

Over 200,000 Subscribers Flee 'Washington Post' After Bezos Blocks Harris Endorsement

By David Folkenflik, NPR, October 28th, 2024

The Washington Post has been rocked by a tidal wave of cancellations from digital subscribers and a series of resignations from columnists, as the paper grapples with the fallout of owner Jeff Bezos's decision to block an endorsement of Vice President Kamala Harris for president. More than 200,000 people had canceled their digital subscriptions by midday Monday, according to two people at the paper with knowledge of internal matters, about 8% of the paper's paid circulation of 2.5 million subscribers.

"The problem is, people don't know why the decision was made" former *Post* Executive Editor Marcus Brauchli told NPR. Chief Executive and Publisher Will Lewis explained the decision not to endorse in this year's presidential race or in future elections as a return to the *Post's* roots: It has for years styled itself an "independent paper." Few people inside the paper credit that rationale given the timing, however.

Post reporters have revealed repeated instances of wrongdoing and allegations of illegality by Trump and his associates. The editorial page, which operates separately, has characterized Trump as a threat to the American democratic experiment.

The decision by Bezos, the billionaire founder of Amazon, was first reported by NPR on Friday. In the days since, two columnists have resigned from the paper and two writers have stepped down from the editorial board.

One of those writers, Molly Roberts, warned of the possible consequences of the eleventh-hour decision to stay quiet rather than publish the editorial endorsing Harris. "Donald Trump is not yet a dictator," she wrote in a statement she posted on social media. "But the quieter we are, the closer he comes."

"For decades, the Washington Post's editorials have been a beacon of light, signaling hope to dissidents, political prisoners and the voiceless," David Hoffman, wrote in a letter Monday explaining his decision to leave the editorial board. "When victims of repression were harassed, exiled, imprisoned and murdered, we made sure the whole world knew the truth.

"I believe we face a very real threat of autocracy in the candidacy of Donald Trump," Hoffman added in his letter to Editorial Page Editor David Shipley, which was obtained by NPR. "I find it untenable and unconscionable that we have lost our voice." Hoffman says he intends to remain at the paper.

Former columnist Robert Kagan, an editor-at-large, explained his decision on CNN Friday night to resign from the paper. "We are in fact bending the knee to Donald Trump because we're afraid of what he will do," Kagan said. During the Trump administration, Amazon sued the government after alleging it had blocked a \$10 billion cloud-computing-services contract with the Pentagon over the then-president's ire about coverage in the *Post*, which Bezos owns personally.

Yet Bezos resolutely supported the staff's coverage during the Trump presidency (and has not interfered with reporting on his own business interests or personal life).

"In Trump's previous — and perhaps only — presidential term, at no point did Bezos flinch when it came to Trump," Brauchli says. "So there's no reason to think he is doing so on this."