

# [***NBC's Ronna McDaniel disaster is dragging Comcast into the political firestorm***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BNC-RFH1-DY7V-G0HN-00000-00&context=1516831)

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New York (CNN) &#8212; Editor's Note: A version of this article first appeared in the "Reliable Sources" newsletter. [*Sign up for the daily digest chronicling the evolving media landscape here.*](https://www.cnn.com/newsletters/reliable-sources?source=nl-acq_article)

What is Brian Roberts going to do?

The Comcast boss is watching an unceasing five-alarm fire rage at 30 Rock, scarring the reputation of NBC News and threatening to consume multiple parts of the Cesar Conde-run NBC Universal News Group.

It's difficult to succinctly summarize the disastrous state of affairs at the news division, given that multiple engines are failing simultaneously. But one thing is clear: Conde has lost control of his organization, prompting industry insiders to wonder how he continues to remain in his role as chairman of the NBC News Group. In the words of one veteran media executive I spoke to Wednesday, "It's inconceivable that he should."

Instead of extinguishing the inferno that broke out on Friday with the hiring of former Republican National committee chair Ronna McDaniel, sparking an unprecedented on-air mutiny over her role in working to subvert the 2020 vote, the actions of Conde and the NBC executives he has empowered have only hosed gasoline on it.

While it was immediately obvious that the announcement was not going over well with the network's staff, Conde froze still, digging his heels in the (Miami?) sand and refusing to dump McDaniel until after his top television personalities, including Chuck Todd and Rachel Maddow, went on the air and excoriated the hire. By the time Conde moved to sever ties with McDaniel on Tuesday evening, however, the crisis had spiraled far out of control and given way to even larger problems for the network boss.

The eventual decision to cut McDaniel earned him public praise from MSNBC hosts, but not before the 80-hour saga severely tarnished the reputations of Conde's top executives and touched off an all-out civil war inside the news group which has sent the organization into a tailspin.

Those details are starting to leak flood out of 30 Rock and into public view. On Wednesday evening, Puck's Dylan Byers [*offered an inside look*](https://e.newsletters.cnn.com/click?Eam9uLnBhc3NhbnRpbm9Ad2FybmVybWVkaWEuY29t/CeyJtaWQiOiIxNzExNTk2MzU1MDU5MDE4NjE1YjI5MjIyIiwiY3QiOiJjbm4tMjA1ZDY5MGQ2YmRhZmEyY2Q2MjYzYTg3ZGQ3ZTJkYTgtMSIsInJkIjoid2FybmVybWVkaWEuY29tIn0/HWkhfQ05OX2lfTmV3c19OREJBTjAzMjgyMDI0YzEyMTY5MDNiMSxjbjEsaHR0cHM6Ly9wdWNrLm5ld3Mvcm9ubmFnaGF6aS10aGUtaHVuZ2VyLXNjcmVhbXMtb2YtbGF0ZS1zdGFnZS1saW5lYXIv/sbk25980d47) into the chaos that has broken out - and it's quite an ugly sight to behold.

Byers reported that Carrie Budoff Brown, NBC News' senior vice president of ***politics***, had recruited Republican Richard Walters to "advance conservative pushback on social media against Todd." Brown denied that characterization but told Byers that she "had a conversation with Richard Walters and asked if [McDaniel] had supporters who could speak on behalf of her being an NBC News contributor," but insisted that she "never discussed what to say, how to say it, or who to focus on." Regardless, staffers inside NBC News are enraged at the fact an executive would have engaged in such behavior.

Inside Conde's inner circle, Stephen Labaton, executive vice president of communications, is also facing an accusation of professional misconduct. Amid the crisis, Labaton bashed his colleagues over at MSNBC, rebuking the hosts in a profane manner, Byers reported, citing a source. Labaton denied making the remark and suggested a disgruntled McDaniel had alleged it after being fired.

Over at MSNBC, Rashida Jones, the network chief, did not escape unscathed. Byers reported that not only did Jones initially not object to McDaniel's hiring, but that she expressed interest in having the election denier on the progressive cable network.

And, outside of Byers' report, I am told that staffers are not pleased with Rebecca Blumenstein, the NBC News president of editorial. During the network's daily editorial meetings this week, Blumenstein has managed to remain almost entirely silent on the McDaniel mess, drawing consternation and dismay from staffers. That could, however, change on Thursday. Blumenstein, I'm told, will travel to Washington to meet with staffers.

Meanwhile, as the top executives at NBCU News Group are ensnared in their own controversies, the company is under tremendous attack from right-wing figures, which are aiming to mar the reputation of NBC News.

"NBC just hired & immediately fired Ronna McDaniel, because the team refused to let even one Republican join them - that's how biased they are!" Elon Musk posted on his social platform X Wednesday.

Of course, the reality is that the journalists rejected McDaniel because she participated in Donald Trump's attempt to throw out votes in 2020 and in the years since publicly stated she did not believe Biden legitimately won the election. Nevertheless, the dishonest narrative is what outlets like Fox News are feeding their audiences - and that coverage has significant consequences for NBC News. Ironically, NBC News' attempt to make inroads with Republicans through the hiring of McDaniel has had the opposite effect.

By the time the right-wing media machine is through with NBC News, it will likely be one of the least trusted news organizations on the right. Instead of taking a few steps forward, the outlet has been sent a dozen steps back. The right is still animated by the Tom Cotton op-ed controversy that roiled The New York Times in 2020. That drama now appears relatively minor when compared to the seismic event that McDaniel's ouster has wrought.

And it is likely not over. Staffers inside the company are wondering amongst themselves who is going to be held accountable for the mess. Will any executives lose their jobs over the corporate catastrophe? That conversation is playing out as McDaniel hunts for an attorney as she prepares for a possible legal fight with NBC News over its decision to pull the plug on her contract and, potentially, the embarrassment the entire episode has caused.

The right-wing fury has also reached the door of Roberts. On Wednesday, Trump spent part of the day ranting on Truth Social against the Comcast boss over the McDaniel disaster, characterizing Roberts as a weak leader whose employees are running amok.

"The sick degenerates over at MSDNC are really running NBC, and there seems nothing Chairman Brian Roberts can do about it," Trump wrote onTruth Social. He later added: "MSNDC fake anchors have taken over NBC from Chairman Brian Roberts, and he doesn't know what to do!"

It's not the first time that Roberts has bore the brunt of Trump's ire. In November, Trump wrote that the government "should come down hard" on Comcast and "make them pay" for the editorial positions of MSNBC. Given that Roberts and the executives who run the media conglomerate hold a significant distaste for drama, it's difficult to imagine that he is thrilled to once again find himself in the former president's crosshairs - and all because of Conde's self-inflicted wounds.

Put another way: The fire in the NBCU News Group house has spread to the Comcast neighborhood - and that can't bode well for Conde, who I'm told had been remote-working during the crisis. (I asked Conde's spokesperson on Wednesday whether the network boss had returned to 30 Rock to manage the situation in-person, but did not hear back.)

While Conde struggles to quell the internal fighting, it is unclear what precisely Roberts and Comcast president Michael Cavanagh are doing - or will do - to help put out the flames. I asked Comcast spokespeople on Wednesday if either Roberts or Cavanagh were taking any action. Do they have confidence in Conde's ability to lead, given that his portfolio has been thrown into absolute disarray?

Comcast declined to comment. Suffice to say, that silence is rather deafening.

Analysis by Oliver Darcy, CNN

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