



Condé Nast and the impending death of the internship

By: Kelsey Osterman - October 24, 2013

In case you hadn't heard, major media publisher Condé Nast has chosen to end its internship program — and that decision could signal the death of the internship as a whole.

News of Condé Nast's decision broke Wednesday, less than five months after two former interns filed a lawsuit against the company for allegedly failing to pay minimum wage. The lawsuit is still pending — and the company confirmed to *Red Alert Politics* that the program would end without commenting further on the motivations for doing so — but it appears that Condé Nast isn't taking any chances with future interns.

Other companies, such as Hearst, Fox Searchlight and Gawker, have also been hit by lawsuits in the past few years. Interns at companies nationwide are joining the cry for payment, and whether or not they show it, employers are running scared. They're being forced to make a choice: Either pay interns or risk lawsuits.

Make no mistake, the plight of the unpaid intern is admittedly regrettable. Many unpaid internships are full-time, meaning it's almost impossible to keep an internship while also trying to make a living. Interns often invest blood, sweat and tears into their companies, despite getting no tangible — aka monetary — benefit in return. Hence the recent outcry.

However, interns usually *do* receive intangible benefits, such as sharpening their skills and learning from some of the best in the business. And even if one gets stuck with an internship that doesn't yield returns in knowledge and proficiency, it creates a line on one's resume. For young people, who don't have a wealth of career experience, one resume line could make all the difference in getting their next internship or a full-time job.

Regardless, young people would probably like to see all unpaid internships converted to paid internships. In reality, that isn't going to happen, and young people aren't going to like the unintended consequences of the lawsuits, according to Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute.

"There is always a problem of them [interns] not seeing those unintended consequences of companies doing exactly what you see Condé Nast doing now, which is saying, 'OK, we just won't have internships

anymore,” he told *Red Alert Politics*. “So it’s not that people will get paid for the internships, they just won’t exist.”

McCluskey expressed what many companies probably fear: that after one or two successful lawsuits, the floodgates have been opened. And that’s not something most employers will risk.

“If lawsuits continue and courts continue to rule against companies, then certainly you will see a reduction of the number of internships available at for-profit companies,” he said.

Given the choice between paying an intern and not having an intern at all, many employers will take the second option. Frankly speaking, some interns are not worth paying minimum wage. An employer that has three unpaid interns would probably rather hire one more full-time person — who actually has job experience and marketable skills — instead of paying three semi-competent interns.

Instead of changing unpaid internships to paid internships, companies are just going to stop offering internships altogether. So good luck getting an internship, young people, with the fewer number of openings leading to stiffer competition.

And then good luck getting a full-time job without an internship on your resume.