

James R. Whelan, founding editor and publisher of the Washington Times, dies at 79

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The Washington Post James R. Whelan, the founding editor and publisher of the Washington Times who became a fierce critic of the newspaper's Unification Church owners after his abrupt dismissal, died Dec. 1 at his home in Miami. He was 79.

He had multiple organ failure, said his nephew Bill Halldin.

Mr. Whelan had a wide-ranging journalistic career and was editor of the Sacramento Union, then owned by conservative billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife, before he joined the Washington Times at its creation in 1982. The Times is owned by an offshoot of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, a religious group that claims millions of followers but is often described as a cult.

Mr. Whelan was aggressively courted for the top editorial job by Bo Hi Pak, the president of News World Communications, the church's publishing unit. Mr. Whelan said that he initially was reluctant to take the position but that he believed in the need for the new publication, which was billed as a conservative alternative to The Washington Post.

"I don't know anyone in the New Right who hasn't felt this sense of desperation and frustration over the absence of a voice in Washington," Mr. Whelan told The Post at the time.

Mr. Whelan was reported to have secured a contract that guaranteed his editorial control of the newspaper, which at the time had a circulation of about 100,000. He was removed two years into the job.

Times executives said their dissatisfaction involved Mr. Whelan's salary demands. Mr. Whelan rejected that claim, charging that the dispute was instead about editorial independence.

In public remarks after his ouster, Mr. Whelan said the paper was "firmly in the hands of top officials of the . . . Unification Church Movement" and that "a covenant of independence has been irreparably breached."

He subsequently worked for the Christian Broadcasting Network as news director and as an editor with a Latin American news service. He retired in the early 1990s but continued writing until shortly before his death.

James Robert Whelan was born July 27, 1933, in Buffalo.

In the early years of his career, in addition to two years of Army service, he worked for the United Press news service and its successor, United Press International, as a correspondent in the United States and in Latin America. He also was a reporter with the Scripps Howard news service.

Mr. Whelan was a 1967 Nieman fellow at Harvard University and received a bachelor's degree from Florida International University in 1975.

Besides his work at the Sacramento Union, he was managing editor of the Miami News and editor of the Panax newspaper group.

In the 1980s and early '90s, he wrote several books, most of them on Latin American issues. He lived for several years in Chile, where he taught at the University of Chile, before returning to Miami in 2008.

A complete list of survivors could not be determined.