

Washington Post owner Bezos blocks endorsement of Harris

Kevin Reed
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On Friday, the publisher and CEO of the *Washington Post*, William Lewis, announced that the newspaper would not be making an endorsement in this year's presidential election.

In "a note from the publisher" posted in the opinion section of the newspaper's website, Lewis said:

The *Washington Post* will not be making an endorsement of a presidential candidate in this election. Nor in any future presidential election. We are returning to our roots of not endorsing presidential candidates.

Lewis also said the decision not to endorse a candidate is "consistent with the values *The Post* has always stood for," and "a statement in support of our readers' ability to make up their own minds on this, the most consequential of American decisions—whom to vote for as the next president."

The *Washington Post* editorial board has made an endorsement in every election since 1976, when it endorsed Jimmy Carter against Gerald Ford, except for the 1988 race between George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis. In each case during that period, the paper endorsed the Democratic Party candidate.

The news pages of the *Post* have been consistently pro-Democratic, pro-Harris and critical of Trump throughout the months of the campaign since the two capitalist parties formally nominated their candidates.

In a news article also posted on Friday, unnamed sources were quoted as saying that an endorsement of Kamala Harris over Donald Trump had been written but not published. The sources were cited as saying the decision not to endorse was made by *Post* owner Jeff Bezos, the billionaire founder of Amazon.

The article stated:

The decision to no longer publish presidential endorsements was made by *The Post's* owner, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, according to four people who were briefed on the decision.

Bezos, according to the *Forbes* Rich List, is the third richest person on the planet, with \$205.6 billion. He lost a \$10 billion government contract for his cloud computing business during the Trump administration of 2016-2020. Trump has repeatedly denounced media sources opposing him as "the enemy of the people." At a rally last Thursday in Arizona, Trump threatened to revoke the broadband license of the CBS network.

During his administration, Trump called the *Post*, "The Fake News Washington Post" and derided it as Amazon's "chief lobbyist."

On Friday, after Trump spoke in Austin, Texas, he greeted executives from Blue Origin, Bezos' space exploration company. Trump spoke with Blue Origin's CEO and vice president of government relations. The company has a \$3.4 billion contract with the federal government to build a new spacecraft to shuttle astronauts to and from the moon's surface.

The *Post* news article said that the editorial board was informed on Friday of the decision by Opinion Editor David Shipley "in a tense meeting." According to two unnamed members of the board, there was "vehement opposition" to the announcement.

The report also said:

The timing of the announcement was especially jarring because it came just one day after two *Post* opinion writers—editorial board member David Hoffman and contributing columnist Vladimir Kara-Murza—received Pulitzer Prizes at a ceremony in New York. Hoffman's series of articles was called "Annals of Autocracy."

The non-endorsement announcement was followed by a news story published by the *Post* on Saturday that, as president in the summer of 2020, Donald Trump sought to invoke a little-known federal law to take over the Washington D.C. police force to violently suppress a peaceful protest near the White House.

According to the transcript of a conversation with governors on June 1, 2020, Trump said:

If you don't dominate your city and your state, they're gonna walk away with you. And we're doing it in Washington, in D.C. we're going to do something that people haven't seen before. But we're going to have total domination.

Robert Kagan, an anti-Trump neo-con Republican who was an opinion editor-at-large at the *Post*, resigned Friday in protest after the announcement by Lewis. The *Post* quoted Kagan saying:

It's a sort of preemptive bending of the knee to who they may think is the probable winner. Anybody who is as much a part of the American economy as Bezos is ... they obviously want to have a good relationship with whoever is in power. [It's] an attempt to try not to be on the wrong side of Donald Trump.

Speaking to CNN's Erin Burnett on her "OutFront" program on Friday, Kagan said:

Trump has threatened to go after Bezos' business. Bezos runs one of the largest companies in America. They have tremendously intricate relations with the federal government. They depend on the federal government.

The decision was also denounced by Marty Baron, the newspaper's former executive editor, who led the newspaper through its coverage of the January 6, 2021 attempted coup. In a social media post, Baron called the non-endorsement decision "cowardice."

A group of 13 *Post* opinion columnists also published a statement condemning the decision as "a terrible mistake." A staffer invoked the *Post*'s slogan, "Democracy Dies in Darkness" and said, "Democracy doesn't die in darkness, it dies when people anticipatorily consent to a fascist's whims."

The official announcement of no presidential endorsement is not surprising given changes made by Bezos in the newspaper's leadership, including the appointment of British media executive Lewis as publisher and CEO in January 2024. Lewis had previously served the right-wing Murdoch publishing empire as the chief executive of Dow Jones & Company and publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*. He had also served as editor-in-chief of the pro-Tory *Telegraph* in the UK as a political consultant to then-Tory Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The *New York Times* reported on Saturday that Bezos "has

told others involved with *The Post* that he is interested in expanding *The Post*'s audience among conservatives."

The *Post* decision marks the second time this week that a major media organization declined to make an endorsement in the race between Trump and Harris, after years of making such endorsements. Earlier this week, Patrick Soon-Shiong, the billionaire owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, blocked a planned endorsement of Harris, prompting the resignation of the head of the *Times* editorial board and two of its writers. Mariel Garza, the former editorial editor, gave an interview with *Columbia Journalism Review* (CJR) on Wednesday saying the editorial board had planned to endorse Harris and that she had drafted an outline of the editorial statement.

Garza said Soon-Shiong informed the editorial board on October 11 that the *Times* would not be publishing any presidential endorsement. Garza told CJR, "I am resigning because I want to make it clear that I am not OK with us being silent. In dangerous times, honest people need to stand up."

While an endorsement of Democrat Kamala Harris by major US newspapers such as the *Washington Post* and the *LA Times* would in no way represent a defense of democratic rights or a means of stopping the growth of fascist politics, the moves by the *LA Times* and the *Washington Post* do underscore the fact that the ruling corporate oligarchy, including its pro-Democratic Party faction, has no commitment to the defense of democracy.

The Democratic administration is fully supporting Israel's genocidal war in Gaza and its expansion into Lebanon and Iran and overseeing a police-state crackdown on anti-genocide student and faculty protesters on college campuses within the US. While it correctly labels Trump as a fascist, the Harris campaign adopts his fascistic border policies and works with the trade union bureaucracy to suppress working class struggles and strikes in order to secure the home front for the imperialist policy of global war—in the Middle East, against Russia in Ukraine and, ultimately, against China.

The defeat of dictatorship and fascism depends upon the independent mass mobilization of the working class in the US and internationally against capitalism and all of its political representatives and for workers' power and socialism.



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