

In Retaliatory Dismissal Lawsuit, Ex-New York Post Editor Says Former Boss Propositioned Her for Sex

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By Tom McParland

A former managing editor for the New York Post has sued the paper and its parent company, News Corp., claiming that she was demoted and later fired after complaining that an ex-editor-in-chief had propositioned her for sex.

The lawsuit, filed Tuesday morning by attorney Douglas Wigdor, alleged that higher-ups at the Post had purposely sidelined the plaintiff, Michelle Gotthelf, in retaliation for sounding the alarm about persistent sexual harassment by longtime editor-in-chief Col Allan, who was described as a “great friend and colleague” by News Corp. chairman Rupert Murdoch.

According to the filing, Allan repeatedly degraded women in the Post press room and routinely promoted underqualified men to top positions, at the expense of more experienced women like Gotthelf.

The complaint also alleged that Allan had inappropriately broached the topic of sex while meeting with Gotthelf in a bar in 2015, telling his then-underling that “we should sleep together.” When she complained about the harassment, Allan was forced to “resign in disgrace,” in the complaint’s words, despite receiving a laudatory send-off from Murdoch.

Then, Gotthelf said, Allan called her in December 2018 to berate her about a story the Post had missed, and ended the “tirade” by telling Gotthelf that he loved her. The next day, Gotthelf was told that Allan, who was “retired” at that point, had been “boozing” and that it was “just Col being Col.”

The Post, however, rehired Allan in early 2019, but told Gotthelf that he was coming on as a consultant, and that she would not have to report to her old boss. But Gotthelf said that Allan still wielded power over her, pressuring Gotthelf specifically to remove a story about writer E. Jean Carroll accusing former President Donald Trump of rape in June of that year.

This January, Gotthelf said, she was “effectively demoted,” after the New York Post Group named Keith Poole, a veteran of Murdoch’s the London Sun, as its new editor-in-chief. Shortly after the hiring, the complaint alleged, Poole pressed Gotthelf about “what happened between you and Col,” and Gotthelf was fired Jan. 12, 2022, “without cause.”

Both Allan and Poole were named as defendants in the lawsuit.

Poole announced Gotthelf's departure in a memo to Post staff Tuesday morning. A copy of the memo, provided to the Law Journal, also announced other management-level personnel changes, and anticipated "additional appointments in the coming days."

A spokeswoman for the New York Post and News Corp. said that "any suggestion of wrongdoing related to the management changes announced today is meritless."

In a statement, Wigdor said that the "New York Post's unlawful treatment of its top female editor after twenty-plus years of service is nothing short of appalling."

"Moreover, the Post's decision to rehire Col Allan after he sexually propositioned Ms. Gotthelf speaks volumes about exactly the type of newsroom News Corp. is running," the attorney added. "We intend to aggressively move forward with holding the Post accountable and protecting Ms. Gotthelf's rights."

In her own statement, Gotthelf said that the "truth of what happened to me deserves to be heard."

"I will miss my colleagues dearly and hope that by speaking out there can be positive change for other women at the Post," Gotthelf said.

A representative for News Corp. did not immediately respond Tuesday to a request for comment.

The lawsuit, filed in the Southern District of New York, included four claims for discrimination and retaliation under both the New York City and state human rights laws.