



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 3, 2013

Tennessee Newspaper Editor Fired for Op-Ed Critical of Obama

An editor at a Tennessee newspaper was fired over an op-ed piece that included a headline that was too frank for his publishers. Drew Johnson, who was the editorial page editor at the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* until earlier this week, [penned an editorial](#) critical of President Obama's jobs-creation schemes that included a "ridiculous government spending spree and punitive tax increase" — but no jobs to speak of, Johnson wrote.



The piece coincided with a visit by the president to the city, which Johnson wrote was probably a good thing, since it would give Obama "an opportunity to see the failure of your most comprehensive jobs plan to date, the disastrous stimulus scheme, up close and personal."

That scheme included a failed federally funded "Project to Nowhere," Johnson wrote, "a \$552 million socialist-style experiment in government-owned Internet, cable and phone services orchestrated by EPB — Chattanooga's government-owned electric monopoly."

While Johnson's editorial ridicule of the boondoggle "economic stimulus" program was enough to get him into hot water with his liberal editors, it was the headline that actually got him fired — which read: "Take your jobs plan and shove it, Mr. President: Your policies have harmed Chattanooga enough."

Johnson was fired after the editorial went viral across the Internet, drawing national attention just as Obama was visiting Chattanooga. The newspaper later released a [statement](#) explaining that Johnson had been ousted for "placing a headline on an editorial outside of normal editing procedures."

But Johnson said that had the headline been used on, say, former President George Bush, there would have been no problem. In fact, he told [Fox News](#), the requirement that last-minute changes to headlines be approved up the editorial ladder was only implemented after his piece was published.

Johnson told Fox that the headline for the editorial was a play off the old Johnny Paycheck country tune "[Take This Job and Shove It](#)," and he considered it an "apt title," better than the original "placeholder" headline. "He said his criticism of the President's jobs plans was in line with the views of many readers, but his bosses were dealing with complaints," reported Fox.

In an August 1 interview, Johnson recalled that the paper's top editor had told him in a meeting after the publication of the piece that "she was disappointed in the headline, that she thought it was crass, and she'd gotten a lot of complaints by Obama supporters." He added that "today I come into work and am told that I'm fired for violating that policy that wasn't put in place until the day after I wrote the piece." He referred to the action as a "retroactive firing."

The newspaper insisted in its statement that the firing had nothing to do with the content of the piece, but was totally because of the headline. "The *Free Press* [op-ed] page has often printed editorials critical of the president and his policies," the newspaper stated.



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The *Times Free Press*, which boasts two editorial pages — a conservative and a liberal version — soberly intoned that it “places high value on expressions of divergent opinion, but will not permit violations of its standards” — standards that Johnson insisted were implemented after his piece was published.

As for Johnson, shortly after his ousting he tweeted that he “just became the first person in the history of newspapers to be fired for writing a paper’s most-read article.”

Some *Free Press* readers responded to the firing by logging on to the paper’s Facebook page and expressing their own opinions. “Free Press means free to print as long as the Politburo approves it, right?” one reader posted. “You have FREE PRESS in your name but someone get’s fired for their opinion — WOW,” wrote another. A third reader noted that the paper “fired the guy who wrote his opinions against the president? That’s cool. ... Free Press? Right.”



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