

WASHINGTON POST STAFF SAY BEZOS HAS UTTERLY DESTROYED THE NEWSPAPER

Fri, 24 Mar 2023 13:56:08, swmof88, [category: news, post_tag: washington-post-staff-say-bezos-has-utterly-destroyed-the-newspaper]

Washington Post insiders say paper 'lost at sea' as high-profile exits over fake news and financial headaches mount

Current and former Post employees say the paper is in a 'rut' and are pointing fingers at Bezos insane ego-mania leadership and propaganda

By [Joseph A. Wulfsohn](#)

•

[Bob Woodward slams Washington Post for ignoring warnings about Russiagate](#)

Washington Times' Charlie Hurt says the mainstream media made 'absurd' claims, and 'The Five' co-host Jessica Tarlov says journalists should have consulted with Woodward on his warnings.

[The Washington Post](#), a once-thriving newspaper known for taking down presidents and exposing government corruption, is now in a "rut," as one former employee put it.

Fox News Digital spoke with five current and former Post employees, many echoing a similar theme that The Post took a turn for the worse when its executive editor Marty Baron stepped down in February 2021 and his successor [Sally Buzbee](#) took over that June.

It was reported last year that the "Democracy Dies in Darkness" paper was "on place to lose money" in 2022. And turmoil erupted [at an employee town hall](#) in December when publisher Fred Ryan announced there would be layoffs in the first quarter of 2023 without offering details as to who would be affected. While many were relieved it wasn't worse – the paper cut 20 jobs in January rather than the hundreds originally feared – the leadership's handling of the situation disappointed rank-and-file staffers.

The Post, like many media companies, has had its financial ups and downs over the years, but what is unprecedented is the exodus that has taken place among both executives and journalists over the past year.

It was announced earlier this week that The Post's chief revenue officer Joy Robins was joining competitor [The New York Times](#) as its global chief advertising officer.

Robins is the latest of several C-suite executives to have recently parted ways with The Post including chief information officer Shailesh Prakash, chief product officer Kat Downs Mulder, communications chief Kristine Coratti Kelly, communications VP Shani George and audience development chief Beth Diaz.

[THE WASHINGTON POST'S WEEK FROM HELL](#)

The floodgates have also opened among its star talent. The Post lost reporters David Fahrenthold, Eli Saslow, Dave Weigel, Karoun Demirjian, Paul Sonne, Robert Samuels and Max Bearak, media columnist Margaret Sullivan, veteran editors Tracy Grant and Steven Ginsberg, and book critic Carlos Lozada.

Additionally, Post columnist Jonathan Capehart stepped down from the paper's editorial board in February over an apparent discrepancy he had with a published piece, leaving the board without any members of color (Capehart remains with the paper as a writer and host of a weekly podcast).



The Washington Post implemented a round of layoffs earlier this year after it was reportedly "on pace to lose money" in 2022. (ERIC BARADAT/AFP via Getty Images)

One former Post staffer said it felt "chaotic" in the newsroom when it became known that "people were being headhunted by The Times." Fahrenthold, Saslow, Lozada, Demirjian, Sonne and Bearak were among those who have joined the New York Times, in addition to Robins.

"People who would say no to The Times before are not saying no now," the ex-staffer told Fox News Digital.

One current staffer said The Post "feels lost at sea."

For those who have spent several years and even decades at The Post, being a "Postie" was part of their identity, with one former employee telling Fox News Digital, "There isn't anybody who has left The Post who 12, 15, 18 months ago could have foreseen that for themselves."

"I thought my career would end at The Washington Post... but there is life after the Washington Post," they said.

The ex-staffer said they heard from former newsroom colleagues who told them seeing Saslow's feature debut on the front page of The Times this week "felt like a gut punch to people."

"He was like Prince or Cher. He was just Eli," they said. "To lose that, I think Sally and Fred are not nuanced enough to understand that somebody like Eli Saslow, Steven Ginsburg who think in ways that are unique, who see things uniquely are definitively worth it even if you can't quantify it. Eli would write three stories a year, is there a business model that'd make sense? No. But people will go to their graves talking about his pieces. They say [something] about who we are as an organization. And the value in that is something that [former Post owner and publisher] Don Graham had, but it's been lost."



next

Image 1 of 12

Joy Robins, The Washington Post's chief revenue officer for four years, is the latest to jump ship, joining The New York Times as its global chief advertising officer. (Mark Sagliocco/Getty Images)

The next exit?

Two sources told Fox News Digital there are rumors swirling that Cameron Barr, The Post's senior managing editor, could be next to head towards the exit, potentially by the end of summer.

Barr, who joined The Post in 2004, was among the finalists considered to be Baron's successor. Ginsburg, a fellow managing editor who began working for the paper back in 1994, was also a serious candidate. Ultimately, both were passed over as Ryan chose Buzbee, an outsider who at the time was the executive editor of The Associated Press. Ginsburg left The Post in late 2022 to become the executive editor of The Athletic, which the Times bought last year.

[CREDIBILITY CRISIS: WASHINGTON POST 'PERHAPS THE WORST' AMONG OUTLETS THAT DISMISSED COVID LAB LEAK THEORY](#)

One former Post staffer told Fox News Digital that Baron was a "was a complete machine" and a "driving force" for the paper.

"I don't know if there's any people at The Post who's a driving force," they said.

The ex-Postie said the paper needs a "big picture leader," suggesting Barr could have served that role.

Another former colleague of Barr's said he isn't necessarily a "beloved figure" in the newsroom, but he is certainly a "respected" one. And if he left The Post, there would be "absolutely nobody to run the journalism."

Barr did not respond to Fox News' request for comment.



Washington Post senior managing editor Cameron Barr is rumored to be leaving the paper later this year, sources tell Fox News Digital. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post via Getty Images)

Abandoning Operation Skyfall

The Post's weak business model was a sore subject among former employees. One knocked the paper for not having "foresight in the new media," pointing to The Times' acquisition of the viral puzzle game Wordle as an example of innovation from the competitor, telling Fox News Digital, "The Times is good at that, The Post is not."

"The Post put a lot chips in the best Trump coverage, and it was not making the best decisions like The Times," the ex-staffer told Fox News Digital. "The competitor stayed on top for a bunch of things and The Post stayed on top of politics only."

The second ex-staffer recalled the summer of 2016 when it was widely assumed in the newsroom that Donald Trump would lose the presidential election against Hillary Clinton and that The Post's traffic, which had reached "record heights" at the time, would disappear once "boring" Clinton assumed the presidency.

[WASHINGTON POST RELEASES UPDATED SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOLLOWING TWITTER MELTDOWN AMONG STAFF](#)

However, The Post's then-digital managing editor Emilio Garcia-Ruiz (who in 2020 joined the San Francisco Chronicle as its editor in chief) provided a "roadmap" for the paper to continue thriving in what they thought would be an early end to the Trump era.

Garcia-Ruiz's business proposal, dubbed "Operation Skyfall" (inspired by the 2012 James Bond film), aimed to maintain the audience that sought political coverage and "convert them" by serving other needs which involved expanding The Post's portfolio to include coverage of food, wellness, culture and books.

"And then Trump won," the ex-staffer said.



Washington Post publisher Fred Ryan is being criticized by former staffers for failing to implement a strong business model in the post-Trump era. (Mark Wilson/Getty Images)

The Post alum was aggrieved that the paper's business leadership "knew that we were deficient of coverage in other aspects" and that it was a "business decision" to not expand coverage between 2016 and 2020.

"Fred only cared about politics. He only cared about the reporters he saw on MSNBC," the ex-staffer told Fox News Digital. "And so when Trump lost, and you get past Jan. 6, and you get into a Joe Biden presidency, there was a roadmap developed in 2016 that would have dealt with the equivalent of a Joe Biden presidency that came from the newsroom."

"I think we're all aware of the challenges we face to build our subscription base back... Most of us are busy covering the news and doing our jobs, but there is a question still lingering above all of us: What does the big boss think?" one current Post insider wondered. "So far, he's given zero indication of his thinking. Seems not to be on his mind. I guess that suggests there's no crises, or at least no need to take immediate action."

'There were some missteps'

Before The Post's current slump, there was what one former staffer referred to as the "revitalization" of the paper. It involved Baron "managing the hell out of decline" and "energizing" the newsroom when he became executive editor in 2012. Later came major investment from billionaire [Jeff Bezos](#), who had bought the paper in 2013.

The former staffer said despite the fact that Baron was "not an easy person to work for," he directed The Post "true north."

But then Buzbee took over.

"There were some missteps," the ex-staffer told Fox News Digital.

The Post alum blamed Ryan and company for not preparing Buzbee enough, saying "leadership failed to brief her" in the first days of her tenure.

"I can imagine a world where Fred thought 'this will be a walk in the park for her' since the AP had a bigger newsroom. I didn't think anyone in the newsroom ever lost sleep being beat by the AP, the same can't be said about The New York Times," they quipped.



Under its executive editor Sally Buzbee, The Washington Post has lost several significant newsroom figures to its direct competitor, The New York Times. (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post via Getty Images)

The former employee acknowledged the uphill battle Buzbee had entering The Post in June 2021, which was in the middle of the pandemic and much of the staff was working remotely at the time. But she still rubbed people the wrong way.

"It was not clear that she had read anything in The Washington Post... It was surprisingly unjournalistic," the ex-staffer told Fox News Digital. "Marty read everything."

The ex-staffer recalled Baron presiding over the newsroom's story conferences twice a day, but that Buzbee was "regularly" late or would "ghost" those meetings.

"People wanted to impress her, and she would say she would be attending a meeting with political staff... People were willing to give her the benefit of the doubt, but you can't be late to the story conference. It's seen as a sign of disrespect," the ex-staffer said. "It seems like a small thing, but it became emblematic of other things... She was explicitly told multiple times you can't not show up... I'm not saying she wasn't working, or she wasn't doing 12-hour days, but to the extent she didn't get the culture [of The Post newsroom]."

[WASHINGTON POST'S 2022 TROUBLES CONTINUE WITH FINANCIAL STRUGGLES, DEPARTING POLITICAL REPORTER](#)

Buzbee's challenge to lead the newsroom was put on full display in June when Post reporter Felicia Sonmez [lashed out at the paper's culture](#) and her own colleagues on social media. Sonmez was later fired for insubordination The Post updated its social media policies.

Perhaps Buzbee's most high-profile recruit so far was Taylor Lorenz, who made a name for herself as the controversial technology reporter at The Times. Her [tearful appearance on MSNBC](#) about cyberbullying and her outspoken left-wing social media presence have made her a distraction at times.

"Taylor Lorenz was somebody we never should have hired," the ex-staffer said without hesitation. "I was told by colleagues who worked at The New York Times who said champagne

corks were popping when it was announced The Post hired her."

They continued, "There are people who you know are going to stay in and understand there is the power in the organization as well as power in the individual and Taylor was one of those people who was only about Taylor. And it was an unfortunate and entirely foreseeable outcome."



One former Washington Post staffer told Fox News Digital the paper "never should have hired" controversial tech columnist Taylor Lorenz. (Screenshot/MSNBC)

Lorenz, known by her critics for her prolific tweeting and her reporting that doxxed popular Twitter personality Libs of TikTok, was engulfed in a controversy last year regarding a column that had an erroneous claim, prompting multiple corrections by the paper. Lorenz took to Twitter and blamed her editor for allegedly including the error without her knowledge.

The incident led Buzbee to [rescind a promotion](#) to then-deputy features editor David Malitz, who was well-liked among colleagues.

That decision, one insider told Fox News Digital, was a reflection of Buzbee "not knowing the room."

"She lost an entire department when she rescinded that job offer," the insider said.

[QUESTIONS REMAIN AS TAYLOR LORENZ BLAMES EDITOR, 'BAD FAITH CAMPAIGN' OVER ERRONEOUS WAPO REPORT](#)

Meanwhile, Bezos has largely been absent from the newsroom in recent years, making a "rare" appearance this past January just before layoffs were implemented.

"The newsroom always thought he was more involved than Jeff actually was," the ex-staffer told Fox News Digital. "He was very proud of The Post. He was proud of owning The Post. But he bought it for \$250 million, for him it's the equivalent of me finding coins in my sofa."

The ex-employee, still well-connected with former colleagues at the paper, said Bezos was "very surprised" at how "honest" The Post staff was during his recent visit.



Jeff Bezos, the billionaire owner of The Washington Post, has largely been absent from the newsroom as some of the paper's most valued journalists continue fleeing. (AP)

The alum said Bezo needs to shake up the leadership at The Post.

"Jeff should tell Fred that it's time to retire," they told Fox News Digital. "Jeff told [former Post publisher] Katharine Weymouth that she was fired after one year of owning The Post. And he told her he found her successor. He has done that in the past, and he needs to do that again because you need to have a new publisher come in and assess whether Sally is the correct executive editor for The Washington Post."

Bezos handpicked Ryan to be publisher of The Post in 2014.

None of the former staffers who spoke with Fox News Digital seem to have any ill will towards The Post. One of them said their "loyalty" was always with the paper regardless of who was leading the masthead.

"I wish nothing but the best for The Washington Post. The world needs institutions like The Post. Nothing would make me happier than Sally turning it around or Fred finding religion. Whatever it takes," they said.

A spokesperson for The Post told Fox News Digital, "The Washington Post continues to operate at its highest levels in serving our readers with world-class journalism and expanding our reach to local, national and international audiences."