

New York Post sued by former editor alleging harassment by top Murdoch lieutenant Col Allan

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When Col Allan retired from the New York Post in 2016, the journalist said to be Rupert Murdoch's longest-serving editor was given a rousing send-off and toasted by the media baron as not just "one of the most outstanding editors of his generation," but "a great friend and colleague."

But in a new lawsuit filed against the Post's parent company, News Corp., a former subordinate alleges that Allan's departure was forced by the company after she complained that he sexually propositioned and harassed her.

Michelle Gotthelf, who served as the newspaper's digital editor in chief among other roles over a 21-year tenure, also alleged in her suit that the company retaliated against her by terminating her last week.

In 2015, her complaint claims, Allan told Gotthelf, "We should sleep together." After informing two Post editors about Allan's conduct, "Ms. Gotthelf's responsibilities and authority were steadily eroded" and newspaper management "began to diminish Ms. Gotthelf's role in retaliation for her complaints about Mr. Allan's sexual harassment," the suit claims.

She alleged that Allan "became even more abusive after Ms. Gotthelf rejected his advances. He refused to make eye contact with Ms. Gotthelf and often killed stories that she supported for no apparent reason." She also claims that she was passed over several times for key promotions and that Allan used derogatory language to refer to women, allegedly describing a female Post editor as "a sneaky lesbian." She reported the newspaper's "hostile work environment" to human resources.

In a statement, a spokesperson for News Corp. called Gotthelf's allegations of an unfair dismissal "meritless."

A veteran of the Murdoch family's media empire who also served as a top editor in Australia, Allan has been described as gruff and "politically incorrect." The rival New York Daily News tabloid wrote in 2016 that Allan "is known for his explosive outbursts and profanity-spewing rants." But Allan was lauded by Murdoch, who thanked him for his service to the news organization.

In her lawsuit, Gotthelf alleges that Murdoch, along with News Corp., "did all they could to protect Mr. Allan's reputation," and she castigated Murdoch for praising Allan upon his retirement.

After a few years away from the company, Allan returned to News Corp. in 2019 as a senior adviser. While Gotthelf says she was told that she would not have to report to Allan again, he “became a de facto supervisor, often giving Ms. Gotthelf directions,” the complaint alleges.

Gotthelf’s lawsuit also names Keith Poole, who was named editor in chief of the New York Post in early 2021 — a move that “effectively demoted Ms. Gotthelf.” (News Corp. announced Allan’s departure from his advisory role as part of that announcement.)

According to the complaint, Gotthelf told Poole in November 2021 — upon his asking during a lunch meeting — about Allan’s conduct toward her. Poole “fired” her two months later “without cause.”

The lawsuit, which was filed in District Court for the Southern District of New York, alleges violations of the New York State Human Rights Law and seeks both monetary damages and a jury trial.

Poole announced Gotthelf’s departure in a memo to Post employees on Tuesday morning that did not explain the reasoning behind it. “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,” he wrote. He also informed employees about a handful of other management changes at the newspaper.

The lawsuit was filed by Wigdor LLP. The firm’s founding partner, Douglas H. Wigdor, has filed and settled numerous sexual harassments lawsuits on behalf of women who were employed by Fox News Channel, a corporate cousin of the New York Post.

“The New York Post’s unlawful treatment of its top female editor after twenty-plus years of service is nothing short of appalling,” Wigdor said in a statement on Tuesday.