

Bari Weiss joins CBS with a mandate for 'balanced and fact-based' news

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CBS News is planning to take another step to appeal to right-of-center viewers by installing Bari Weiss as editor in chief. Weiss arrives with a mandate to redefine the CBS News brand in the eyes of the public and refine its news coverage. She is seen as a change agent for a network regularly accused by President Trump and his political allies of liberal bias.

"Bari is a proven champion of independent, principled journalism, and I am confident her entrepreneurial drive and editorial vision will invigorate CBS News," said David Ellison, the CEO of parent company Skydance Media, in a statement Monday, adding that Weiss will report directly to him. "We believe the majority of the country longs for news that is balanced and fact-based, and we want CBS to be their home."

In a note to staff, Ellison decried partisanship as a threat to communities. The media, he said, also played a role. "Too often it has become a platform that amplifies the very partisanship tearing our society apart," he wrote. Weiss echoed that view in a note to subscribers, saying that the majority of Americans, who are neither part of "an America-loathing far left" or "a history-erasing far right," have been ill-served, and she sees this as an opportunity to reach them as quickly as possible.

NPR interviewed eight current and former journalists at CBS News for this story. Several still at the network — speaking on condition of anonymity because the network did not authorize them to speak publicly — say they are withholding judgment until they see whether Weiss offers insight and guidance or starts issuing decrees with ideological intent.

Weiss' job will be complicated, however, by the company's intention to conduct network-wide layoffs this month of up to 10% of the workforce, according to two people with direct knowledge. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

Weiss is considered sharp, savvy and entrepreneurial. She was an opinion and book reviews editor at *The Wall Street Journal* before joining the *New York Times*' opinion section, where she also wrote under her own byline, often taking a contrarian bent.

While drawing support from many who accuse the mainstream media of being reflexively liberal, the site she founded, The Free Press, does not blindly embrace Trump's agenda. When the nation's top broadcast regulator, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr, pressured ABC to "take action" on Jimmy Kimmel, The Free Press cried foul on First Amendment grounds.

Just before last year's election, Trump sued CBS alleging that a *60 Minutes* interview with Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris had been edited in an effort to make her appear more articulate than she was. Many legal experts had considered the lawsuit frivolous and CBS likely to triumph in court. Yet Carr initiated a formal FCC review of CBS that reinforced Trump's complaint, raising the pressure on the network and its owners.

Before the settlement, Cibrowski's predecessor Wendy McMahon resigned, as did Bill Owens, the longtime executive producer of the network's signature show, *60 Minutes*. In a note to staff, Owens said he was no longer allowed "to make independent decisions based on what was right for 60 Minutes, right for the audience."