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From: Morning Media
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Subject: Morning Media: Tackling harassment at home — Vice fires three — Lauer speaks — Zucker weighs in — Mercer funded O'Keefe — Who owns LA Weekly?

By Michael Calderone | 12/01/2017 05:34 AM EDT

DEAN BAQUET AND MARTY BARON'S NEWSPAPERS have doggedly pursued allegations of sexual harassment against influential men in media and entertainment. The New York Times has tackled Harvey Weinstein, Bill O'Reilly, Louis C.K., and most recently Matt Lauer. The Washington Post broke scandals involving Charlie Rose and Mike Oreskes. But as the pair shared a stage Thursday during Business Insider's Ignition conference, Columbia University's Emily Bell asked about how they're drawing lines in their own newsrooms when it comes to allegations of sexual harassment.

- **"You're not just editors here, you're newsroom leaders."** Bell reminded the longtime friends and rivals. Baron said the Post's legal and human resources departments provide guidance on such matters, but acknowledged that they're still figuring things out. "These cases are not all the same," Baron said. "There are levels of severity. Anything is severe, but there are levels of severity, and different circumstances in each one. And I think that we have to look at every case individually."

- **One case the Times is looking at now** involves Glenn Thrush, the White House reporter who the paper suspended on Nov. 20 after a Vox report describing allegations of inappropriate behavior toward younger female journalists. While Times staffers I've spoken to agree Thrush exercised poor judgment, there's debate inside the paper as to whether he deserves to lose his job over alleged incidents that occurred outside the newsroom and didn't involve women he directly supervised. Baquet didn't specifically address Thrush's case, but described how he's approaching the issue more broadly.

- **"I don't think we yet know where the line is,** except for the obvious cases," Baquet said. "Harvey Weinstein's on such a far end. But I think there were no lines for so long that this wrenching debate the country's in, this wrenching discussion, is obviously significantly more healthy than the lack of discussion before. But I think it's hard. It's going to be tricky to figure out where the lines are going to be. We're all going to have to take case by case."

Good morning and welcome to Morning Media. And there will surely be more cases in others newsrooms, so if top editors aren't considering how they'll proceed, they should be. Please send tips to mcalderone@politico.com and [@mlcalderone](https://twitter.com/mlcalderone). Jason Schwartz ([@JasonSchwartz](https://twitter.com/JasonSchwartz)) and Daniel Lippman ([@dlippman](https://twitter.com/dlippman)) contributed to the newsletter. [Archives](#). [Subscribe](#).

VICE FIRES THREE: Vice's "toxic" culture came under scrutiny in a recent Daily Beast piece and there is a rumored New York Times exposé in the works. But the company also has been conducting its own sexual harassment investigation and announced Thursday night that three employees were fired. "The conduct of these employees ranged from verbal and sexual harassment to other behavior that is inconsistent with our policies, our values, and the way in

which we believe colleagues should work together," Vice chief human resources officer Susan Tohyama wrote in a memo first reported by CNN.

NBC's SHIFTING STATEMENTS ON MATT LAUER DRAW SCRUTINY: Jason Schwartz and I report: Employees at NBC News especially noted the wording shift from "in 20 years" to "current NBC News management," according to a network staffer. [NBC News chief Andy] Lack's current tenure at NBC News began in 2015, though he had previously headed the news division from 1993 to 2001. The tweak raised questions over whether NBC brass was suggesting that past executives may have heard of inappropriate behavior.

- **At least one**, CNN president and former "Today" executive producer Jeff Zucker, addressed the issue on Thursday. At Business Insider's Ignition conference, he denied any knowledge of bad behavior by Lauer. "No one ever brought to me, or to my knowledge, there was never, there was never a complaint about Matt," Zucker said. "There was never a suggestion of that kind of deviant, predatory behavior. Not even a whisper of it, nothing like that."

MATT LAUER BROKE HIS SILENCE on Thursday after being fired for "inappropriate sexual behavior." He apologizing for the "pain I have caused others by words and actions" and said he realized "the depth of the damage and disappointment I have left behind at home and at NBC." Still, Lauer is reportedly seeking a \$30 million payout from the network.

WATCH: Melissa Francis, the Fox Business host and former CNBC anchor, recalled to Tucker Carlson on Thursday night how a friend was sexually assaulted at NBC, but did not come forward out of fear management wouldn't do anything about it and potential damage to her career. Francis said sexual harassment is "not an NBC problem" and "not a Fox problem," but is pervasive across the big TV networks.

AMONG THE 'TODAY' SHOW FAITHFUL: CNN's Tom Kludt stopped by the plaza on the morning after Lauer's exit: "Before the show, the crowd gathered outside the studios had been briefed by a producer who asked them to refrain from waving and holding signs during what she said would be 'serious news' at the top of the broadcast ... Thursday's broadcast attracted 'Today' show diehards, many of whom admitted they were disappointed that they wouldn't see Lauer. But virtually everyone who spoke to CNNMoney said they were troubled by his alleged behavior, and applauded NBC for its action."

LISTEN: Playbook's Anna Palmer and Jake Sherman stopped by CJR's "The Kicker" podcast.

ROBERT MERCER FUNDED JAMES O'KEEFE GROUP: The billionaire Breitbart backer has also given money to Project Veritas, the conservative activist group now in the news for its bungled Washington Post sting, BuzzFeed's Joseph Bernstein and Kendall Taggart report. "Gravitas Maximus LLC" - a Mercer investment vehicle through which he also funded the conservative outlet Breitbart - gave \$25,000 to Project Veritas, according to a nonpublic portion of a 2012 tax form," they write. "The family's involvement has not previously been made public."

HOW TO COVER POLITICAL EXTREMISM: I asked Monday if the New York Times

needs a dedicated beat reporter covering white nationalism in light of the controversy over a soft-focus profile of a Nazi sympathizer and as some outlets, like BuzzFeed, have reporters deeply immersed in the fascism festering online. BuzzFeed's Charlie Warzel expressed concern with the Times' approach in a CJR interview. "When an institution like the Times shows that it's struggling to catch up with the rest of us, that makes people nervous and angry," he said. "We're in this period of flux right now, but we've got to treat this like covering any other extremist group. Just because they're on the internet doesn't mean they're less real."

- **Meanwhile, Baquet also responded** at the Ignition conference to criticism of the Nazi next door story, calling it "the most ridiculous overreaction." Baquet said he thought the story could've more clearly told the reader that "if you think neo-Nazis are guys who live in the hills of Alabama smoking pipes, in fact, it's more complicated than that" but "just as insidious." However, Baquet suggested the pushback was overblown, singling out academic critics "who have never actually done much journalism."

"**WHO OWNS LA WEEKLY?**" wrote Keith Plocek on Wednesday in the LA Weekly. In a move reminiscent of Sheldon Adelson's stealth purchase of the Las Vegas Review-Journal, the new owner of the weekly paper still haven't revealed themselves. The Society of Professional Journalists called Thursday for whomever is behind Semanal LLC, the company recently acquiring LA Weekly, to reveal themselves. "In an era of rampant misinformation and distrust, it's especially important that we do not allow the owners and backers of news organizations to remain a mystery," said Andrew Seaman, SPJ's ethics committee chairperson. "We cannot allow this to become the norm."

REVOLVING DOOR

Mike Federle, who has served as Forbes Media's President and COO, has been named CEO. Outgoing CEO **Mike Perlis** will serve as Vice Chairman and Strategic Advisor to management and the Board.

Alex Thompson, politics and policy editor at Vice News, will move to Washington to cover the Trump era as the outlet's first full-time staff writer in the capital.

Elyse Perlmutter-Gumbiner and **Freddie Tunnard** have been named White House producers at NBC News.

EXTRAS

- Jack Shafer asks, "Is it ever OK for journalists to lie?"
- Matthew Felling argues that the #MeToo movement deserves to be Time's "Person of the Year."
- Why Twitter didn't delete anti-Muslim tweets that the president recklessly retweeted.
- And Walmart has stopped selling a shirt with instructions on how to lynch journalists.

KICKER

"I'm not going to try to get into the mind of Donald Trump because I don't think there's a whole lot of space there. I think he's a kook. I think he's crazy. I think he's unfit for office." -- *Senator Lindsey Graham on Fox News on Feb. 17, 2016.*

"You know what concerns me about the American press is this endless, endless attempt to label the guy as some kind of kook, not fit to be president." -- *Senator Lindsey Graham on CNN on Thursday.*

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