


Former New York Post digital editor sues Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.

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By Meg JamesStaff Writer Jan. 18, 2022 3:32 PM PT

A former top editor of the New York Post has sued News Corp., alleging she faced years of retaliation at the publishing company for complaining about sexual advances by the Post's former editor in chief, Col Allan, one of Rupert Murdoch's longest-serving lieutenants.

Michelle Gotthelf, who was managing editor of the Post's digital edition until last week, filed the federal lawsuit Tuesday in the Southern District of New York against Murdoch's News Corp., NYP Holdings, Allan and Keith Poole, the newspaper's current editor. The lawsuit alleges discrimination and retaliation.

Poole, who also oversees Page Six and NYPost.com, fired Gotthelf — one of the Post's most senior female executives — on Jan. 12, roughly two months after learning about her allegations against Allan, the lawsuit said.

Gotthelf had worked at the Post for more than two decades, joining as a features writer in 2000. She became an editor and held several prominent management roles, including metro editor and eventually managing editor. She was the top editor of the paper's popular website until last week. The Post separately announced her departure Tuesday.

"Any suggestion of wrongdoing related to the management changes announced today is meritless," a spokesperson for the New York Post and News Corp. said in a statement.

The Post has become the latest business unit in the sprawling Murdoch empire to face allegations of sexism and misogyny. In 2016, Murdoch's trusted ally, Roger Ailes, co-founder of Fox News, was ousted amid a wide-reaching sexual harassment scandal first exposed in a lawsuit by Gretchen Carlson. Ailes died the following year. Other prominent figures at Fox News, including prominent anchor Bill O'Reilly, were also forced to resign over allegations of harassment.

Allan has worked within News Corp. for more than 40 years, joining as a cub reporter in his and Murdoch's native Australia. While working as a foreign correspondent for News Corp. in the U.S. in the late 1970s, Allan became acquainted with the media baron himself.

In 2001, Murdoch and his oldest son, Lachlan Murdoch, turned to Allan to run the Post following a management shake-up when the newspaper competition with the New York Daily News was particularly intense. Allan had distinguished himself as the editor of two News Corp. publications in Sydney.

Allan served as top editor at the Post for about 15 years, and Gotthelf was one of his top deputies.

“Mr. Allan delighted in degrading Ms. Gotthelf, and women generally, in front of her mostly male peers. For example, Mr. Allan would refer to women in news stories as ‘skanks’ or ‘stupid women,’” the lawsuit said. “He described a female NY Post editor as a ‘sneaky lesbian.’”

Allan also allegedly told Gotthelf that “Murdoch ‘doesn’t like many women.’”

Over the years, Gotthelf thrived within the organization — despite what she described in the lawsuit as a misogynistic atmosphere within the newsroom. Her situation began to deteriorate after Allan allegedly first made a sexual proposition to her in 2013. She decided to keep the overture quiet, because Allan was a formidable force at the company, according to the lawsuit.

But in the fall of 2015, Allan invited Gotthelf for drinks at a bar, the lawsuit said. Although she was uncomfortable, she felt she had to acquiesce and have drinks with Allan because he was her boss. That evening, he allegedly quizzed her about her relationship with her boyfriend, then told her: “We should sleep together.” She said no, and bolted from the bar, the suit states.

The following day, Gotthelf reported the incident to human resources, saying she had been bullied and harassed, according to the lawsuit.

Several months later, in 2016, Allan retired as the Post’s editor in chief.

Murdoch himself attended the Post’s send-off for the retiring newsman, calling Allan “one of the most outstanding editors of his generation” and a “great friend and colleague,” according to Gotthelf’s lawsuit.

After three years of retirement, Allan returned to the Post in an advisory capacity with substantial clout within the newsroom.

On Jan. 3, 2019, Allan allegedly called Gotthelf and expressed displeasure because the Post had missed a story that was covered by the rival Daily News. “At the end of his tirade, Mr. Allan told Ms. Gotthelf, ‘I love you,’” the suit said.

She soon learned that Allan had rejoined the publication. Gotthelf renegotiated her contract so that she did not have to report to Allan, but that arrangement did not last, the lawsuit said.

In June 2019, after the Post published an online story that E. Jean Carroll had accused then-President Trump of rape, Allan told Gotthelf that the story “should be removed” from the Post’s website. The two argued, and Allan allegedly wrote to Gotthelf, saying: “Get rid of it.”

In November 2021, Gotthelf was invited to a lunch meeting with Poole to discuss her contract, which was set to expire.

Poole had joined the paper early last year. At the lunch, Poole “wanted to know what happened between Mr. Allan and Ms. Gotthelf,” the suit said.

She was terminated two months later, the suit said.

On Tuesday, Poole announced Gotthelf’s Jan. 15 departure in an email to the staff.

“I want to take this opportunity to thank her for all she has done during her 20-plus year tenure here, and I hope you will join me in wishing her the best for the future,” Poole said.

Gotthelf is represented by high-profile attorney Douglas Wigdor, who handled lawsuits against Fox News’ former star TV host, Bill O’Reilly. The latter was replaced by Tucker Carlson.