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Editor-in-Chief

O'Dwyer's Newsletter



The Inside News of
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OMNICOM'S Q1 REVENUES SLIDE 4.4%

Omnicom reported a 4.4 percent slide in first-quarter revenues to \$3.5B, slippage that CEO John Wren blames on negative foreign currency rate comparison and divestitures.

Net income was flat at \$263.2M.

On a regional basis, OMC's US revenues decreased 0.2 percent to \$1.9B. Europe was down 14.8 percent to \$606.8M, UK fell 5.4 percent to \$338.7M and Asia/Pacific tanked 6.6 percent to \$366.2M.

The PR group, which includes FleishmanHillard, Porter Novelli, Ketchum, Portland, Cone and Marina Maher Communications, fell 3.5 percent to \$334.2M and 0.5 percent organically.

Shareholders Want to Oust Wren as Chairman

Omnicom shareholders want to junk the 2018 decision of the board to give the chairman title to Wren, CEO since 1997, following the retirement of 90-year-old executive chairman Bruce Crawford from the board at last year's annual meeting.



John Wren

OMC's board claims it spent considerable time reevaluating its leadership structure and assessing succession options before deciding to appoint 66-year-old Wren as chairman.

It says it contacted investors who were comfortable with combining the chairman/CEO roles due to the "complexity of our business, the critical nature of Wren's longstanding client relationships to a professional services business such as ours and our strong lead independent director role," according to OMC's proxy for the May 20 annual meeting in Boston.

Lead director Leonard Coleman is former chairman of Aetna and senior advisor to Major League Baseball. The 70-year-old joined OMC's board in 1993.

The shareholder resolution wants OMC to amend its corporate bylaws to require that the chair be an independent director. It provides the board the discretion to make the move following Wren's departure from the company.

The resolution states that an independent chairman is best positioned to build up the oversight capabilities of the company's directors while the CEO addresses the challenging day-to-day issues facing it.

OMC tells shareholders to reject the measure because it says Coleman "provides effective independent oversight and responsibilities similar to those of a chairman."

Wren earned \$23,945,128 in total compensation in 2018, which was 567 times more than the median \$42,205 earned by an OMC employee.

MACON-BIBB BLASTS ALERT SYSTEM RFP

Macon-Bibb County, the city-county that sits about 85 miles south of Atlanta, Georgia, is inviting marketing agencies to bid on a campaign surrounding the debut of its MBCAlert System, which will provide residents with the latest information regarding emergency events via direct message to their cell phones, home phones or email.

The Macon-Bibb County Board of Commissioners is looking for a marketing agency to raise awareness about the service among the county's 90,000 adult residents.

Scope of the work includes marketing via social media, web advertising, TV, radio, billboard ads and print.

The work also calls for community outreach via an email campaign as well as direct-mailer flyers, a Power-Point presentation and outreach among rotary, Kiwanis, neighborhoods and church groups.

The envisioned campaign would run for six months. MBC Public Affairs and the Macon-Bibb County Emergency Management Agency would provide oversight and guidance to the hired agency.

Deadline to submit proposals is noon (EST) on May 9. Proposals should be mailed or delivered to:

Macon-Bibb County Procurement Department
Attn: Nan Tharpe
700 Poplar Street, Suite 308
Macon, GA 31201

All bids should be labeled, "Bid 19-027-NT Macon-Bibb County Alert Marketing Campaign."

[Download the RFP, including required submittal documents \(PDF\).](#)



GOLDMAN SACHS' WELLS GOES TO PROSEK

Prosek Partners has recruited David Wells, who was chief marketing and communications officer in Goldman Sachs' consumer and investment management division, as partner. Earlier, he headed communications for Goldman's Americas unit.

Wells has also served as head of marketing and communication, EMEA at J.P. Morgan and has worked as an editor and reporter at the *Financial Times* and Bloomberg. He has also been a commentator for National Public Radio and was a frequent contributor to programs on CNBC, CNN, the BBC and other networks.



David Wells

NRA SUES ACKERMAN MCQUEEN, MERCURY

The National Rifle Association has sued long-time ad agency Ackerman McQueen and its Mercury Group PR unit for allegedly failing to turn over its business records to justify its billings.



The organization paid Ackerman McQueen more than \$42M in 2017.

According to the suit filed in Virginia Circuit Court, the NRA “requested access to material, readily available records that Ackerman and Mercury are contractually obligated to provide,” but the defendants refused to provide them.

The gun group claims it negotiated with AM for access to the records for the better part of a year and its patience has now run out.

The NRA claims its contract with AM entitles it upon “reasonable notice” to examine any and all “files, books and records” of both Ackerman and Mercury which pertain to matters covered by the parties’ contract.

AM dismissed the suit as “frivolous, inaccurate and intended to cause harm to the reputation of our company.”

The Oklahoma City-based shop said in a statement: “We will defend our position and performance aggressively and look forward to continuing to serve the NRA’s membership.”

The NRA and AM have worked together for decades and created the high-impact “from my cold, dead hands” messaging of the late actor and five-time NRA president Charlton Heston.

ZIMBABWE BOLSTERS TRUMP CONNECTIONS

Zimbabwe has hired Avenue Global Strategies to a \$1.1M one-year contract, which went into effect April 5, to foster better relations with the US.

Barry Bennett, who was a senior advisor to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, helms and co-founded AGS. He joined Team Trump after working as presidential campaign manager for Ben Carson, now Dept. of Housing and Urban Development Secretary.

Zimbabwe in March inked Brian Ballard’s Ballard Partners to a two-year contract valued at \$1M. Ballard led Florida’s Trump Victory fundraising group.

The firm’s job is to encourage a re-examination of Zimbabwe from the State Dept. with a view of “establishing the best possible bilateral relationship with the US and facilitating the restoration of Zimbabwe’s membership in the good standing with the community of nations.”

The Trump administration on March 6 extended economic sanctions imposed in 2003 against 100 officials and institutions of the African nation for another year. Current president Emmerson Mnangagwa has been working to restore his country’s diplomatic standing.

His government announced April 14 a plan to partially compensate white farmers for land seized from them by Mugabe and redistributed to blacks.

The Voice of America reported April 16 that Mnangagwa’s government hopes that Zimbabwe’s “cold relations with the west with thaw and that the ailing economy will improve.”

ON THE MOVE

Manifest has named **Jessica Becker** managing partner of its New York operation. Becker joined Manifest London in 2016, before making the switch to Manifest New York the next year. Before coming to the agency, she was an account director at Unity and account manager at Red Consultancy. In addition, Manifest London has promoted **Ali Maynard James** to managing partner. Along with Manifest Stockholm co-founders Anna Karlsson and Josefine Hedlund, Becker and James complete an all-female regional leadership team for Manifest.



Jessica Becker

KemperLesnik has brought on **April Rueber** as public relations group account director. Rueber comes to the agency from Ketchum, where she served as a managing account supervisor in its Chicago office. She has also held positions at Olson Engage and Weber Shandwick. She has developed and executed brand campaigns for global companies across food, beverage, CPG, tech, retail and lifestyle sectors.

Buffalo Groupe, LLC and its **Buffalo Agency** have appointed three new senior vice presidents: **Teresa Olsen, Lauren Nodzak** and **Emily Clark**. Olsen, who will be head of strategy for Buffalo Groupe, comes to the agency from Hallmark Cards, where she directed strategy for its branded specialty retail network. Nodzak, who will serve as head of client strategy and service, joins Buffalo from Pernod Ricard USA, where she spearheaded strategic public relations and influencer marketing for the company’s U.S. spirits portfolio. Clark will serve as head of people and culture. She was previously vice president of sales and marketing for Buffalo’s former parent company and largest current shareholder, Billy Casper Golf.

MSL has named **Isabel Long** senior vice president, U.S. business development, effective May 1. Long comes to MSL from Edelman’s Chicago office, where she served as SVP, director of growth and development. She has also worked in business development for Deutsch NY and DDB Chicago. In her new post, Long will lead strategic growth across MSL’s U.S. network. MSL, which is part of the Publicis Groupe, has 100 offices in 40 countries.



Isabel Long

Red Fan Communications has hired **Alicia Downard** as supervisor of client services. Downard comes to the agency from information services company Gartner, where she worked as part of its Digital Markets unit, managing brand marketing and public relations campaigns for Capterra, GetApp and Software Advice. She previously worked at the Office of the Texas Governor and with the Texas Historical Commission. In her new role, Downard oversees the agency’s client services team, including its content strategy and research division and the recently launched Brand Positioning + Narrative Lab. Downard reports directly to Red Fan’s founder, Kathleen Lucente.

THE OXYMORON OF “LEGAL ETHICS”

If you’ve ever wondered which party is more “ethical,” public relations professionals or lawyers, the answer can be summarized in two words: Jussie Smollett.

The obscure actor, purportedly “accosted” by MAGA hat-wearing racist homophobes on the frigid streets of Chicago, is back in the news. First, the city of Chicago sued Smollett, seeking to recover more than \$130,000 for costs related to the investigation of the actor’s dubious complaint. Then, Kim Foxx, the embattled Cook County Attorney, called for the county’s inspector general to review how her office handled—or if you’re so inclined, “mishandled”—the case.



Fraser Seitel

Regardless of how the lawsuit or the investigation turn out, the Smollett case has already yielded lessons about the differences in the counsel offered

by PR people and lawyers.

Assume that the actor, as the Chicago police charged, hired two African American associates to “attack” him, and then lied about it. Here, then, are the key questions that client Smollett faced and how his handling of them might’ve been different, had he consulted savvy PR advisors rather than ethically-challenged attorneys.

What happened?

This is the first question an attorney asks a client. The client then tells the lawyer what went on, and generally, the attorney leaves it at that and accepts the explanation. The reason a lawyer doesn’t probe is that he or she is forbidden to tell a judge or jury that the client didn’t do something the lawyer knows he did.

That’s why when they asked Alan Dershowitz whether he thought his client, O.J. Simpson, was guilty, the Harvard lawyer famously answered, “I didn’t ask, because that wasn’t my job.”

In Smollett’s case, of course, the actor claimed he was attacked by two white men, and his lawyers ran with it.

Had a PR professional been on hand, the question wouldn’t have been, “What happened?” but rather, “What did you do?” Public relations people must probe more deeply to determine if the client is telling the truth. If you think your client is lying, then you risk losing your own credibility by defending his innocence.

Accordingly, a savvy PR person would’ve had real trouble defending Smollett’s flimsy claim that he had been attacked. His lawyers suffered no such pangs of guilt. After a grand jury indicted Smollett for arranging the whole thing, the actor’s lawyer said, “Like any citizen, Mr. Smollett enjoys the presumption of innocence, particularly when there has been an investigation, like this one where information, both true and untrue, has been leaked.”

What’s the worst case?

One essential responsibility for a PR person is to give the client a “worst case” analysis. In other words, determine, in advance, what’s the worst thing that can happen.

In Smollett’s case, the worst thing that could happen was that he’d be found out to be lying about the attack, thus committing a crime, destroying his reputation and imperiling his career.

Had a public relations advisor been consulted before Smollett’s cockamamie stunt, the actor might’ve been talked out of risking everything on such a hare-brained idea. After the fact, a PR advisor would’ve cautioned the actor to tell the truth and show contrition.

What’s the right thing to do?

“Doing the right thing” is the ultimate public relations mantra.

A lawyer advises you on what you must do to stay out of jail. In Smollett’s case, his attorneys got the charges dropped. In response, Smollett’s lawyers continued to declare, “The case is closed . . . Mr. Smollett, like every citizen, is innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.”

A PR professional, on the other hand, doesn’t tell you what you “must” do but rather what you “should” do to defend yourself in the Court of Public Opinion; there’s a big difference. In Smollett’s case, the “right” thing to do, would have been to admit what happened, take responsibility for the mistake that clearly was made, apologize profusely for wasting everyone’s time, and volunteer to make restitution to the city.

The last thing a thoughtful PR advisor would’ve counseled Smollett to do was continue to maintain his innocence.

What do you say?

Jussie Smollett’s statement at his press conference after Foxx had thrown in the towel was stunning in its audacity.

“I have been truthful and consistent on every level since day one. I would not be my mother’s son if I was capable of one drop of what I’m accused of. This has been an incredibly difficult time. Honestly one of the worst of my entire life.”

Following his lawyers’ advice to play the “victim” to the end, the actor refused to be remorseful.

What should Smollett have said? Well, he could’ve taken a cue from fellow actor Felicity Huffman, who pleaded guilty and accepted full blame for participating in the college admissions cheating scam.

Accordingly, Smollett should’ve said, “What I did was stupid and a mistake. Implicating my two friends and taking advantage of the dedicated Chicago police force and the goodwill of the public was wrong in every way. I am ashamed and committed to repaying the city for its monetary loss and regaining the trust of the public through my actions going forward.”

Instead, the harassed actor opted to stay true to the wrong-headed advice his lawyers continued to proffer. With the Empire star’s acting future in doubt and the false police report story refusing to go away, Smollett’s attorney lashed out with one final tone-deaf appeal, “We will not try this case in a court of public opinion. There is no case to try. The case was dismissed. We should all allow Mr. Smollett to move on with his life as a free citizen.”

Good luck with that, Counselor.

Fraser P. Seitel has been a communications consultant, author and teacher for 40 years. He is author of the Pearson text “The Practice of Public Relations,” now in its 13th edition, and co-author of “Rethinking Reputation” and “Idea Wise.” He may be reached directly at yusake@aol.com.

DEVELOPMENT NONPROFIT ISSUES RFP

Isles, Inc., a Trenton, NJ-based urban green development nonprofit funded by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, is seeking PR and marketing services for a statewide campaign to inform the public regarding the dangers of lead.

The nonprofit wants to hire an agency that can enact a marketing, advertising and branding plan for the NJDCA's Lead Safe Home Remediation Pilot, a free program that provides lead-safe repairs and energy efficiency work in qualified homes and residential units.

Scope of the work includes developing an implementation strategy and comprehensive two-year strategic public outreach and communication plan; creating marketing materials and graphic development; and audience development and information gathering.

Total cost for the project should not exceed \$50,000.

Proposals are due by 5 p.m. (EST) on Friday, May 10 and should be mailed or delivered to:

Isles, Inc.; Attn: Peter Rose; 10 Wood Street; Trenton, New Jersey 08618

Bidders should submit five copies of their proposals, including a signed original and four copies.

[Download the RFP \(PDF\).](#)

GLOVER PARK PICKS UP KEURIG

Glover Park Group scoops up Keurig Green Mountain Inc. for DC lobbying duties concerning environmental issues. Environmentalists and social media activists have long targeted Keurig, which has its coffee-makers in more than 20M homes and business across North America, for the landfill waste generated by disposal of its single-use K-Cup pods.



Bob Gamgort, Keurig's CEO, and Monique Oxender, chief sustainability officer, address the issue on the company's website. They promise K-Cup pods across North America will transition to a recyclable format by the end of 2020.

Glover Park's Keurig team includes managing directors Catharine Ransom, energy and sustainability practice leader, and Jack Krumholz, former head of Microsoft's DC office.

NEWS OF FIRMS

G&S Business Communications has relocated its New York headquarters to 111 West 33rd Street, near the new Hudson Yards complex. The move follows the agency's August 2018 acquisition of CooperKatz & Company, which doubled its New York staff and broadened its roster of accounts and portfolio of services.

Antenna has rebranded and consolidated its parent company's subsidiaries – including Beckerman, Eco Branding and Chicago Digital – under the Antenna brand. The combined agency will provide integrated communications and marketing campaigns for companies in the cleantech, real estate, healthcare, mobility and B2B technology industries. A new logo, name, brand identity and website have been unveiled to highlight Antenna's expanded offerings.

NATIVE ADS CROWDING OUT DISPLAY

Native ads will continue to overtake display as the dominant form of digital advertising in the U.S., accounting for \$43.9 billion this year, an increase of more than \$8.66 billion from 2018, according to a recent report by digital market research company eMarketer.

Altogether, sponsored content will account for nearly two-thirds of all digital display ad spending in the U.S. this year—or 62.7 percent—an uptick of 3.3 percent from 2018's 59.4 percent and an increase of 8.5 percent from 2017's 54.2 percent.

eMarketer expects native to account for 64.8 percent of the digital display ad market by the end of next year.

Almost all that additional spending will go to mobile placements, according to the report, which currently gets about 85 percent of all native display ad dollars in the U.S., and most native ads will appear on social media, where native will account for 95.6 percent of social digital display ad spends this year (a .9 percent increase from 2018's 94.7 percent).

Facebook should get the lion's share of those ad dollars, according to the eMarketer report.

Finally, eMarketer notes that the native ad market is also growing in the nonsocial world, and estimates that native will account for nearly a third—30.8 percent—of nonsocial display ad spends in 2019, up from 26.3 percent last year and 19.1 percent in 2017.

VENN STRATEGIES COMBATS OPIOIDS

Addiction prevention coalition Voices for Non-Opioid Choices has retained political and public affairs shop Venn Strategies to handle health issues on Capitol Hill.

D.C.-based Voices for Non-Opioid Choices is dedicated to combatting America's opioid crisis by increasing awareness and access to FDA-approved non-opioid options and therapies to manage patients' post-surgery pain.

Overdose deaths involving prescription opioids in the U.S. has quintupled in less than two decades, from 3,400 deaths in 1999 to more than 17,000 in 2017, according to the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices has hired Venn Strategies to communicate issues relating to increasing patient and provider access to non-opioid approaches for acute pain management, according to lobbying registration documents filed with Congress in April.

A five-person team manages the account, including Tyler Roberts, former legislative assistant to Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and staffer to Reps Roy Blunt (R-MO), Joe Barton (R-TX) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE); Claire Badger, a former State Department staffer who was later associate director to the Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee; and Kelly Ferguson, former staffer to Reps. Hal Rogers (R-KY) and Paul Gosar (R-AZ).

Venn Strategies is the D.C. public affairs shop founded and led by Stephanie Silverman, who was a senior advisor at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips and an associate in Citibank's global finance unit.



RF REPS HONG KONG TRADE DEVELOPMENT

Ruder Finn has picked up the Hong Kong Trade Development Council to promote its “Startup Express 2019” and “Entrepreneur Day” initiatives.

The firm will work with HKTDC as it helps new businesses gain access to global markets via membership programs, exhibitions and workshops. RF will develop content and handle media outreach.

The 2019 Entrepreneur Day will be the 11th edition of the two-day event that features seminars and networking opportunities. Start-up Express debuted last year.

Paul Yang, senior VP/GM of RF Hong Kong, said his firm is excited to team with HKTCC as it continues to build a vibrant and sustainable ecosystem for the city’s start-up community.

LEVICK’S DESCHAUER MOVES TO MARKSTEIN

Markstein has hired Jack Deschauer as a strategic consultant in its Washington, D.C. office. Deschauer joins Markstein from LEVICK, where he was a senior vice president, co-managing the corporate affairs practice and leading crisis teams.

At LEVICK, Deschauer worked across numerous industries with such clients as CITGO Petroleum Corporation, Pratt & Whitney, the United States Olympic Committee, World TeamTennis and Carnival Cruise Lines.



Jack Deschauer

He previously was a senior director at Qorvis Communications, where he worked on national communications programs for defense contractors; nutritional, health and wellness groups; and GQ and Scientific American magazines.

Markstein represents clients including Walmart, Encompass Health, Colonial Pipeline, Diversified Gas & Oil, the International Women’s Media Foundation and The World Games 2021 Birmingham.

SEN. MURRAY’S COS JOINS PRECISION

Mike Spahn, chief of staff for Washington Democratic Senator Patty Murray, has joined Precision Strategies as managing director.

Stephanie Cutter and Jen O’Malley Dillon, deputy campaign managers of president Obama’s reelection effort, co-founded Precision as a strategic communications, digital and political consulting shop.

Spahn has been on Murray’s staff since 2011. His duties included overseeing lawmaking through the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and serving as senior counselor to the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee. He also helped guide Murray through two re-election campaigns. He previously served as staff director in the Office of the Democratic Conference Secretary in the Senate.

Precision partner Stephanie Cutter says that Spahn’s “expertise in navigating some of our nation’s biggest challenges and crafting winning policy and political campaigns will immeasurably help our clients achieve their goals.”

MEDIA MOGUL HINDERY GRABS GEPHARDT

Leo Hindery, who founded the Yes Network in 2001 as the cable home of the New York Yankees, hired Gephardt Group Government Affairs related to work regarding media infrastructure funding.

Walt Disney Co. in March sold the 80 percent ownership position of Yes that it acquired via the acquisition of 21stCentury Fox for \$3.5B.

Earlier, Hindery headed cable giant Tele-Communications Inc, which was merged into AT&T in 1999.

Hindery registered Trine Acquisition Corp, a blank check company, with the Securities and Exchange Commission in December. It went public last month, raising more than \$260M to invest in the media, communications and technology sectors.

Dick Gephardt, former Democratic speaker of the House, heads the four-member team that works for Hindery, which includes Tom O’Donnell, chief of staff to Congressman Gephardt, and Christina Hamilton, CoS to Congressman David Obey.

Hindery was senior economic advisor for John Edwards’ president run and economic/trade advisor to Barack Obama’s campaign.



Leo Hindery

FOX VET CROWLEY TO TAKE TREASURY POST

Fox commentator Monica Crowley is expected to become Treasury Secretary spokesperson following the exit of Tony Sayegh, a Fox News alum, next month.

She had been considered for a post at the National Security Council and was viewed as a candidate for the White House press secretary job, according to the *New York Times*.

Crowley dropped out of contention after CNN charged she plagiarized passages of her 2012 book, “What the (Bleep) Just Happened.” She later called the allegations a political hit job.

At Treasury, she would play a key role in promoting President Trump’s handling of the economy, including his tax cuts and trade policy.

MEDIA MANEUVERS

American Media has sold the *National Enquirer*, along with the *Globe* and *National Examiner*, to James Cohen, the former owner of newsstand operator Hudson News, for \$100 million. The *Enquirer* has seen a precipitous drop in its readership. The Alliance for Audited Media says that while the paper sold an average of 516,000 copies per issue in 2017, that number had plummeted to 218,000 by December 2018. AMI still owns such titles as *OK!*, *Star* and *Us Weekly*.

Meredith is taking *Money* off the market and is also turning the 47-year-old publication into an online-only property. *Money*’s June/July print issue will be the last to hit newsstands. Meredith had been shopping the title with a \$10 million price tag, but no one took the bait. “We are going to invest in the digital money.com brand site itself as well as leverage the *Money* content across our portfolio,” a Meredith spokesperson said, according to the *New York Post*.

COMMENTARY

Attorney general Bill Barr has served as president Trump's crisis PR manager since March 24 when he released his four-page summary of special counsel Robert Mueller's report on Russian meddling in the 2016 election. He should stick to his day job.



Bill Barr

The AG unveiled that infamous memo after a mere two-day peek at the more than 400-page Mueller report, a work-product from 19 lawyers and 40 FBI agents who interviewed more than 5,000 witnesses. He must be a fast reader.

Though Mueller's team wrote their own summaries of each section of the report, Barr decided to put his own spin on the report, which allowed the Tweeter-in-Chief to make non-stop

claims of "No Collusion, Total Exoneration."

Of course, Barr wasn't exactly an impartial judge when it came to the Mueller probe. After all, he made an unsolicited pitch for Jeff Sessions' old job via a June 8 memo to the Justice Dept. that blasted Mueller's investigation as "fatally misconceived."

And lo and behold, he got the gig.

Ever the good PR guy Barr gave an advance copy of the redacted Mueller report to his client and played all of his PR cards during his high-profile April 18 press conference.

Nobody asked Barr for a Mueller probe summary; nobody begged him to hold a press conference just before the release of the redacted report. What exactly were the journalists, who hadn't read the report, supposed to ask him?

The problem with Barr is that he just can't get out of the limelight, which goes against every rule of crisis management.

He said Mueller's evidence "is not sufficient to establish" that Trump obstructed justice.

And the ultimate spin: Mueller found "substantial evidence that the president was frustrated and angered by a sincere belief that the investigation was undermining his presidency, propelled by his political opponents."

Oh really, hasn't the president been crusading against Mueller and the "18 angry Democrats" for the past months?

Despite Barr acting more like a Whirlpool washing machine stuck in spin cycle, reality bites.

Mueller's report has more than 180 pages detailing evidence that Trump obstructed justice. Since current Justice Dept. guidelines prohibit indictment of a sitting president, Mueller helpfully noted, "Congress has authority to prohibit a president's corrupt use of his authority in order to protect the integrity of the administration of justice."

Great idea. It's up to the House Judiciary Committee,

which is led by Trump's old nemesis, "Fat Jerry" Nadler, to pick up the ball that Mueller put into play. No spin from Barr is going to deter bulldog Nadler from seeking justice.

Trump, who was a fan of former Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly, can certainly appreciate Nadler's "No Spin Zone." After all, Bill-O used to get huge ratings before he was taken down by his own misconduct.

The US is becoming a more dangerous place for reporters to do their jobs, according to the just-released 2019 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders.

The US slipped three notches to No. 48 of the 180 countries/territories measured, falling from the "satisfactory" to "problematic" category.

The slippage, according to RWB, goes beyond the "fake news" taunts of Donald Trump.

"Never before have journalists been subjected to so many death threats or turned so often to private security firms for protection," says RWB.

The group cites the June shooting of four journalists and another staffer of the *Capital Gazette* in Annapolis as an example of hatred of the media.

The Americas region showed the biggest deterioration (3.6 percent) of media freedom sparked by declines in the US, Brazil, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Mexico.

The EU and the Balkans registered the second biggest deterioration at 1.7 percent.

France slipped a notch to No. 32 due to violence at the Yellow Vest protests. French news crews now require bodyguards to cover the demonstrations and conceal the logos of their channels from the protesters.

Hungary fell 14 places to No. 87 as officials in prime minister's Viktor Orban's Fidesz political party refuse to answer questions from journalists viewed as non-friendly to Fidesz.

Poland slipped as its "state-owned media have been turned into propaganda tools and are increasingly used to harass journalists," according to the report.

Russia was down a notch to No. 149 as the Kremlin used arrests, arbitrary searches and draconian laws to pressure independent media and the Internet.

Norway, for the third year running, is the best place for journalists.

Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands follow.

The Index is based on the level of pluralism, media independence, environment for the media and self-censorship, legal framework, transparency and the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.

—Kevin McCauley

