

# [***NBC News boss Cesar Conde faces backlash from his network's anchors over 'inexplicable' decision to hire ex-RNC chair Ronna McDaniel***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BN0-0VP1-JBSS-S034-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

New York (CNN) &#8212; Cesar Conde has a decision to make - and it's not an especially difficult one.

The NBCUniversal News Group chair is facing a torrent of backlash from his own staff after greenlighting the hire of former Republican National Committee chair Ronna McDaniel as a paid network contributor.

Over the last 24 hours, the most prominent and recognizable NBC News and MSNBC personalities have voiced strong displeasure with the company's decision to welcome McDaniel to "the team." And they're not doing it via anonymous comments to the press. They're doing it on the record on NBCU's own air. Chuck Todd broke the dam on Sunday's "Meet the Press" with a set of candid comments about the hiring, and Rachel Maddow capped the flood of backlash Monday night with a blistering 30-minute monologue eviscerating the network's leadership for the "inexplicable" move.

Suffice to say, NBCU News Group is in unprecedented territory. Never has a network's C-suite ever been so thoroughly flogged by its most high-profile stars in such no holds barred fashion. Saying that Conde simply has a crisis on his hands would be a contender for understatement of the year. It's a five-alarm fire at NBCU News Group, and one of Conde's own making.

While NBC News president Rebecca Blumenstein and senior vice president of ***politics*** Carrie Budoff Brown were most directly responsible for McDaniel's hiring, a decision that MSNBC boss Rashida Jones did not object to it at the time, the buck ultimately stops with Conde, who hold the real power at the Peacock Network. McDaniel's hiring could not have happened without Conde's blessing.

It does not take a brilliant political mind with prescient foresight to understand that hiring McDaniel would ignite a firestorm of outrage - from both within 30 Rock and outside it. Conde, someone who ostensibly supports American democracy, should have rejected McDaniel's hiring on the grounds that NBCU News Group could not put someone on its payroll who tried to subvert the 2020 vote.

As so many of NBCU's staffers have underscored, the objection to McDaniel is not that she is a Republican. It's not even that she is a Donald Trump-supporting Republican. It's that she was an active participant in the plot to overthrow the last presidential election. That is not to even mention McDaniel's years of demonizing the press, smearing the journalists who work at NBC News and MSNBC as she sought to destroy the credibility of the organization that she ran to after being chased out of the RNC.

The notion put forward by NBC that it needed to hire McDaniel to bring its viewers "an insider's perspective on national ***politics*** and the future of the Republican Party" is absurd. If that's the case, the network should move to hire free agents like Tucker Carlson or Candace Owens. They too have their hands on the pulse of the Republican Party. In fact, they represent much more of where the GOP stands today than McDaniel. So, using NBC's logic, why not hire them? (Spoiler: News organizations rightfully have established basic standards for paid contributors. Asking that your employees have a commitment to democracy, to the truth, and to basic decency is not a big ask.)

But even if Conde has no allegiance to basic democratic principles, which this hire calls into question, given that he is known to be a political player who cares deeply about his own image in the press, he should have been wise enough to foresee that hiring McDaniel would be an ill-conceived move. How this did not occur to Conde is unfathomable and shows a tremendous lack of judgment.

Even more bizarre is Conde's management, or lack thereof, since the controversy erupted. It was clear early on that his employees at NBC News and MSNBC did not support McDaniel's hiring. If that was not evident on Friday, it was clear as day on Sunday after "Meet the Press." The network's employees were not only flabbergasted and demoralized by the move, but absolutely enraged by it.

At that point, the writing should have been on the wall for Conde - as it was for every other media executive that I have spoken with over the last 24 hours. It is evident that McDaniel has no real future as an NBC analyst and the decision to bring her on as a contributor will have to be reversed. After all, which NBC or MSNBC program is going to invite her on after all of this?

The only real question for Conde after the Sunday morning scolding should have been how he chose to back out of the deal in the least painful way possible. To be fully honest, I very much expected a Sunday evening announcement from NBC, one that would have earned praise from the company's staff and quickly been swept away by the rush of Trump news Monday morning.

But no such announcement came.

Instead, Conde has allowed the mess to spiral absolutely out of control. MSNBC's top stars hammered the network's leadership throughout the day Monday over the hire. NBC News' Guild blasted Conde, saying in a statement that under him the company had quietly laid off employees over the last month and instead chosen to "prioritize an election denier over its reporters." The already severe crisis was allowed to blossom into one of the worst corporate public relations catastrophes in recent memory.

All the while, Conde has remained silent. I asked his spokesperson, Stephen Labaton, on Monday whether the NBCU News Group boss had any comment on the situation. Does he have any regret? I didn't get an on-the-record response. Suffice to say, however, that what Conde does moving forward will say a lot about his character and commitment to democratic values. It will also say a lot about the NBCU News Group and what type of organization it is.

In her biting monologue on Monday night, however, Maddow did offer Conde a way out of this mess.

"Mistakes will be made," Maddow said."But our resilience as a democracy is going to be recognizing when decisions are bad ones and reversing those bad decisions. Hearing legitimate criticism, responding to it, and correcting course. Not digging in. Not blaming others. Take a minute. Acknowledge that maybe it wasn't the right call."

"It is a sign of strength, not weakness, to acknowledge when you are wrong," Maddow added. "It is a sign of strength. And our country needs us to be strong now."

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