

Head of CBS News Is Forced Out Amid Tensions With Trump

Wendy McMahon, the president of CBS News and Stations, had allied herself with Bill Owens, the “60 Minutes” executive producer who recently resigned.

**By Michael M. Grynbaum, Benjamin Mullen and Lauren Hirsch
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The president of CBS News, Wendy McMahon, was forced out of her post on Monday, the latest shock wave to hit the news division amid an ongoing showdown involving President Trump, “60 Minutes” and CBS’s parent company, Paramount.

Ms. McMahon told her staff in a memo that “it’s become clear the company and I do not agree on the path forward.” Executives at Paramount informed Ms. McMahon on Saturday that they wanted her to step down, according to several people with direct knowledge who requested anonymity to share private discussions.

Paramount is [in talks to settle](#) a \$20 billion lawsuit brought by Mr. Trump that accused “60 Minutes” of deceptively editing an interview with his Democratic opponent, Kamala Harris. Many legal experts have called the suit baseless, but Paramount’s controlling shareholder, Shari Redstone, [has said](#) she favors settling the case. She is seeking federal approval for a multibillion-dollar sale of her company to a Hollywood studio, Skydance.

The situation prompted the executive producer of “60 Minutes,” Bill Owens, [to resign last month](#). He has told confidants that Paramount executives, cognizant of the settlement talks with Mr. Trump, had pressured him over the program’s coverage of the Trump administration.

A new flashpoint between “60 Minutes” and its corporate bosses flared last week.

For its May 18 season finale, “60 Minutes” had planned to air a segment, reported by Anderson Cooper, about the Trump administration’s order for mass firings at the Internal Revenue Service.

George Cheeks, the chief executive of CBS and a co-chief executive of Paramount, considered an idea to broadcast an unrelated prime-time special on Sunday that would air instead of the network’s evening lineup, including the “60 Minutes” season finale, according to four people briefed on private deliberations.

Leaders at the news division were uncomfortable with that idea. The prime-time special was not pursued. Mr. Cheeks did not ask “60 Minutes” to modify or eliminate the segment, one of the people said.

By the end of the week, “60 Minutes” producers decided to cut the I.R.S. segment from the weekend’s show, but for journalistic reasons. The producers said they had learned of new information from the I.R.S. that required additional reporting. “Our team will continue to report on these new details and will broadcast the story in the future,” the show said in a statement.

Within CBS News, it was widely expected that Ms. McMahon, who [took over](#) the news division in August 2023, would not be at the company much longer.

Executives at Paramount had expressed concern about Ms. McMahon’s performance for months. Her detractors pointed to an overhaul of “CBS Evening News” that sent its ratings plummeting, and her handling of [an October incident](#) involving the “CBS Mornings” anchor Tony Dokoupil, who in an interview had challenged the author Ta-Nehisi Coates’s views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Ms. McMahon’s critics also believed that the reporting at “60 Minutes” had become politically biased, exposing the company to unnecessary criticism. And it was clear that Mr. Trump was paying close attention.

On May 4, “60 Minutes” aired a segment that quoted some prominent lawyers criticizing the president for acting unlawfully when he issued executive orders targeting law firms.

Mr. Trump’s lawyers perceived those quotes, and the segment as a whole, as an attempt by CBS to gain the upper hand in the settlement negotiations, according to a person with knowledge of the internal discussions. They then countered by conveying a threat to Paramount: Mr. Trump might file a new lawsuit, accusing Paramount and CBS of defaming him in the “60 Minutes” episode, according to two people familiar with knowledge of the talks.

“CBS and Paramount’s attempts to subvert the legal process with lies and smears may necessitate additional corrective legal action, which President Trump reserves the right to pursue,” said Ed Paltzik, a lawyer for Mr. Trump.

A mediation session late last month ended with lawyers for Paramount and Mr. Trump still far apart on the terms of a deal.

Mr. Trump has regularly criticized “60 Minutes,” and declined to be interviewed by the program during last year’s presidential campaign. He has also continued to criticize the program’s reporting, which last month he deemed “fraudulent.” Mr. Trump has also urged his government regulators to strip CBS of its broadcast license. “CBS is out of control, at levels never seen before, and they should pay a big price for this,” Mr. Trump wrote in [a social media post](#) last month.

CBS executives have added additional layers of oversight on the program in recent months, drawing frustrations from some top producers, including Mr. Owens. “In a million years, the corporation didn’t know what was coming up — they trusted ‘60 Minutes’ to report the stories and program the broadcast the way ‘60 Minutes’ saw fit,”

Mr. Owens said during [an emotional meeting](#) with his staff in April. Any change to that arrangement, he said, created “a really slippery slope.”

Mr. Cheeks said in a memo on Monday that Ms. McMahon would remain at the network for “a few weeks to support the transition.” She will be succeeded for now by a pair of veteran network executives: Tom Cibrowski, who was recently named president of CBS News, and Jennifer Mitchell, the president of CBS Stations.

David Enrich contributed reporting.