Sonya Heitsbusen’s mother passed away in February 2021. It is unknown if Covid-19 played a role in her passing.*

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<sup>24</sup> “Reynolds removes restrictions on businesses, gatherings, masks,” KCCI, Feb. 5, 2021

<sup>25</sup> [twitter.com/newzgirl/status/1259701087231246342](https://twitter.com/newzgirl/status/1259701087231246342)

## CIVIL SERVICE

➤ **Even though she never served in the military or as a civil servant, Sonya Heitshusen supports a required year of civil service after turning 18**

- In a Nov. 11, 2018, Facebook post, Sonya Heitshusen wrote, “I feel like a phony on Veterans Day. I’ve never served in the US Military, the National Guard or the Reserves. I’ve never been a civil servant of any kind. This led to a discussion this morning about compulsory service (the Draft, Conscription) to our country. I don’t think everyone is cut out for the military. However, I think some sort of civil service requirement would give us all a better appreciation for our Veterans, our country and our freedoms. What do you think? Should the US require a year of civil service after turning 18?”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sonya Heitshusen Facebook post, Nov. 11, 2018

## DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT

- **In August 2021, Sonya Heitshusen filed a lawsuit against her former employer, challenging what she calls a widespread practice of removing older, female staffers from the air because of their looks**
  - In an Aug. 24, 2021, article, the Associated Press reported, “As a prominent reporter and anchor at one of Iowa’s biggest local television stations, Sonya Heitshusen was known for doggedly investigating injustices and holding the powerful accountable.  
  
“A year after WHO-TV in Des Moines abruptly let her go, she is turning those skills on her former employer with a lawsuit challenging what she calls a widespread practice of removing older, female staffers from the air because of their looks.  
  
“Heitshusen filed an age and gender discrimination lawsuit Tuesday against WHO-TV’s parent company, Nexstar Media Group, Inc., which calls itself ‘America’s largest local television and media company,’ with 199 stations.”<sup>27</sup>
- **Sonya Heitshusen’s lawsuit alleges that Heitshusen faced numerous ‘micro-aggressions’ over the years**
  - In an Aug. 24, 2021, article, the Associated Press reported, “The lawsuit alleges that Heitshusen faced numerous ‘micro-aggressions’ over the years, as her bosses treated male anchors more favorably and her age ultimately became seen as a liability.  
  
“The lawsuit recounts an incident in which Peterson told the newsroom that Heitshusen had a reaction to the shingles vaccine but that others need not worry because only her “advanced age” caused her to need the shot in the first place. While seemingly a joke, the comment reflected a deeper truth that her age was a concern to management, it alleges.  
  
“The lawsuit also alleges that male anchors received higher pay, more vacation time and more on-air recognition for journalism awards, and that they were not judged by their appearances.  
  
“Meanwhile, the suit claims that managers told Heitshusen she could not negotiate for more time off, that one once commented to her and another female anchor about losing weight, and that managers gave her more support for pursuing ‘softer’ feature stories than investigative news, it claims.”<sup>28</sup>
- **Sonya Heitshusen’s lawsuit alleges that she was “thrown out to pasture” because she was no longer seen as camera-worthy, after years in which she saw her male colleagues receive better treatment from management**

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<sup>27</sup> Ryan Foley, “Ex-Iowa anchor hopes her age bias lawsuit changes TV news,” Associated Press, Aug. 24, 2021

<sup>28</sup> Ryan Foley, “Ex-Iowa anchor hopes her age bias lawsuit changes TV news,” Associated Press, Aug. 24, 2021

- In an Aug. 24, 2021, article, the Associated Press reported, “The lawsuit alleges Heitshusen, 54, was ‘thrown out to pasture’ because she was no longer seen as camera-worthy, after years in which she saw her male colleagues receive better treatment from management.”<sup>29</sup>

***Editor’s Note:** The case is scheduled to go to trial in 2023*

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<sup>29</sup> Ryan Foley, “Ex-Iowa anchor hopes her age bias lawsuit changes TV news,” Associated Press, Aug. 24, 2021

## QUOTABLE

➤ **Sonya Heitshusen: “I can be kind of a bitch, to be honest”**

- In a Aug. 7, 2020, podcast, while discussing why others in the newsroom were scared of her, and her directness in speaking, Sonya Heitshusen said, “So, I can be kind of a bitch, to be honest.”<sup>30</sup>

*Editor’s Note:* For audio/video of this quote, see: <https://www.itsbingbang.com/podcast/jealous-podcast-sonya-heitshusen/>

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<sup>30</sup> Jealous Podcast Episode 9, Aug. 7, 2020