



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

*JSNE Published June 8, 2024*

*JSNE Published June 8, 2024*

**JSNE Note:** *The Washington Post, owned by Jeff Bezos, is one of the world's premier Newspapers of Record.*

*In 2023, WaPost won the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting. However, WaPost lost more than \$75 million dollars.*

*Readership was down 50% from 2020.*

*To stem the tide, Bezos recently hired several news leaders from Britain.*

*"To speak candidly," Will Lewis, the new publisher and chief executive of The Washington Post told staffers at the top of the 90-minute meeting, "we are in a hole, and we have been for some time."*

*To say there is a cultural difference in the American and British news industry might be construed as a purposeful understatement.*

*Bezos' support has been steadfast, despite continuing losses in subscriptions and financial performance. On the other hand, reader comments about the Post's leadership changes raise large concerns about the future.*

*Will Bezos continue The Post's history of deep reporting and investigative journalism?*

*Or is The Post destined to demise in a manner similar to the Wall Street Journal, owned by another billionaire, Rupert Murdoch?*

---

**All of the following articles are copyrighted by their publishers**

[MAY 23, 2024. The Washington Post publisher disclosed the paper lost \\$77 million last year. Here's his plan to turn it around](#)

**CNN Business**

[June 2, 2024. Washington Post Executive Editor Sally Buzbee Heads for the Exit](#)

**Daily Beast**

[June 2, 2024. Sally Buzbee steps down as Executive Editor of The Washington Post. Matt Murray and Robert Winnett take editorial leadership roles in new newsroom structure.](#)

**WaPost**

[June 7, 2024. The Growing Debacle for Will Lewis and the Washington Post](#)

**Politico**

[June 5, 2024. 'Clash Over Phone Hacking Article Preceded Exit of Washington Post Editor](#)

**NYTimes**

[June 3, 2024. Washington Post editor and CEO clashed on reorganization before her exit](#)

**WaPost**



## **Rocky Road at the Washington Post**

***Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.***  
***JSNE Published June 8, 2024***

**[June 3 2024. Washington Post Newsroom Reels From Its Editor's Sudden Exit](#)**

**NYTimes**

**[June 7, 2024. Three Strikes So Why Is WaPo CEO Will Lewis Not Out?](#)**

**Daily Beast**

**[May 11, 2024. WaPo Boss Was at Center of Murdoch Cover-Up, New Docs Claim](#)**

**Daily Beast**

**[June 7, 2024. New Washington Post Publisher Infuriated His Old News Corp Staff During Phone Hacking Crisis](#)**

**Daily Beast**

---

### **JSNE Fair Use Notice**

JSNE is a non-commercial entity operating for the sole purpose of advancing democracy, justice and truth in our community.

JSNE makes content available for public educational and community informational purposes only. JSNE offers content and commentaries to advance public understanding of issues impacting our community, local and national, typically by revealing connections ("connecting the dots") between local persons and organizations, and larger right-wing ideological movements across domains such as economics, politics, society, culture and media, among others. Often, these key connections may not be readily apparent to the public.

This site may offer copyrighted material owned by a third party, the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. Notwithstanding a copyright owners' rights under the Copyright Act, Section 107 allows limited use of copyrighted material, without permission from the rights holders, for purposes such as education criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. These so-called Fair uses are permitted even if the use of the work would otherwise be infringing.

When such material is offered, JSNE will acknowledge and reference the content's subject/title, author, date and source. If you wish to use copyrighted material published on this site for your own purposes that go beyond fair use you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. We recommend that you seek the advice of legal counsel if you have any questions on this point. (6/8/2024)



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**



## MAY 23, 2024. The Washington Post publisher disclosed the paper lost \$77 million last year. Here's his plan to turn it around

By [Oliver Darcy](#), CNN Published 7:02 AM EDT, Thu May 23, 2024

<https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/23/media/washington-post-will-lewis-turnaround-plan/index.html>

On Wednesday, Will Lewis, the newly minted publisher and chief executive of The Washington Post, strode on stage before gathered staffers at the company's D.C. headquarters to outline his vision for shepherding the iconic newspaper into a financially prosperous future.

Dressed in a navy-blue blazer and button-down shirt, along with his trademark sneakers (the Brit is known to be partial to the casual footwear), Lewis first delivered the cold hard reality to his assembled workforce. He candidly explained the depths of The Post's recent financial woes, revealing that it had lost \$77 million over the last year and seen a dramatic 50% drop in audience since the highs of 2020.

"To speak candidly," Lewis told staffers at the top of the 90-minute meeting, "we are in a hole, and we have been for some time."

But Lewis said he has a plan to rescue the renowned newspaper that has broken some of the biggest stories of our time and turned its most influential journalists into household names. That plan, officially dubbed the "build it" phase of the turnaround project (which follows the "say it" and "fix it" phases), was defined by a pyramid shared with staffers in a Powerpoint presentation.

The pyramid, aimed at helping employees visualize new business opportunities, showed the traditional subscription membership stacked along with new subscription and payment offerings for readers.

Among the new revenue streams are "flexible payments," which were described to staffers as "frictionless payments" that would target a "likely untapped" audience. In other words, a person who may be interested in reading a single story on The Post's website will soon be able to make that one-time purchase via a service like Apple Pay. I'm told that feature will, in fact, start to roll out next quarter.

Additional subscription tiers, dubbed Post Pro and Post Plus, are also in the works, targeting working professionals and diehard readers with additional products, including a forthcoming newsletter focused on the climate and economy. The plan follows similar premium subscription offerings from the likes of Axios and POLITICO, which have introduced "pro" plans that have helped tap into new revenue streams.

"We think that we've been a one-size-fits-all organization for too long, so we're excited to create a new set of consumer and professional products that better meets the needs of our multi-faceted audiences," Karl Wells, chief growth officer at The Post, explained.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

Lewis' plan, however, included more than just revamping The Post's subscription offerings. Silicon Valley veteran Vineet Khosla, the newspaper's chief technology officer, appeared onstage, speaking to staffers about the need to integrate artificial intelligence into The Post's newsroom.

"I totally get that there is a huge fear of A.I. everywhere," he said. "But I want us to go beyond the fear. The way I see us operate is we have A.I. everywhere. We have A.I. in our newsroom; we have A.I. with our consumers; we have A.I. in the business... Start thinking of it as a copilot."

The experimentation with machine language models is already underway. The Post has started using A.I.-generated voices to allow people to listen to select newsletters. And, last week, Executive Editor Sally Buzbee announced in an internal memo an expanded version of article takeaways, which will be generated by A.I. and edited by humans in the newsroom.

At the same time, Kathy Baird, The Post's chief communications officer, told staffers at the Wednesday meeting that the newspaper plans to strengthen audience relationships with its journalists, aiming to promote key journalists that create its reporting and connect them with readers. While The Post clearly plans to bet big on infusing its products with A.I., it wants to emphasize the human element of its journalism.

Whether the multi-pronged initiative is enough to turn The Post around, of course, remains to be seen. It goes without saying that Lewis and the newspaper's leadership team have their work cut out for them, as evidenced by the poor state of affairs that Lewis himself disclosed to staffers. But the new publisher voiced confidence that these measures will put The Post on track for success.

"I really hope at some point in the future, when you look back on this day," he told staffers, "it's actually quite a significant day in the history of our company."



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

# DAILY BEAST

## June 2, 2024. Washington Post Executive Editor Sally Buzbee Heads for the Exit

SAYONARA

**The move is a sudden and unexpected leadership change at one of the country's largest newspapers—one that just last month won three Pulitzer Prizes.**

**Brett Bachman** Updated Jun. 03, 2024 6:11AM EDT Published Jun. 02, 2024 10:27PM EDT

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-washington-post-executive-editor-sally-buzbee-heads-for-the-exit>



*The Washington Post's* executive editor Sally Buzbee has resigned, according to [a press release](#) issued by the newspaper.

The move is a sudden and unexpected leadership change at one of the country's largest newspapers—one that just last month won three Pulitzer Prizes for national reporting, editorial writing and commentary.

"Sally is an incredible leader and a supremely talented media executive who will be sorely missed," Will Lewis, the CEO and publisher of the *Post*, said. "I wish her all the best going forward."

Buzbee will be replaced by Matt Murray, the former editor-in-chief at *The Wall Street Journal*, who will serve in the role until the 2024 election has concluded, the newspaper said in its announcement. Following the election, Robert Winnett, who is currently deputy editor of The Telegraph Media Group, will take over as editor of the *Post*.

### **It's unclear what led to Buzbee's decision.**

She was hired in 2021 to replace Marty Baron, who served for nearly a decade in the position. Prior to her time in Washington, Buzbee was the top editor at the Associated Press.

In addition to its leadership change, the *Post* also announced that it plans to add a newsroom division for service and social media journalism "dedicated to better serving audiences who want to consume and pay for news differently from traditional offerings."



## **Rocky Road at the Washington Post**

***Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.***

***JSNE Published June 8, 2024***

The unit “will focus more on video storytelling, embracing AI to help, and flexible payment methods,” the paper wrote, while predicting that it will be operational by the third quarter of 2024.





## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

*JSNE Published June 8, 2024*

**The Washington Post**  
*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

### **June 2, 2024. Sally Buzbee steps down as Executive Editor of The Washington Post. Matt Murray and Robert Winnett take editorial leadership roles in new newsroom structure.**

***The Washington Post also announced today its intention to launch a new division of the newsroom dedicated to better serving audiences who want to consume and pay for news differently from traditional offerings.***

By WashPostPR

June 2, 2024 at 8:38 p.m. EDT

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/pr/2024/06/02/sally-buzbee-steps-down-executive-editor-washington-post-matt-murray-rob-winnett-take-editorial-leadership-roles-new-newsroom-structure/>

The Washington Post today announced Sally Buzbee has stepped down as Executive Editor. Buzbee has been with The Washington Post since 2021, leading the newsroom through the turbulence of the pandemic and expanding its service journalism, including Climate and Well+Being.

**Under her leadership, The Washington Post has won significant awards, including the recent Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting.**

**Matt Murray, former Editor in Chief of The Wall Street Journal (WSJ),** will replace Buzbee as Executive Editor until the 2024 US presidential election, after which **Robert Winnett, Deputy Editor of The Telegraph Media Group, will take on the new role of Editor at The Washington Post,** responsible for overseeing our core coverage areas, including politics, investigations, business, technology, sports and features.

The Washington Post also announced today its intention to launch a new division of the newsroom dedicated to better serving audiences who want to consume and pay for news differently from traditional offerings.

This third newsroom will be comprised of service and social media journalism and run separately from the core news operation. The aim is to give the millions of Americans – who feel traditional news is not for them but still want to be kept informed – compelling, exciting and accurate news where they are and in the style that they want.

This new organizational structure follows The Washington Post's recent announcement of its 'Build It' plan, which highlights the need to move away from the traditional one-size-fits-all approach and to create news for a broader range of readers and customers. This will focus more on video storytelling, embracing AI to help, and flexible payment methods. The new newsroom division will be operational by the third quarter of this year.

The move will also allow the core news division to focus on growing The Post subscriber base and building a new suite of professional products – Pro, Plus and Membership.

"Sally is an incredible leader and a supremely talented media executive who will be sorely missed. I wish her all the best going forward," said William Lewis, CEO and Publisher of The Washington Post.

Murray will join as Executive Editor, effective immediately. He worked at The Wall Street Journal for 29 years, eventually leading its 1,300-person newsroom as well as overseeing the publication's editorial strategy and operations. Under Murray's tenure, The Wall Street Journal doubled its digital traffic and subscriptions, and achieved record growth in video and audio audiences as it expanded across all platforms.



## **Rocky Road at the Washington Post**

***Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.***

***JSNE Published June 8, 2024***

"I'm deeply honored to join such a storied news institution with its long, rich history of memorable and impactful journalism and want to thank Sally for her great leadership," said Murray. "I am excited by Will and Jeff's vision for The Post's next era of growth and reinvention and can't wait to get started."

This fall, Winnett will take on the new role of Editor at The Washington Post, responsible for overseeing its core coverage areas, including politics, investigations, business, technology, sports and features. He will transition into the role leading up to the election. On November 6th, Murray will begin his role as leader of the third newsroom.

Winnett has an excellent track record in investigative reporting, delivering scoops and leading significant newsroom transformations. He has run Telegraph Media Group's news operations since 2013 and has overseen the introduction of Britain's first fully integrated 24-hour, seven-day news operation covering digital platforms and The Daily and Sunday Telegraph newspapers.

"By creating three, strong, journalism functions – Core, Service/Social and Opinions – we are taking a definitive step away from the 'one size fits all' approach and moving towards meeting our audiences where they are," said Lewis.

Murray, Winnett and David Shipley, who heads the Opinions Newsroom as Editorial Page Editor, will each report directly to William Lewis.





## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

# POLITICO

## June 7, 2024. The Growing Debacle for Will Lewis and the Washington Post

The crisis at the newspaper suggests the publisher has no idea about how the media operate

By **JACK SHAFER**

06/07/2024 05:41 PM EDT

<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/06/07/will-lewis-washington-post-00162341>

**The oldest axiom in journalism is that the reporter should never become the story.** Its unwritten corollary, rarely invoked in the contemporary era, is that the publisher should *absolutely* never become the story. Will Lewis, the freshly installed CEO and publisher of the *Washington Post*, violated that corollary this week as the *New York Times*, NPR's David Folkenflik and even Lewis' own newspaper devoted many inches of hot copy to his conduct, alleging that he has overstepped the traditional boundaries that define a modern U.S. publisher's job.

The maelstrom seems certain to impede Lewis' plan to remake the money-losing *Washington Post*, a plan that includes bringing in two outsiders — one, a fellow Brit, has no U.S. newspaper experience — which has ruffled some on the staff. Depending on how the current crisis unwinds, Lewis' conduct and response may undo him. He can't very well put out the business fire that is consuming the *Washington Post* (it has lost \$77 million in the past year) if his own pants are aflame. Will *Post* owner Jeff Bezos want to keep a publisher who is beset with a fast-growing credibility crisis?

**The origins of the controversy are both mind-bending and simple.** Lewis is named in a complex and unfolding civil lawsuit in Britain that claims he [played a role in destroying evidence](#) in the [phone-hacking scandal](#) that engulfed British newspapers more than a decade ago. Lewis is not a defendant in the case and has consistently [denied any wrongdoing](#).

Lewis has also declined to speak further about the claimants' allegation against him, lending a [Streisand-like effect](#) on the topic for journalists writing about him. His role (or non-role) in the phone-hacking scandal was raised in most of the coverage of his appointment to the *Post* job in late 2023, [including in the Washington Post](#).

"I did whatever I could to preserve journalistic integrity," Lewis told the *Post* before refusing to discuss it any further. "I took a view very early on that I'm never going to talk about it," he said. "And it's either right or wrong that I've done that." Despite his wave-offs, the topic has remained of interest to reporters.

**But Lewis' most recent alleged attempts at message control appear to have backfired on him.** Some may argue a culture clash between Lewis' hard-edged Fleet Street nature and the American media ecosystem is to blame, but more likely it's a flaw in Lewis' character or a basic misunderstanding about how reporters do their job. Regardless, doom could be in his future.

**The chronology looks like this.**

Lewis appears to have had his first words with then-*Post* Executive Editor Sally Buzbee about phone-hacking [coverage in March](#), as the paper published a story about it mentioning him, according to a [Thursday evening story](#) in the *Washington Post*. The two clashed again in May, as the *Post* was about to publish [another story about the scandal](#) that mentioned Lewis, the [Wednesday New York Times](#) reported. According to the *Times* sources, "Mr. Lewis



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

*JSNE Published June 8, 2024*

told Ms. Buzbee the case involving him did not merit coverage.” When she said she was going to publish anyway, he said she was committing a lapse in judgment and ended the conversation, reports the *Times*. The Thursday story in the [Washington Post](#) matches the *Times* account about his opposition to publishing the story and believing Buzbee’s actions constituted a lapse in judgment. (Buzbee left the paper this week, apparently because she was about to be demoted from the top job.)

Lewis issued a blanket denial to the *Post* reporters for their story, calling the account “inaccurate,” denying that he had used the phrase “serious lapse in judgment,” and insisting he “did not pressure her in any way.”

Complicating the saga is another barnburner, this one from [NPR media reporter David Folkenflik](#), which claims the *Post* incident isn’t the first time Lewis has tried to derail a story about him. Folkenflik writes that “Lewis repeatedly — and heatedly — offered to give me an exclusive interview about the *Post*’s future, as long as I dropped the story about the [phone-hacking] allegations.” Lewis dismissed the Folkenflik charge with an [email to Post reporters](#), calling the NPR reporter “an activist, not a journalist” and seemingly accused Folkenflik of abusing an off-the-record agreement, which Folkenflik categorically denies.

**Whether you believe** the reporting from the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and NPR or you believe Lewis, he seems to know squat about how to talk to reporters — especially considering his long-tenure as a top reporter and editor in England before moving over to the business side.

Lewis had to know coming into the *Post* job that the phone-hacking subject could not be avoided, despite his blanket refusal to discuss it again. Now, he may be completely innocent of any misconduct in the phone-hacking, and all the reporters are being busybodies. But reporters rarely take no for an answer.

**If he expects to lead an institution whose remit is accountability, he must expect reporters — both those who work for him and those who work for other publishers — to demand answers.** Dropping the subject down the memory hole or deterring the *Post* from writing about it was never a serious option. Can he possibly be that dense?

For Lewis to imagine that the *Post* should not write about him is a pipe dream. This is a perk that not even the owner and his companies enjoy. I’ve kept a clip file of Bezos and Amazon coverage since the billionaire bought the paper, looking for some sign of the paper taking a dive for him. I’ve yet to find any evidence. If Bezos’ hide is thick enough to endure the *Post* arrows, Lewis’ should be, too.

Lewis’ most floundering example of damage control has to be his slandering of Folkenflik as “an activist, not a journalist.” Folkenflik has a reputation for being relentlessly sensible and accurate, and he routinely breaks news, even about his own employers. Journalists know this about Folkenflik. So, when Lewis smears him, it can only arouse curiosity about his motives.

Attacking a reporter who has the goods also has a way of attracting additional reporters to the story, something Lewis must know. Having unfairly savaged Folkenflik, what will Lewis do next? Disparage *Post* reporter Sarah Ellison and Elahe Izadi, who distinguished themselves with the Thursday story, as “activists, not journalists” because they wrote unflatteringly about him?

**What possessed Lewis?** James Ball, current political editor of *The New European* and formerly of the *Guardian US* and BuzzFeed UK, attributes the dustup, in part, to a “culture clash.”

“British newsroom leaders just do not tolerate the level of dissent that American ones do. Much more a case of the bosses say jump and you jump,” Ball says.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

But that excuse carries Lewis only so far.

He spent four years in the 2010s working for the *Wall Street Journal* and Dow Jones, plenty of time to acclimate himself to U.S. norms. Plenty of other British news executives, like Mark Thompson now at CNN, Emma Tucker at the *Wall Street Journal* and John Micklethwait at Bloomberg News, have navigated their way to the states without driving into a ditch.

**Lewis must also be savvy enough to American standards to know that the cover-up is almost always worse than the crime.**

Assuming that the current British phone hacking case will surface new material about his role (or non-role) in it, wouldn't it make more sense for him to get in front of the bad news and tell his side of the story?

His silence on the subject is unbecoming and also counterproductive. In a piece that I was working on as this story broke, I asked several news executives who landed at the top of publications where they knew almost nobody and knew very little about the new city, they were working in what advice they might have for Will Lewis and his two new top editors, Matt Murray and Robert Winnett, who are strangers to the *Washington Post*.

Their top recommendation was that a new team must first establish trust with the staff that they've inherited. In journalism, as in other professions — the military, deep sea diving and restaurant work, for example — faith in your co-workers is essential. Newsrooms are run by consent of the governed. You don't have to think your colleague is a good person in order to work effectively with them, but you must believe they are on the level with you.

If Lewis hopes to [reorder the Washington Post](#) into three newsrooms, and restore the stumbling paper to its former glory, he'll need every hand on deck. He can't afford to be drawn into anymore "he said/she said" debates about his recent events, nor can he continue to kick the phone-hacking scandal down the road. If he hopes to succeed, he must perform a [reverse ferret](#) of a sort and level with his reporters and the press. Nobody wants to work for an untrustworthy publisher.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*  
**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

## The New York Times

### June 5, 2024. 'Clash Over Phone Hacking Article Preceded Exit of Washington Post Editor

Will Lewis, the chief executive of The Washington Post, objected to coverage of a legal development involving him in a phone hacking case.

By [Benjamin Mullin](#) and [Katie Robertson](#)

June 5, 2024



Will Lewis, who started as the chief executive of The Washington Post in January, has said he is trying to stop annual losses in the tens of millions of dollars. Carlotta

Weeks before the embattled executive editor of The Washington Post abruptly [resigned](#) on Sunday, her relationship with the company's chief executive became increasingly tense.

In mid-May, the two clashed over whether to publish an article about a British hacking scandal with some ties to The Post's chief executive, Will Lewis, according to two people with knowledge of their interactions.

Sally Buzbee, the editor, informed Mr. Lewis that the newsroom planned to cover a judge's scheduled ruling in a long-running British legal case brought by Prince Harry and others against some of Rupert Murdoch's tabloids, the people said.

As part of the ruling, the judge was expected to say whether the plaintiffs could add Mr. Lewis's name to a list of executives who they argued were involved in a plan to conceal evidence of hacking at the newspapers. Mr. Lewis told Ms. Buzbee the case involving him did not merit coverage, the people said.

When Ms. Buzbee said The Post would publish an article anyway, he said her decision represented a lapse in judgment and abruptly ended the conversation.

The interaction rattled Ms. Buzbee, who then consulted with confidants outside The Post about how she should handle the situation. When [the judge ruled several days later](#), on May 21, that Mr. Lewis could be added to the case, The Post published [an article](#) about the decision.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

Mr. Lewis did not prevent the article from publishing. But the incident continued to weigh on Ms. Buzbee just as she was considering her future at the paper, according to the two people with knowledge of her decision-making process. Her eventual decision to resign has [shaken](#) one of the country's top news organizations.

The interaction over the court ruling was not the primary reason for her resignation. Ms. Buzbee had already been mulling her future at The Post because of a plan by Mr. Lewis to reorganize the newsroom that he laid out to her in April, the people said. Mr. Lewis had offered Ms. Buzbee a job running a new division focused on social media and service journalism, according to the people. She considered that a demotion, since her job as executive editor included overseeing all parts of the news report.

A spokeswoman for The Post declined to comment. Ms. Buzbee also declined to comment.

Mr. Lewis was appointed by Jeff Bezos, The Post's owner and the founder of Amazon, late last year to remake the publication as it reeled from a steep audience decline and annual losses in the tens of millions of dollars. For the past few months, Mr. Lewis, who was previously the chief executive of News Corp's Dow Jones, which publishes The Wall Street Journal, has been formulating a strategy to overhaul the business.

He decided to split the editorial ranks into three divisions: a core newsroom that covers politics, business and other topics; an opinion section; and a new division that would focus on social media, like video storytelling, as well as service journalism, including wellness and lifestyle coverage. (The Post is currently divided into two parts, news and opinion.)

In offering Ms. Buzbee a role running the social media and service journalism division, according to people familiar with her thinking, Mr. Lewis told her she could weigh in on the recruitment of the editor to oversee the core news operation. He later informed her that he had selected [Robert Winnett](#), an editor at The Daily Telegraph who had previously worked with Mr. Lewis, the people said.

The conversation between Mr. Lewis and Ms. Buzbee about the phone hacking coverage took place in a conference room at an executive meeting outside The Post newsroom. At the meeting, Post executives discussed Mr. Lewis's planned changes to The Post.

Editors occasionally alert top executives about thorny stories before they are published. In 2013, Martin Baron, the longtime editor who preceded Ms. Buzbee, informed The Post's publisher, Katharine Weymouth, before The Post began to report on sensitive stories about the National Security Agency. In 1971, Ben Bradlee, the crusading executive editor, gave Katharine Graham, The Post's former owner, a heads-up before the newspaper published articles about the Pentagon Papers, which revealed the secret history of the Vietnam War.

Mr. Lewis declined to comment to The Post for its article about the ruling in the phone hacking case. But in numerous previous media interviews, he has strongly denied the allegations that he was involved in covering up phone hacking while he was a senior executive for Mr. Murdoch. The Post [published](#) an article in March about the lawsuit that also named Mr. Lewis.

At a contentious staff meeting on Monday, Mr. Lewis defended his business strategy, telling the newsroom that The Post had lost \$77 million the previous year, had seen a 50 percent audience decline since 2020 and needed to make radical changes to succeed.

"Let's not sugarcoat it. It needs turning around, right?" he said, according to a recording of the meeting. "We are losing large amounts of money. Your audience has halved in recent years. People are not reading your stuff."

He continued: "I've had to take decisive, urgent action to set us on a different path, sourcing talent that I have worked with that are the best of the best of the best."





## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

*JSNE Published June 8, 2024*

### Turmoil at The Washington Post

- **A Sudden Exit:** Sally Buzbee's [abrupt departure](#) from The Washington Post, where she had been editor since 2021, has added to the [growing tension](#) between the newsroom and its chief executive, Will Lewis.
- **A Quid Pro Quo:** Lewis repeatedly [offered an exclusive interview to an NPR reporter](#) if the reporter agreed not to write about allegations against him in a phone-hacking scandal in Britain.
- **A Tense Relationship:** Weeks before Buzbee resigned, [she clashed with Lewis](#) over whether to publish an article about a British hacking scandal with some ties to Lewis.
- **Stepping Into the Spotlight:** In the swashbuckling world of British newspapers, the editor Robert Winnett stands out for his lack of flash. Now he will [become the editor of The Post at a pivotal time](#).

**The Washington Post**  
*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

### June 3, 2024. Washington Post editor and CEO clashed on reorganization before her exit

***Executive editor Sally Buzbee urged a delay of William Lewis's plan to restructure the newsroom. Her abrupt replacement by a veteran Wall Street Journal editor triggered questions from staff.***

By [Sarah Ellison](#), [Elahe Izadi](#) and [Jeremy Barr](#)

Updated June 3, 2024 at 3:43 p.m. EDT | Published June 3, 2024 at 11:25 a.m. EDT

Barely five months after joining The Washington Post as publisher and CEO, William Lewis recently began discussing a plan with his top executives for dramatically restructuring the newsroom.

His timing, though, drew resistance from executive editor Sally Buzbee. With her team of journalists absorbed by the demands of covering a historic presidential campaign, she urged Lewis to wait until after Election Day.

Lewis didn't want to wait. Hired by Post owner Jeff Bezos with a mandate to reverse a sharp decline in subscriptions and a \$77 million deficit over the past year, he wanted to execute the new plan immediately. She also balked at the role he saw for her in the new structure — and the two agreed she should depart, according to two people familiar with the conversation.

[Buzbee's abrupt exit](#) after three years at The Post — which even her own department heads learned about late Sunday in a companywide email from Lewis — left the newsroom reeling.

A Monday morning newsroom meeting to introduce [Matt Murray](#), who will take on a new role as a top Post editor, turned contentious as staff members pressed Lewis about Buzbee's departure and his plans to spin off portions of The Post's journalism into a new division.

Murray, a former editor in chief of the Wall Street Journal, vowed to uphold journalism standards and The Post's legacy.

"This is change about growth," he said. "It's change about the future. It's change about building on The Post and taking it to the next generation and enhancing the legacy of the place."

Lewis, who previously worked with Murray at the Journal, called him "a proper journalist who loves causing trouble and working with fellow editors and reporters, and an old-fashioned editor who will edit each day."

Though Lewis took staff questions, he refused to give specifics about the decision-making behind Buzbee's departure.

"I really enjoyed working with Sally," Lewis said. "I wish it could have gone on for longer, but it couldn't. And I don't think it's appropriate to take that bit of the conversation any further."





## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

He apologized for the manner of the announcement. The news “began to leak out, which is why we had to scramble.” Buzbee, the first woman to head the news operations of The Post, has not responded to requests for comment. She had been hired in 2021 by The Post’s previous publisher, Fred Ryan, after the retirement of former executive editor Martin Baron. Buzbee spent most of her career at the Associated Press, most recently as its top editor. Ryan stepped down as publisher in 2023, and since Lewis has stepped into the role, he has made several executive-level hires. As recently as this weekend, Buzbee had given no indication that she would be leaving. On Saturday night, she attended the White House News Photographers Association award dinner, where she chatted with Post journalists and sat next to White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

And less than two weeks ago, Buzbee participated in a companywide presentation to discuss a plan by Lewis to revamp core elements of the business, including new subscription offerings.

She told Post department heads late Sunday in a brief call that she had been presented with a reorganization plan that she didn’t want to be a part of, according to three people familiar with her remarks who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak.

The publisher and his top editor had discussed Lewis’s restructuring plans over several weeks, and Buzbee had hoped to persuade him not to execute his plan until after the election, according to a person familiar with their conversations. But Lewis was eager to accelerate the timing of his plan. He offered Buzbee oversight of a new division of the company, which he described Sunday evening as being focused on “service and social media journalism.”

But Buzbee was uncomfortable with the structure and did not believe she could be effective in the role, the person familiar with their conversations said. That left her with no real place in the organization and the two agreed that she needed to step aside.

For weeks before the announcement of her departure, though, Lewis had made inquiries to potential candidates to succeed Buzbee, according to people familiar with his discussions, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to protect confidential communications.

Buzbee was not present for the staff meeting Monday but received a healthy round of applause from Post colleagues, who questioned her treatment by company leaders.

Murray was [replaced as the top editor of the Journal](#) in early 2023 after nearly five years but remained at parent company News Corp in an advisory role. He had been in discussions for another job opportunity, but as those deliberations wore on, he decided to accept Lewis’s invitation to join The Post, one of those people said.

In his own remarks, Murray, who spent 29 years at the Journal, focused on the future, which he said will meld the legacy of The Post with a forward-looking approach to news.

A native of the Washington, D.C., area, Murray said he doesn’t plan to remake The Post in the Journal’s image — and that The Post is the newspaper that made him want to work in journalism.

“I’ve been in the business long enough, and I’ve done enough things that I’m not interested at this point in managing decline,” Murray said. “I’m interested in the future and growth. ... This is going to be an exciting time. We’re going to have a lot of new opportunities and new things.”

Murray will serve only temporarily as Buzbee’s replacement, Lewis has said. After Election Day, he will hand over the reins of leadership for the newsroom’s core reporting areas — including politics, investigations, business, technology, sports and features — to [Robert Winnett](#), a British journalist who is currently the deputy editor of Telegraph Media Group.

At that point, Murray will shift over to serve as the leader of the new company division.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

*JSNE Published June 8, 2024*

Lewis previously worked alongside both Murray and Winnett — the former when he was publisher of the Journal, the latter when he was the editor of the Daily Telegraph.

During Monday's meeting, one staff member highlighted these connections, as well as Lewis's past remarks about his commitment to diversity.

"The most cynical interpretation sort of feels like you chose two of your buddies to come in and help run The Post," she said. "And we now have four White men running three newsrooms."

Lewis reaffirmed his commitment to diversity while acknowledging that "I've got to do better, and you'll see that going forward."

Lewis has referred to the new division that Murray will oversee as a "third newsroom" — distinct from the news operations that will eventually be helmed by Winnett, and distinct from The Post's opinions section, which has always operated separately from news and which will still be overseen by David Shipley, its leader since 2022.

Yet a lack of detail about what the new division will entail — and how it will intersect with the rest of the news organization — prompted questions in the staff meeting.

In one heated exchange with a Post staffer, Lewis warned that the newsroom cannot afford to be resistant to change, saying that "decisive, urgent" actions are needed for the company to survive upheaval within the media industry and a recent loss of subscribers and revenue.

"We are going to turn this thing around, but let's not sugarcoat it. It needs turning around," he said. "We are losing large amounts of money. Your audience has halved in recent years. People are not reading your stuff. Right. I can't sugarcoat it anymore."

In his brief remarks, Murray did not share his specific editorial priorities, though he mentioned a few specific stories that will be top priorities for The Post, including the presidential election, the [Donald Trump](#) trials and the trial facing Hunter Biden.

"The Post has such a great legacy, a history and tradition of great journalism in the past and right until this morning," he said. "There's so much outstanding work that comes out of this newsroom. I'm humbled and proud to be a part of it."

The decision to change editorial leadership and create a new division was part of Lewis's new strategy for The Post, which focuses on reaching new audiences and rejecting a "one-size-fits-all" strategy for serving readers and attracting new customers.

But Murray said there are no plans to blow things up for the sake of doing so. Going forward, Murray said the mission at The Post "will be to take what we do and really translate it the right way."



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

## The New York Times

### Washington Post Newsroom Reels from Its Editor's Sudden Exit

Sally Buzbee, who has been editor of The Washington Post since 2021, chafed at a major reorganization by the newspaper's chief executive.

**By Benjamin Mullin and Katie Robertson**

Published June 3, 2024 Updated June 4, 2024

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/03/business/media/washington-post-sally-buzbee-exit.html>

On Sunday night, minutes after Will Lewis, the chief executive of The Washington Post, informed employees that the newspaper's executive editor, Sally Buzbee, was being replaced, managers gathered on a conference call to hear from their boss one last time.

Ms. Buzbee told them that a new organizational structure created by Mr. Lewis — effectively splitting the Washington Post newsroom and opinion section into three smaller divisions — didn't work for her. She added that Mr. Lewis was pushing for aggressive moves to turn around The Post, and asked editors to reserve judgment for now.

"I would have preferred to stay to help us get through this period, but it just got to the point where it wasn't possible," Ms. Buzbee said, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The stunning call — which some attendees described as funereal — added to the growing tension between the newsroom and Mr. Lewis, who has set about remaking The Post since he started in January.

Many reporters and editors figured that Ms. Buzbee would remain in place until at least the presidential election in November. Just two weeks ago, Mr. Lewis and Ms. Buzbee had addressed The Post's staff together at a long-awaited all-hands meeting in which Mr. Lewis discussed his vision for The Post.

When Mr. Lewis revealed his plan to separate The Post's newsroom into segments, he said she could run one of them, according to a person with knowledge of the interactions. Ms. Buzbee chafed at the idea, according to two people familiar with her thinking.

The reorganization would have been an effective demotion for Ms. Buzbee, who had been in charge of all news content at The Washington Post. The structure adds a division focused on service and social media journalism under the supervision of a new editor, which would have pulled a large portion of The Post's editorial output out from under Ms. Buzbee's supervision.

On Sunday, Mr. Lewis told Ms. Buzbee that he was appointing another person to her job, according to a person with knowledge of the talks.

Mr. Lewis is temporarily replacing Ms. Buzbee with Matt Murray, the former editor in chief of The Wall Street Journal. Mr. Murray will run The Post's newsroom as executive editor through the election, at which point he will transition to run the division focused on service and social media journalism. Mr. Lewis had been considering hiring Mr. Murray for a senior editorial role at The Post for more than a month, according to a person with knowledge of their discussions, though another person familiar with the talks said Mr. Lewis first directly approached Mr. Murray about this role a week ago.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

A new editor, Robert Winnett, will take over the company's core coverage areas after the election. For the past decade, Mr. Winnett has run news operations at The Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Telegraph.

David Shipley will continue to run The Post's opinion section. All three — Mr. Winnett, Mr. Murray and Mr. Shipley — will report directly to Mr. Lewis.

A spokeswoman for The Washington Post declined to say whether Jeff Bezos, the owner of the newspaper, was aware of or approved the leadership changes announced on Sunday evening.

Mr. Murray, 58, was introduced to The Post's newsroom on Monday, in a town-hall meeting that kicked off with a long round of applause for Ms. Buzbee, according to several people in attendance. Under her leadership, the Post greatly expanded its editing ranks and received six Pulitzer Prizes, three of them [this year](#).

During the meeting on Monday, the executives were grilled by reporters at The Post on the lack of diversity in the hires replacing Ms. Buzbee — Mr. Murray, Mr. Winnett and Mr. Shipley are white men.

According to a recording obtained by The New York Times, one of The Washington Post's star political reporters, Ashley Parker, asked how the newspaper had arrived at its decision, adding that one skeptical interpretation might be that Mr. Lewis was simply hiring his associates to help run The Post.

Mr. Lewis is in many ways orchestrating a reunion with people that he worked with during earlier chapters of his career. As the publisher of The Wall Street Journal, he appointed Mr. Murray to the top editorial position at the paper in 2018. And he worked with Mr. Winnett for years, first at The Sunday Times and then at The Telegraph.

"When you were here before, you talked very movingly about how you care about diversity — and people talk about diversity — but then when push comes to shove, they say, 'Well, I looked around and I couldn't find anyone,'" Ms. Parker said.

In response, Mr. Murray said that diversity would be a "constant commitment" at The Post, adding that he had "the most diverse masthead that The Journal had ever had" during his years as the top editor at The Wall Street Journal.

Mr. Murray wasted no time familiarizing himself with The Post's newsroom. On Monday, he began taking meetings in Ms. Buzbee's old office on the seventh floor, hours after her sudden departure. Her nameplate has already been removed. In a statement on Monday, The Washington Post Guild said that it was "troubled" by Ms. Buzbee's sudden departure and the lack of diversity in The Post's top ranks.

The editorial change-up comes at a delicate time for The Washington Post. The newspaper is preparing to cover the homestretch of the presidential election, including the nominating conventions in Chicago and Milwaukee this summer. It is highly unusual to replace the top editor of a major U.S. newspaper during this period.

At the all-hands meeting two weeks ago, Mr. Lewis rattled off a list of priorities that included "build it," "fix it" and "say it." Mr. Lewis revealed that The Post was in dire straits, with more than \$70 million in losses over the last year and audience declines of 50 percent since 2020.

Near the end of the meeting on Monday, Kainaz Amaria, The Post's national visual enterprise editor, said that Ms. Buzbee's treatment "didn't feel fair," adding that the circumstances of her exit could make it difficult to trust new leadership.

"To start off like this is very difficult," Ms. Amaria said, according to the recording.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

*JSNE Published June 8, 2024*





## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

# DAILY BEAST

## June 7, 2024. Three Strikes So Why Is WaPo CEO Will Lewis Not Out?

WORKING THE REFS

***WaPo's new boss has already done considerable damage to the storied newspaper, writes ex-Post reporter Paul Farhi for The Daily Beast.***

By [Paul Farhi](#) Updated Jun. 07, 2024 5:17PM EDT Published Jun. 07, 2024 12:55PM EDT

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/three-strikes-so-why-is-wapo-ceo-will-lewis-not-out>



### OPINION

The news that *Washington Post* editor Sally Buzbee [had resigned under pressure](#) earlier this week was disconcerting enough for the *Post*'s 950 or so journalists and an untold number of its readers. But the revelations that have followed since then are considerably more important and damaging than the departure of one editor.

*The New York Times* [reported Wednesday evening](#) that one of the precipitating events in Buzbee's exit was a brief clash with her and new boss, *Post* publisher Will Lewis. The dispute was over an unpublished news story involving Lewis' work for Rupert Murdoch after the phone-hacking scandals at Murdoch's British tabloids more than a decade ago. The *Post* was about to report a basic fact: that an English judge overseeing a lawsuit filed by victims of the hacking, including Prince Harry, was seeking to add Lewis' name to a list of executives allegedly involved in [efforts to cover up the hacking](#). According to the *Times*, Lewis sought to dissuade Buzbee from publishing the story, and criticized her for "a lapse in judgment" when she said she would do so despite his guidance. The *Post* reported Thursday that Buzbee had a similarly tense exchange with Lewis about another story about the case in March.

Strike one: If the *Times* and *Post* accounts are accurate—Lewis has denied trying to spike the stories and denies any hacking cover-up—his actions constitute blatant self-dealing and the corrupt exercise of power.

Then on Thursday, NPR reporter David Folkenflik [dropped another anvil on Lewis](#). After Folkenflik requested an interview with Lewis in December before he joined the *Post*, Lewis "repeatedly and heatedly" offered an exclusive interview on





## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

the condition that Folkenflik drop a story he was reporting about Lewis' alleged role in the Murdoch scandal.

Folkenflik declined the offer and [wrote about the allegations](#) in December. Lewis didn't explicitly deny Folkenflik's description of their conversations in his response on Thursday, but he did call the reporter "[an activist, not a journalist](#)."

Strikes two and three: Lewis' reported *quid pro quo* offer reeks of unseemly image polishing and manipulation, a bad look for a news executive supposedly dedicated to transparency. Further, calling a respected journalist names isn't likely to endear Lewis to a building full of journalists.

Full disclosure: I'm hardly a disinterested party here. I was a *Post* reporter for nearly 36 years and left in December after the paper offered buyouts to about 10 percent of its staff. I spent the last 13 years at the *Post* covering the media beat, which meant I occasionally covered news about the *Post* itself.

What I learned in all that time—what was reinforced on a near-daily basis—was the *Post*'s fidelity to basic journalistic principles, such as fairness and accuracy.

High on this list was the necessity to avoid conflicts of interest, actual or perceived. Reporters weren't supposed to march in political rallies, put up yard signs for candidates or contribute in any way to them, lest it suggest partisanship. Former editor Leonard Downie went so far as to decline to vote so that he could maintain a completely impartial and open mind in making judgments about news coverage.

This ethical canon, imbued over 80 years of the Meyer-Graham family's ownership of the *Post*, continued after Amazon founder Jeff Bezos bought the paper in 2013. Despite suspicions to the contrary, Bezos has stayed out of the *Post*'s newsroom; as far as I can determine, he's never dictated a news story, or blocked one from publication. He has rarely visited its headquarters over the past 11 years. Nor has he sought flattering coverage for himself. On the contrary, the *Post*'s archives groan with stories unfavorable to Bezos' vested interests—from investigations into the harsh working conditions at Amazon's warehouses to the company's efforts to quash union organizing drives. I was involved in reporting what had to be the most personally humiliating episode of Bezos' life—the theft and leaking of [his "below-the-belt" selfies](#) to the *National Enquirer*. I never heard a word from the boss.

All of which makes the underlying issues described by the *Times*, NPR and the *Post* far more unsettling than the departure of an editor. The *Times* story, in particular, suggests Lewis sees his role as *both* publisher and editor, empowered to smack down stories he doesn't like or that he finds personally damaging. When Buzbee gave him a heads up about the hacking stories, the proper response should have been: "Carry on."

If anything, Lewis and his camp have only made matters worse in the past 48 hours. Following Folkenflik's story, his spokesperson [told the Times](#) that Lewis was "a private citizen" when he began his discussions with the NPR reporter in December, as if this somehow explained... something. She also reiterated Lewis' claim that their multiple interactions were off the record, in effect suggesting that Folkenflik had acted unethically by writing about them this week. (Folkenflik told me on Thursday that Lewis and his representative made the offer "numerous times" in conversations that weren't off the record).

Lewis has denied meddling with the *Post*'s editorial decisions and emphasized to staffers that he understands the distinction between publisher and editor. "I know how this works, I know the right thing to do, and what not to do. I know where the lines are, and I respect them," he wrote [in an email to his reporters](#): "The Executive Editor is free to publish when, how, and what they want to. I am fully signed up to that."

The larger question is where all this leaves Lewis and the *Washington Post*'s newsroom, which at the moment [can fairly be described as shaken](#).



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

Buzbee was not always a popular figure among the *Post*'s rank and file, but her dedication and integrity were never questioned. The circumstances of her unceremonious departure made her an object of sympathy among many staffers, and surely will leave some lingering sore feelings.

But the suspicion and cynicism surrounding Lewis may linger longer. The events of the past few days have made staffers wonder: Does Lewis get the fundamental principles and codes the *Post* has tried to live by for decades? Does he want to remake the *Post*'s business fortunes at the price of its hard-won reputation?

Of course, Lewis' fate won't be decided by the staff's judgment of him. There's only one person whose vote counts in such matters. And as usual, he's not talking.

# DAILY BEAST

## May 11, 2024. WaPo Boss Was at Center of Murdoch Cover-Up, New Docs Claim

HACKED

**The Daily Beast has reviewed new claims submitted to a British court for review. The documents allege that Lewis oversaw the deletion of emails related to the hacking scandal.**

**Clive Irving** Updated Jun. 07, 2024 11:23AM EDT Published May 11, 2024 8:07PM EDT

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/wapo-boss-will-lewis-was-at-center-of-murdoch-cover-up-new-docs-claim>

*The Washington Post* publisher and CEO [Will Lewis](#) is caught in a legal endgame centered on a scandal that seems never to go away, the industrial-scale hacking practiced in the newsrooms of [Rupert Murdoch](#)'s British tabloids from the mid-1990s until it was exposed in 2011.

Lewis was never involved in the hacking. The legal action involves his alleged role in the frantic efforts of Murdoch and his top executives to purge all the records of the crime. He has so far refused to make any comment to counter the allegations.

But the pressure on him to respond is growing because the lawyers representing victims of the hacking have asked the presiding judge in London to admit into their lawsuit new witnesses' testimonies gathered during the last year of discovery. The judge is expected to rule on this soon.

But the pressure is even greater than that: time is running out. The defending Murdoch entity, News Group Newspapers, NGN, faces the risk that if it cannot settle out of court the remaining 40 or so cases (more than 250 have been settled) the cases go to a trial in court in January 2025, in which case the claimants' charges would be aired in public.

Both sides have effective coercive powers. The claimants have built a detailed narrative of widespread wrongdoing; NGN can afford to suppress that narrative with settlements so generous that they exceed anything that could be won after a trial, a tactic that was recently conceded to have worked in the case brought by Hugh Grant.

The most formidable claimant left is Prince Harry. How much longer he will play this game is in question. It has been a long-declared aim for him to see the architects of so much pain for him (and his brother and late mother) exposed in court. I understand that he may have already received an offer from NGN, but it is likely that he will go to the brink of timing before settling.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

The strength of Harry's case is reflected in the application to update the lawsuit now being reviewed by the judge. The Daily Beast has reviewed the document giving the details of the application.

It should be made clear that, under English civil law, these allegations in the document are regarded as submissions to the judge, not evidence. That can be established only in open court, through evidence given under oath by witnesses, should the cases come to trial. Another caveat is that as convincing as the new charges may seem, in the absence of rebuttal by the NGN lawyers or public statements by those named, this is a one-sided account.

A spokesman for NGN, responding to previous reporting of the new allegations, said, "The claimants have now sought to introduce accusations in the civil court against many current and former journalists, staff, and senior executives of News International in a scurrilous and cynical attack on their integrity."

Around sixty amendments are being requested; the judge may allow some and not others. For those that are allowed, NGN would have to amend their defense to plead to them. (That does not rule out the possibility that the submissions denied by the judge could nonetheless reappear as evidence in a courtroom.)

The document alleges that over several months in 2011, Will Lewis was a decisive force at the center of a cover-up involving the purging of incriminating emails, documents, and computer hard drives.

Lewis has thus far refused to comment on the hacking case beyond what he told the *Post* in [a fall 2023 profile](#) pegged to his joining the newspaper: "I did whatever I could to preserve journalistic integrity. I took a view very early on that I'm never going to talk about it. And it's either right or wrong that I've done that."

Lewis joined the Murdoch newspaper business in September 2010, as group general manager. On Jan. 26, 2011, the Metropolitan Police launched Operation Weeting, an investigation into phone hacking at the [News of the World](#), Murdoch's best-selling Sunday tabloid.

Not only the police were involved. A group of members of parliament were beginning their own investigation. But there were no unannounced police raids on the newspaper offices and plant at Wapping in East London. The police and the politicians arranged visits in advance.

The two tabloids, the *News of the World* and the *Sun*, had [cultivated a cozy relationship](#) with the Metropolitan Police. Confidential briefings on criminal cases were leaked to the papers by corrupt police officers who were paid for them. Senior officers, on retirement, were hired for generous sums to write columns on crime and national security. Operation Weeting displayed no sense of urgency.

The new allegations suggest that Murdoch's top executives moved quickly to take advantage of that tardiness and remove more than 30 million emails, computer hard drives, and documents before the investigators turned up:

"Mr Lewis gave approval for the deletion of all emails from 2007 on 3 February 2011 (one week after the start of Operation Weeting) which deletions were completed on 8 February 2011, the day before NI [News International] met the MPs to discuss what data was available, and the Claimants contend that this was a deliberate plan by Mr Lewis... to prevent the MPs from obtaining evidence of phone-hacking, other unlawful activity and the cover-up that took place in 2007. The Claimants rely on the fact that Mr Lewis withheld from the police the fact that millions of emails had been deleted since 14 January 2011, for 6 months."

Another part of the document describes an alleged scapegoating of an IT contractor, Darren Elmes, following a request from the MPs for a hard drive that contained an email chain they wanted to retrieve. The hard drive had disappeared and NGN executives suggested that Elmes was a "disgruntled employee" who had a motive to steal the hard drive. As a result, according to the claim, Elmes' home was raided and searched without result, and he was found innocent.



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

***Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.***

***JSNE Published June 8, 2024***

According to the claims statement, some emails were not deleted and were transferred to a laptop that became known as “the extraction laptop” where they were subject to further selective deletion. The document claims: “Later, in July 2011, the hard drive was found, together with another laptop, during a search by the MPs in a floor safe hidden under a vanity unit in the annex to Rebekah Brooks’s office.”

These claims will not be tested in open court if the remaining litigants settle with NGN. The NGN lawyers have witness statements already made by the Murdoch executives cited, including Lewis, at a time when it seemed some of the cases would go to trial. Darren Elmes has also made a witness statement for the claimants.

A source with deep knowledge of the cases told me: “The claim documents are not the actual documents underlying the allegations. The real danger for NGN comes when there’s a trial because then the media can see it, the police can see it, the victims can see it.

“That’s the evidence. People will have given evidence on oath. And then the judge could say, as he did in the cases involving the *Daily Mirror*, I find the News Group witnesses were lying.”

Would criminal prosecutions follow?

“If the police don’t do anything, and there will be cause to do something, there could be a judicial review, or victims could bring private prosecutions. So, there are ways of getting there.”

In a statement made to *Prospect* magazine, [in response to reporting last week](#) by the former *Guardian* reporter Nick Davies, who first revealed the scale of the hacking, a spokesman for NGN said, “These proceedings have now been going on for over 15 years and NGN is seeking to bring them to a close. Between 2011-2015 a large-scale police investigation resulted in the trials of many individuals in the criminal courts. Corporate liability was also investigated at length and, in 2015, the Crown Prosecution Service concluded that there was no evidence to support charges against the company.”

In fact, NGN is arguing that the litigation has been going on so long that yet another round of new claims should not be allowed: “The recent vacation of the January 2024 trial should not precipitate another cycle of extensive amendments and consequential amendments.” They cite a statement made by a judge in 2018: “Time before the trial is not an excuse for spending hundreds of thousands of pounds beefing up cases, dotting every i, crossing every t.”

That argument was successfully countered by the litigants’ lawyers, who argued that the decisive time period should not be from when the alleged offenses were committed but from the point when they were discovered—in other words, if the cited actions were important but previously unknown, they should be put on the record.

The latest claims reflect the fact that more than 200 journalists, executives, and private investigators have been deposed, filling in many of the gaps—but far from all of them—in the search for truth.

Hacking was a viral worm that poisoned British journalism over a long period. It was incubated in a Murdoch newsroom where it quickly became contagious. It spread widely, corrupting editors who saw in it an irresistible source of scoops that violated the privacy of many hundreds of people, high and low. And it is part of the malignant legacy of Rupert Murdoch and a tabloid newsroom culture that he uniquely created and oversaw.





## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

# DAILY BEAST

## June 7, 2024. New Washington Post Publisher Infuriated His Old News Corp Staff During Phone Hacking Crisis

MURDOCH'S LONG SHADOW

**Will Lewis was tasked with cleaning up News Corp's hacking scandal in Britain—and ex-colleagues say he threw them to the wolves to protect the powerful.**

[Lachlan Cartwright](#) Updated Jun. 07, 2024 11:24AM EDT Published Jan. 27, 2024 11:42PM EST

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/new-washington-post-publisher-will-lewis-infuriated-news-corp-staff-during-murdoch-phone-hacking-scandal>



As [Will Lewis](#) settles into his new gig as publisher of [The Washington Post](#), a civil trial playing out in London's high court could dredge up a controversial chapter from his past.

From mid-2011 to mid-2012, [Lewis was an executive member of News Corp's Management and Standards Committee](#), set up following the phone-hacking scandal that engulfed Rupert Murdoch's universe and led to the shutdown of the [News of the World](#) after 169 years.

While Lewis has [described himself as a "junior" member of the operation](#), some refugees from News International [say he played a lead role](#) in what they call a "witch hunt" and claim he betrayed rank-and-file journalists to protect the brass. Lewis and a representative for [The Washington Post](#) did not respond to multiple requests for comment. A spokesperson for News UK (formerly News International) declined to comment, and a rep for News Corp did not respond to a request for comment.

"Will Lewis' behavior throughout that particular period of time was utterly disgusting," Duncan Larcombe, who was the royal editor for [The Sun](#) for a decade, told The Daily Beast.

Larcombe was one of two dozen journalists charged with offenses based on evidence turned over by the Management and Standards Committee. Accused in 2015 of paying for stories about the royal family and the Sandhurst Military



## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

*Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.*

**JSNE Published June 8, 2024**

Academy while Princes William and Harry were enrolled, Larcombe [was acquitted](#) in 2016 and left *The Sun* to write a book.

At *The Sun* and *News of the World*, that era was dominated by a scoops-at-any-cost attitude, where paying off police officers and government officials for information was [admittedly a daily](#) occurrence. But when it was revealed that the *News of the World* had hacked into the voicemails of missing 13-year-old schoolgirl Milly Dowler, [a national uproar ensued](#). London's Metropolitan Police investigated *News of the World* staffers for potential misconduct, which then led to a number of probes into illegal activity at both the *News of the World* and sister title, the *Sun*. To this day there has been little accountability about who ordered and signed off on the hacking and the payments to the police and government officials. News Corp has spent a [staggering amount of money](#), believed now to exceed [\\$1 billion](#), to prevent these allegations being properly aired in court.

*“Murdoch himself would pile pressure on the editors and the journalists to come up with great stories.”*

Amid intense pressure, News Corp launched the Management and Standards Committee in response to concern that executives including [Rupert Murdoch](#) and his son James—who was running the UK-based News International—could be in legal jeopardy under [the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act](#).

Lewis, who had been group general manager at News International, was appointed to the Committee, along with now-deceased former sports journalist Simon Greenberg (Lewis' childhood friend and a former *News of the World* journalist). Alongside a team of some 100 lawyers from white-shoe firm Linklaters, and forensic accountants from PricewaterhouseCoopers, they worked from a secret bunker within News International's east London location, according to two people with knowledge of the situation.

The Committee handed over emails, payment requests, and other evidence to Scotland Yard for its three inquiries: Operation Weeting, which examined the phone hacking allegations; Operation Elveden, which probed payments to public officials; and Operation Tuleta, which focused on computer hacking.

The operations involved 200 officers and staff, who [conducted dawn raids on journalists' homes](#) and arrested sources of *News of the World* and *Sun* reporters after the Committee shared their confidential information with the police.

More than a decade later, some of the targeted reporters remain traumatized and angry, particularly at Lewis, [who has now risen to the upper echelons](#) of American media.

“Turning over journalists who overwhelmingly turned out to be completely innocent [and who] had all their contacts and confidential sources handed over to the police—if that is his idea of good journalism, then I'm a monkey's uncle.” Larcombe said.

“Lewis would sort through the emails and invoices, which they then passed on to the Met. That was their job,” former *Sun* editor Kelvin MacKenzie told The Daily Beast.

MacKenzie was editor of the tabloid from 1981 to 1994, a period of great growth and frequent controversy, and later returned, twice, as a columnist. He was axed in 2017 after writing a column that compared a part-Nigerian soccer star to a “gorilla.”

He noted to The Daily Beast the irony that the reporters targeted in the Scotland Yard hacking and payments to public officials probes were simply trying to please the owner.





## Rocky Road at the Washington Post

***Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.***

***JSNE Published June 8, 2024***

“Murdoch himself would pile pressure on the editors and the journalists to come up with great stories. Why? Because great stories meant great sales and great sales equals great advertising revenue,” he said.

“The very journalists which at one moment he is cheering home... the next moment [Murdoch] is throwing under the bus. Absolutely disgraceful actions which should hang around his neck in his new retirement,” he added.

*“We were thrown to the wolves and had to stay silent for nearly four years before we could defend ourselves.”*

“The two people that were doing that were Will Lewis and the guy who died (Greenberg). Will Lewis cannot get away from that, he cannot escape. He was essential to that process.”

Twenty-two *Sun* journalists were arrested at the time; only one was convicted—of paying a police officer for stories—but that verdict was overturned on appeal. One of the arrested journos, who asked to remain anonymous, said the repercussions were appalling.

“But his life seems to carry on and he has never acknowledged the wrong that he has done. The legends of journalism like Woodward and Bernstein would clearly be uncomfortable working for someone like Will Lewis.”

[In an interview with the \*Post\*](#) when he was named as publisher, Lewis said he had a “junior” position with the Management and Standards Committee, [although a press release](#) from News Corp when the committee was announced described him as a “full time executive member.”

“I did whatever I could to preserve journalistic integrity,” Lewis told the *Post*. “I took a view very early on that I’m never going to talk about it. And it’s either right or wrong that I’ve done that.”

Five current and former *Post* reporters told The Daily Beast more transparency about Lewis’ role and actions is needed.

“To what extent did Jeff Bezos know about any of these things?” a former senior *Post* staffer asked, referring to the Amazon founder who now owns the *Post*. Bezos did not respond to a call for comment.

Larcombe, who has written an upcoming book titled *The Scum That I’ve Become* about his years at *The Sun*, said he will never forgive Lewis or the Murdochs.

“We were thrown to the wolves and had to stay silent for nearly four years before we could defend ourselves. We were languishing on bail when they were deciding what we did wrong,” he said. “All the contacts I had in my phone were contacted by the police at that time. It was awful. I had sources that I really relied on and cultivated over a long period of time that have never spoken to me since.”

At the civil trial, which features around 40 plaintiffs including Prince Harry, Kate Winslet and Hugh Grant, the plaintiffs’ attorneys will allege that the *Sun* newspaper hired private investigators to “blog” private information and illegally hacked into people’s voicemails—charges the *Sun* strenuously denies.

Just like in the Dominion trial that Fox faced before settling at the last minute, News Corp is bracing for the disclosure of thousands of emails and documents relating to the allegations, many of which are between former *Sun* editor and now News Corp subsidiary News UK CEO, Rebekah Brooks, and her former number two, Lewis, according to two people familiar with the matter.

[NPR](#) reported late last year that Lewis orchestrated a “massive cover-up of criminal activity” when he was leading the MSC. Citing court documents, journalist David Folkenflik reported how Lewis himself stands [accused of authorizing the deletion](#) of millions of emails. Lewis has [previously denied the allegations](#) when they surfaced when he was in the running for the top job at the BBC.



## **Rocky Road at the Washington Post**

***Amid Large Financial Losses, Jeff Bezos Brings in New Leadership from British Media. The Transition Isn't Going Well.***

***JSNE Published June 8, 2024***

For those who have closely observed the fallout from the phone hacking scandal, there is a deeper and somewhat more problematic danger lurking for the *Washington Post*.

“What should trouble those who are concerned about the editorial freedom of the *Post* and whether their sources are safe is that Mr. Lewis’ old bosses at News Corp know the truth about what happened and therefore now have a hold over the publisher of one of their rivals,” says Evan Harris, a former member of parliament who is working for the claimants team in the civil litigation. “I don’t know what Bezos was thinking.”