

Jeff Zucker Resigns From CNN After Relationship With Top Executive

didn't," Mr. Zucker wrote in a memo to colleagues.



Jeff Zucker resigned on Wednesday as the president of CNN, departing one of the most powerful positions in American media after serving



The sudden end of Mr. Zucker's

and threw
about to

company, WarnerMedia, is on the verge of being acquired by [Discovery Inc.](#)

Mr. Zucker, 56, wrote in a memo on Wednesday that his relationship had

come up during an internal investigation into the conduct of [Chris Cuomo](#), the CNN anchor who was fired in December over his involvement in the political affairs of his brother, former Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#) of New York.

someone I have worked with for more than 20 years,” Mr. Zucker wrote. “I acknowledged the relationship evolved in recent years. I was required to disclose it when it began but I didn’t. I was wrong.”

He was referring to Allison Gollust, CNN’s executive vice president and one of the network’s highest-ranking leaders, who said on Wednesday that

she would remain at CNN.

“Jeff and I have been close friends and professional partners for over 20 years,” Ms. Gollust wrote. “Recently, our relationship changed during Covid. I regret that we didn’t disclose it at the right time.”

Both Mr. Zucker and Ms. Gollust are divorced. Mr. Zucker is also leaving

A Moment of Change at CNN

- **Chris Cuomo's Downfall:** The state attorney general, Andrew Cuomo, then the governor

- **The Streaming Race:** CNN+, a late arrival at the streaming party, is on a hiring spree. [Can it get viewers already overwhelmed with options to pay?](#)
 - **Direction in Flux:** WarnerMedia, CNN's parent company, is expected to be acquired later this year by Discovery Inc. in [one of the nation's largest media mergers](#).
- A leader in the television industry for 30 years, Mr. Zucker is the rare behind-the-scenes executive whose name recognition rivaled that of the anchors he oversees. He is perhaps best known for hiring Donald J. Trump [to star in "The Apprentice"](#) on NBC — [and then clashing](#) with his onetime employee after Mr. Trump became a media-bashing politician who

In keeping with a career at the center of the news industry, Mr. Zucker's exit on Wednesday was entwined with another dramatic story line: the downfall of the once-powerful Cuomo brothers.

Chris Cuomo has fiercely contested the terms of his departure from CNN, which has refused to pay the anchor's severance or honor the remainder of his current contract, saying he engaged in unethical conduct. Mr. Cuomo has retained the powerful Hollywood litigator Bryan Freedman,

In discussions with WarnerMedia lawyers, Mr. Cuomo's legal team raised the subject of Mr. Zucker's relationship with Ms. Gollust, according to two people briefed on the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to

discuss private conversations.

Early last week, both Mr. Zucker and Ms. Gollust were asked about their relationship by lawyers from Cravath, Swaine & Moore, a law firm that WarnerMedia had retained to investigate Mr. Cuomo's tenure at the network, according to two people briefed on internal deliberations.

Lawyers from Cravath were interviewing CNN officials broadly about Mr. Cuomo's tenure and the events that led to his termination, in part because CNN executives believed the dispute could eventually lead to litigation, according to the two people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss company business. Mr. Cuomo's lawyers sent a letter asking CNN to preserve messages between Mr. Zucker, Ms. Gellust, Andrew Cuomo,

Among other matters, days before Mr. Cuomo's firing, CNN had been informed of an accusation of sexual misconduct against the anchor by a former junior colleague at another network. Mr. Cuomo has denied the accusation.

at the company, two people briefed on their discussion said. Mr. Zucker offered to stay on for a transition period as the network found a new leader, but Mr. Kilar rejected that suggestion, one of the people said.

A hands-on manager who whispers in anchors' earpieces and calls into the control room at odd hours, Mr. Zucker had been absent from his usual editorial calls in recent days. But even some of his closest confidants had no idea that he was on the verge of an exit. In the CNN newsroom, where Mr. Zucker commands fierce loyalty, journalists and producers were left

“This is an incredible loss,” the anchor Alisyn Camerota said on a broadcast on Wednesday. “These are two consenting adults who are both executives. That they can’t have a private relationship feels wrong.”

Mr. Zucker and Mr. Cuomo were once close. Mr. Zucker recruited the anchor to CNN from ABC News, and he stood by Mr. Cuomo for months even after revelations that he had advised aides to Andrew Cuomo on how the governor could fend off a sexual harassment scandal.

Ms. Gollust also has a connection to the Cuomo family: She served as communications director to Andrew Cuomo, then the governor, [for four months](#) in 2012 and 2013.

But Mr. Zucker's support dwindled in December after more details emerged about Chris Cuomo's involvement, including efforts to uncover the status of articles at other news outlets.

Mr. Kilar, who is based in Los Angeles, visited New York and Washington on Wednesday to address CNN executives, saying he had accepted Mr.

Zucker's resignation. He announced that three executives — Michael Bass, Amy Entelis and Ken Jautz — would jointly lead CNN on an interim basis through what he anticipated would be “the close of the pending transaction with Discovery”

Mr. Kilar, a former head of Hulu, had been perceived as losing power to Mr. Zucker after the Discovery deal was announced. AT&T, the parent company of WarnerMedia, neglected to inform Mr. Kilar about the pending merger until shortly before it was announced and he had been widely expected to leave once it was completed. And Mr. Zucker is close friends

with David Zaslav, the Discovery chief executive who is poised to be the leader of the newly combined company.

AT&T is run by John Stankey, who was Mr. Zucker's boss and the head of WarnerMedia from June 2018 through April 2020. Representatives for both AT&T and Discovery declined to comment.

Mr. Zucker rose to prominence in the early 1990s when he became the wunderkind executive producer of NBC's "Today" show and made stars of Matt Lauer and Katie Couric. He became chief executive of NBCUniversal in 2007 before he was ousted from the company in 2010. Battling a series of

medical ailments throughout his career, he began a comeback by joining CNN in January 2013, eventually becoming a public face of the network in large part because of his complex relationship with Mr. Trump.

CNN was criticized during the 2016 presidential campaign for granting enormous amounts of airtime to speeches by Mr. Trump. But as Mr. Trump hardened against CNN, he publicly vilified Mr. Zucker and often joined his supporters in chants of “CNN sucks,” making the network a symbol of what he called a biased press. CNN itself brought on anti-Trump commentators, and its programming tilted toward more opinionated

Mr. Trump celebrated Mr. Zucker's resignation on Wednesday, claiming in a statement that Mr. Zucker had been "terminated for numerous reasons, but predominantly because CNN has lost its way with viewers and everybody else."

Fox News, whose coverage is often criticized by CNN commentators, also featured Mr. Zucker's exit on Wednesday, running a headline at the top of its website saying he "resigns in disgrace." An accompanying article said

Mr. Zucker had “personally allowed” CNN to “drift from a just-the-facts news operation to a hyperpartisan opinion platform.”

In recent months, Mr. Zucker had been focused on the shaping of [CNN+](#), a subscription streaming service that is set to begin this spring and a major financial bet for WarnerMedia. Mr. Zucker [was involved in enticing](#) big names like Eva Longoria, the NPR star Audie Cornish and the former Fox News anchor Chris Wallace to join the fledgling streaming network. CNN

will now proceed into an uncertain digital future without its longtime leader at the helm.

“Together, we had nine great years,” Mr. Zucker wrote in his memo on Wednesday. “I certainly wish my tenure here had ended differently. But it was an amazing run. And I loved every minute.”

Katie Robertson contributed reporting.