



Kevin McCauley  
Editor-in-Chief



The Inside News of  
PR and Marketing  
Communications

271 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016  
212/679-2471. Fax: 212/683-2750  
[www.odwyerpr.com](http://www.odwyerpr.com); [jobs.odwyerpr.com](http://jobs.odwyerpr.com)

July 22, 2019 Vol. 52 No. 28

## INTERPUBLIC UPS POLANSKY, HEIMANN

Interpublic has named Weber Shandwick CEO Andy Polansky chairman/CEO of its constituency management group, succeeding Frank Mergenthaler, who is retiring as CFO at the end of year.



Andy Polansky

Weber Shandwick global president Gail Heimann takes over the helm from Polansky, who will become executive chairman of Interpublic's PR flagship. Jack Leslie will remain chairman.

The CMG group includes Weber Shandwick, DeVries Global, Rogers & Cowan, Jack Morton, Octagon, Current Global and Golin.

Polansky, who began his career as a journalist, took over Weber Shandwick from Harris Diamond in 2012.

Michael Roth, IPG CEO, called Polansky "a collaborative leader with a strong commitment to driving business results and core values and who has consistently evolved our offerings to stay ahead of client needs."

Heimann, global president since 2013, "is a leading strategist, creative powerhouse and a stand-out in the industry who inspires risk-taking work that drives long-term results for clients," according to Polansky.



Gail Heimann

Roth credits the duo for leading "the transformation of the industry's top PR firm in a new era of marketing communications."

## OMNICOM'S PR UNITS SLIP 3.7% IN Q2

Omnicom CEO John Wren has reported that Q2 PR revenues slipped 3.7 percent to \$349.3M and 3.6 percent to \$683.4M for the first-half.

The FleishmanHillard, Ketchum, Portland, CLS Strategies, Cone, Mercury, Marina Maher Communications and Porter Novelli group dipped 1.3 percent and 0.9 percent, respectively, on an organic basis.

Wren blames negative effects of foreign exchange rates and more divestiture than acquisition activity for the 3.6 percent slippage in Q2 revenue to \$3.7B.

Net income moved ahead 1.8 percent to \$370.7M during the quarter.

Geographically, Omnicom 2Q revenues dropped 13.4 percent to \$674.9M in Continental Europe and 0.7 percent to \$361M in the UK.

US revenues were up 0.7 percent to \$2B.

## HAROLD BURSON HEADS HOME TO MEMPHIS

Harold Burson, 98-year-old founding chairman of Burson-Marsteller, will move from New York to Memphis on July 23.

"I have been working in New York City – which had been my dream as a child – since 1946," said Burson in a statement "Working and living here is, to my mind, one of the greatest experiences anyone can have. I worked hard, had a lot of luck and have benefitted from having many wonderful colleagues and mentors who contributed to my success."



Harold Burson

Eighteen months shy of his 100th birthday, Burson expects to "even enjoy a pace that's just a little bit slower than that of Manhattan." He plans to continue a three-days-a-week work schedule and support BCW's Memphis clients, such as FedEx and US Navy.

Donna Imperato, BCW CEO, praised Burson as "a master of influence and true icon."

## STURBRIDGE, MA LOOKS TO RENEW BRAND

The Sturbridge Tourist Association is seeking proposals from agencies that can develop a renewed town brand and marketing strategy to promote the community to prospective visitors over the next three years. The Worcester County town is about 55 miles west of Boston.

Scope of the work calls for examining Sturbridge's brand and marketing strategy; developing a profile of the types of visitors Sturbridge receives; conducting research to see how the town's residents and businesses view the community; developing a town brand and written brand guidelines as well as a three-year marketing strategy; and providing technical assistance, support and guidance.

The contract runs until June 30, 2020.

Proposals, due by 12:00 p.m. (EST) on Aug. 14, should be sent to: Town of Sturbridge; Attn: Kevin Filchak, M.P.A.; 301 Main Street; Sturbridge, MA 01566

All bidding agencies must submit one original and six copies of their proposals along with a transmittal letter signed by an authorized official of the agency.

A separately sealed technical and price proposal—marked "Price Proposal – Branding/Marketing"—must be submitted to: Town of Sturbridge; Attn: Kevin Filchak, M.P.A.; 301 Main Street; Sturbridge, MA 01566

Forward questions to Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator Kevin Filchak, [kfilchak@town.sturbridge.ma.us](mailto:kfilchak@town.sturbridge.ma.us), no later than 4:00 p.m. (EST) on Aug. 7.

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

## **FTI FINALLY FILES UKRAINIAN WORK**

FTI Consulting received \$740K for strategic communications work on behalf of the Ukrainian Office of the Prosecutor General from May through December 2012 to promote a report by Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom regarding evidence and procedures used during the 2011 trial of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko.



**Yulia  
Tymoshenko**

Skadden failed to register with the Justice Dept. the Ukrainian effort on behalf of Paul Manafort, who was Donald Trump's campaign manager, which led to a US civil suit.

In January, Skadden agreed to register retroactively a Foreign Agents Registration Act filing and pay a \$4.6M fine. FTI/UK unit filed the FARA documentation on July 12.

## **BGR TAKES RIDE WITH OUSTED NISSAN CHIEF**

BGR Government Affairs is "providing guidance and assisting" Carlos Ghosn, the former head of Nissan, who was arrested in Tokyo in November for allegedly under-reporting millions of dollars of income at Nissan and using company funds for personal expenses.

Ghosn categorically denies those charges.

The 65-year-old auto titan, who was arrested after getting off a private jet in Tokyo, served more than 100 days in the slammer and is currently out on bail.



**Carlos Ghosn**

He filed a breach of contract against Nissan and joint venture partner Mitsubishi Motors in the Netherlands on July 17, alleging that he was unjustly terminated and seeking \$13.4M in damages. Ghosn's contract was with the Holland-headquartered subsidiary of the Japanese companies.

BGR's Haley Barbour, former Mississippi Governor and Republican National Committee chairman, and Lanny Griffith, a key player in the Bush I White House, are helping Ghosn resolve his international legal issues.

## **GE, NAM VET HILLMAN JOINS EDELMAN**

Patrick Hillman, who handled public affairs and issue advocacy at the National Association of Manufacturers, General Electric and Levick, joined Edelman Chicago July 15 as executive VP in its crisis and risk group.

Hillmann comes to Edelman from Washington, D.C. communications firm Sortie Group, where he was co-founder and managing partner.

Since starting out in PR with Ketchum in 2010, Hillmann has guided *Fortune* 500 companies in the tech, defense, health care, energy, finance and consumer packaged goods sectors through high-profile issues and led major public policy and crisis management initiatives.

In his new post, Hillmann serves as a senior advisor in such areas as crisis and risk management, reputation recovery, and issue advocacy. He will also provide risk-vulnerability analysis and audits as well as delivering campaign-style insights for high-stakes litigation.

## **PUBLICIS REGISTERS 1.6% Q2 GROWTH**

Publicis Groupe CEO Arthur Sadoun reports a 1.6 percent rise in Q2 growth to \$2.4B, a performance that was hampered by lackluster results on the US advertising front as clients slash fees.

He expects to remedy the ad sector through an organizational revamp and an increased emphasis on cross selling of services.

Sadoun stressed that organic growth returned to "positive territory," albeit at a 0.1 percent clip.

Though organic growth is "healthy and built on solid foundations" the French ad/PR combine sees short term challenges ahead. He said the profound disruption and transformation sweeping the communications sector has penalized Publicis in the short-term.

Over the long haul, Sadoun believes the combination of Sapien and Epsilon (data tech platform) positions Publicis as the leader in delivering "personalized experiences at scale" to clients.



**Arthur Sadoun**

## **NRA SPOKESPERSON BAKER EXITS IN REORG**

Jennifer Baker, director of public affairs for the National Rifle Assn.'s Institute for Legislative Action lobbying wing and spokesperson for the gun group, has left the troubled organization.

The exit of Baker, who was with the NRA for the past six years, comes on the heels of the June departure of Chris Cox. The 17-year NRA veteran resigned as executive director after being suspended by the organization on charges that he participated in an attempt to oust the organization's chief executive, Wayne LaPierre.

Cox dismissed those allegations as "offensive and patently false."

As part of Cox's "inner circle," Baker played a big part in the NRA's 2016 offensive against Hillary Clinton and drive to elect Donald Trump as president, according to *Politico*.

Jason Ouimet, ex-federal affairs head at the NRA, has succeeded Cox on an interim basis.

## **FOX ADDS EX-WHITE HOUSE PRESS AIDE SHAH**

Raj Shah, who served as deputy press secretary to president Trump before exiting this January to lead the media group at Ballard Partners, has come on board at Fox Corp. as a senior vice president.

Shah joins former White House communications director Hope Hicks, who is chief communications officer and executive vice president at Fox.

While working for Trump, Shah made appearances on Fox News in which he criticized Hillary Clinton and countered statements about the president, such as Stormy Daniels' claims that she had an affair with Trump.

Before his time at the White House, Shah was research director and deputy communications director at the Republican National Committee.



**Raj Shah**

## **HOW TO ACT FAST DURING A COMMS CRISIS**

It's been a tough few weeks for brands.

Blue Bell ice cream was victim of a moronic prank when a young woman thought it would be funny to open a carton, lick the ice cream, close it back up and return it to the grocery store freezer; and L Brands CEO Les Wexner—parent company of retailers Victoria's Secret and Bath & Body Works—was linked to disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein.



**Christine Reimert**

Truth of the matter is, scenarios that jeopardize brand reputations are reported on every week. Remember the United Airlines passenger that was forcibly removed? Or Chipotle's food safety crisis? Or the data breaches impacting millions of shoppers, credit card holders and others?

Some of these issues are business disrupters; others are enough to shutter an enterprise. The takeaway is that organizations, no matter how large or small, must be ready to assess, respond and manage these issues when they happen.

Here are a few things to consider:

### **Be fast, first and factual**

Being fast and first with your information should always be coupled with being right. The idea is to get in front of the issue with the facts and a response to either preempt a situation or to have a shot at shaping the narrative once something has occurred. Sitting back to see how others might respond leaves a void that others will rapidly fill with information and opinions that can run a wide range between true and false.

In the case of L Brands, the connection between its CEO and Epstein goes back decades, but it's been reported that Wexner severed all ties 12 years ago when Epstein first pleaded guilty to prostitution charges in Florida. Restating the status of that non-relationship now would be a more effective approach than the no-comment strategy L Brands has chosen to employ.

### **Make it a one-day story, not a three-part mini-series**

When you let others tell your story, instead of telling it yourself, you're left to react to the news. That's true whether your story starts on social media, in a blog, on the evening news or all three. When information leaks out bit by bit, or is wrong or misinterpreted, you're not likely to provide the big picture at once, which means you end up trying to correct or reshape the information over a longer period of time. Instead of reacting to the news again and again, present the facts yourself, and be the first to do it. Even in a situation that's negative or potentially damaging, it's better to own up, up front, on your terms, instead of letting the information take on a life of its own. Plus, you can better manage the issue by providing context and a framework proactively so that the story can be reported and received fully and accurately—all at once. Blue Bell is a good example. The company was slow to respond and never posted anything on social platforms and thus, the story dragged on all week.

### **Don't wing it**

If you don't know the answer or don't have the complete solution figured out, don't speculate about what

might've happened or might have caused the problem. It's better to let people know what your path to the solution is, rather than guessing at what the outcome might be. Then you can follow up with updates as needed.

### **Know who your allies—and detractors—are**

Enlisting the support of a relevant third-party voice can be an effective strategy for reinforcing your position or response. In the case of Blue Bell, a well-placed statement from an ice cream manufacturers association could've been helpful in establishing the industry's best practices, manufacturing standards and precautions regarding packaging, for example.

On the flip side, it's equally important to know who or what might be disruptive to your issues management or crisis communications response. Smart brands do that assessment as part of issues management planning—what voices can you anticipate will be in opposition to yours? In the heat of the moment, you can monitor for voices in real-time on social media and news coverage and determine whether you need to correct content or evolve or amplify your messaging as a result.

### **Create an issues management plan**

Create a turn-key protocol so that all of the preliminary logistics can be established. Who should be part of your issues management team? Do you know, specifically, how to get in touch with your important audiences quickly? Are there people or other organizations of influence that you should know about and have relationships with, in case you need their support? What's the current perception of your organization in the marketplace and how would that factor into an issues management process? What will the chain of communications look like should a negative issue emerge?

Answers to questions like these can inform a measured response plan.

*Christine Reimert is Executive Vice President at Devine + Partners in Philadelphia.*

## **NEWS OF FIRMS**

**Lou Hammond Group** is expanding into the Denver market. LHG Denver offers expertise in communications, marketing, media relations, advertising, digital and creative services for clients in such industries as hospitality and tourism, real estate, healthcare, financial services, energy, tech, nonprofit and destination marketing. The new office is headed by Ivie Parker, who was previously director of hospitality marketing at Timbers Resorts.



**Ivie Parker**

**Matter Communications** has launched a live video initiative, mLive. mLive produces live videos for brands across a wide range of original programming: product launches and demonstrations, cooking and game shows, interview and talk shows, thought leadership and corporate news, as well as live shows developed around corporate events and industry conferences. George F. Snell III is GM and executive producer of the new initiative. Snell comes to Matter from Weber Shandwick, where he was executive vice president of integrated media.

## **FORT SASKATCHEWAN FLOATS RFP**

The Canadian city of Fort Saskatchewan seeks an agency to provide marketing and advertising campaigns for various city departments over a three-year period.

The Alberta town, which has a population of about 27,000, sits 16 miles northeast of Alberta's capital, Edmonton.



Scope of the work includes creative services (development of creative campaign and messaging to be used across print, TV, video, radio and digital communications

channels, including print elements such as concept development, copy writing, art direction, layout and mock-ups, as well as production and post-production work); and media-buying services (strategy, planning and buying).

Terms of the contract commence January 1, 2020, and run through 2022. Budget for this project is approximately \$250,000 per year.

Proposals are due by 4:00 p.m. (MT) Aug. 15 and should be sent to: Wendy Kinsella; Director of Corporate Communications; City of Fort Saskatchewan; 10005 – 102 Street; Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta T8L 2C5

All bidding agencies must submit one bound copy as well as one digital copy (PDF format on a CD/DVD or USB flash drive). Proposals are to be submitted in a sealed envelope clearly marked "2020 – 2022 Marketing Proposal" along with the bidder's name and address (attached RFP doc contains a typo in this section confirmed by Fort Saskatchewan communications director).

All questions concerning this RFP should be directed to corporate communications director Wendy Kinsella, [wkinsella@fortsask.ca](mailto:wkinsella@fortsask.ca).

[Download the RFP, including market study survey results and safety pre-qualification application \(PDF\).](#)

## **INVARIANT ENLISTS IN APPLE CORPS**

Invariant has joined Apple's corps of DC lobbyists, handling issues such as privacy, encryption, copyright, intellectual property and competitive matters.

The firm headed by lobbying powerhouse and Democratic insider Heather Podesta also will school members of Congress about "supply chain protocols."

Podesta, who served on the staffs on Democratic Congressmen Robert Matsui/Earl Pomeroy and Senator Bill Bradley, heads Invariant's five-member Apple team.

That squad includes Anne MacMillan, ex-aide to now Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi; Eric Rosen, legislative director to former Congressman Anthony Weiner; Nicole Venable, staffer to ex-Senator Chuck Robb, and Annie Palisi, aide to former Speaker John Boehner.

Podesta launched Heather Podesta + Partners in 2007. It rebranded as Invariant ten years later to project a more bipartisan approach to communications.

She is the former wife of Tony Podesta, a former Democratic bigwig. His Podesta Group imploded in 2017 after special counsel Bob Mueller linked it to a Ukrainian client of now-jailed Paul Manafort, Trump's campaign manager.

## **GOODMAN, GREGORY REP AUSSIE GOLD**

The Australian Kangaroo, a 2,205-pound gold coin which is recognized as the world's biggest by Guinness World Records, made its U.S. debut outside the New York Stock Exchange on July 16.

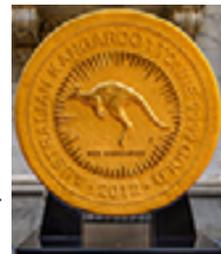
Goodman Media International and Gregory FCA provided publicity for the event.

The *Wall Street Journal* headlined its story about the \$45M coin, "A Gigantic Gold Coin Makes its Way to Wall Street" and assured readers that a thief was unlikely to cart it off.

"The coin—with Queen Elizabeth's profile pressed onto one side and a mid-hop kangaroo on the other—is beyond the wiles of the average pickpocket," reported the WSJ. "It measures nearly 32 inches in diameter and is almost 5 inches thick."

The appearance was part of a push by The Perth Mint, Australia's official bullion mint, to publicize its gold exchange-traded fund. Perth's fund, with \$133 million in ETFs backed by gold bars, currently lags far behind the U.S., which has \$52 billion in its gold-backed fund.

Perth Mint says that its gold ETF is the only one backed by a government-guaranteed mint. "Given the maturity of the American market and the understanding by U.S. investors of the importance of holding gold in any wealth portfolio, it was an obvious choice to bring AAAU (the NYSE handle for the Perth Mint's fund) to market in the world's share trading capital," said Perth Mint CEO Richard Hayes.



## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

**Ketchum** and **Droga5 UK** are working with **Kahlua** on a campaign encouraging consumers to take likes and social media less seriously and focus on living "in the moment." Kahlua's Zero Likes Given initiative will include a pop-up exhibition, on display in New York City from July 25-27, consisting of Instagram photos from around the world that all received zero likes. The goal of the exhibition is to give attendees a break from the pressure of their like count. The campaign cites a study showing that while over 90 percent of millennials think it's important to live in the moment, more than half of them have missed an important moment because they were trying to capture it on social media.



**Kaplow Communications** has been named agency of record for **Extend Fertility**, a fertility services company based in New York City. Kaplow will work to increase awareness of Extend Fertility's offerings. Extend Fertility helps women take on their fertility choices by making egg freezing, embryo freezing and IVF treatments more accessible and affordable, with pricing 40 percent less than the national average. Other brands that are part of Kaplow's health and wellness practice include 23andMe and The Breast Cancer Research Foundation.

## PHOENIX SCHOOLS SEEK MARKETING HELP

The Phoenix Union High School District, a high school-only school district in Phoenix, Arizona, is seeking proposals from agencies that can develop a marketing and advertising campaign to reach prospective students, their parents and prospective employees.



UHSD employs more than 3,000 and serves 28,000 students across 20 schools.

The school district wants a marketing and advertising plan and campaign that will increase district enrollment at select schools, retain current staff and students, increase the number of qualified diverse staff to meet recruitment goals for vacancies and increase awareness of PUHSD in the community and among its target audience.

Scope of the work includes assisting in the launch the district's newly-adopted branding campaign and may also include print, social and digital media, outdoor advertising, broadcast advertising, video/photography work, production of promotional items and special events and grassroots outreach.

Terms of the contract are set to commence during the fiscal year 2019-2020 and continue until June 30, 2020, with the option of a one-year renewal.

Proposals are due by 2:00 p.m. (PST) on August 14 and should be sent to: Phoenix Union High School District No. 210; 4502 N. Central Avenue; 4th Floor, Purchasing; Phoenix, AZ 85012

All bidding agencies must submit one original and five copies of their proposals, as well as one digital copy on a thumb drive. The solicitation number— RFP #1-819—should be plainly marked on the outside of the envelope or package.

Direct questions concerning this RFP to purchasing director Lila McCleery, [mccleery@phoenixunion.org](mailto:mccleery@phoenixunion.org).

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

## LENZNER TO STAR IN MPAA'S PR ROLE

Emily Lenzner will become executive VP-global communications at the Motion Picture Assn. of America on August 1. Currently senior VP-global communications & external relations at Atlantic Media, she will be based in DC and report to MPAA CEO Charles Rivkin.

At AM, she led communications for *Atlantic* magazine, which was sold to Laurene Powell Jobs' Emerson Collective in 2017; Quartz, which was unloaded to Japan's Uzabase financial publisher in 2018; National Journal Group and Government Media Group.



**Emily Lenzner**

Earlier, she was managing director for PA at SKDKnickerbocker and executive director of communications for ABC News in DC, handling PR for "Nightline" and "This Week with

George Stephanopoulos" and political coverage.

Lenzner succeeds Matt Bennett, who recently left the MPAA for the VP-chief communications officer job at American University.

## ON THE MOVE

Prophet has brought on **Bill Margaritis** as senior strategic advisor. He was previously executive vice president, corporate affairs at Hilton Worldwide; senior vice president, corporate communications and investor relations at FedEx; and vice president for Bechtel in London. Margaritis is also a past chairman of the Arthur W. Page Society. Prophet chief growth officer Scott Davis said that his "unique skills in helping companies maximize the value of their intangible assets—brand, culture and reputation—are a powerful combination."



**Bill Margaritis**

**Hill+Knowlton Strategies** has appointed **Daniel Holmes** as creative director in New York, continuing H+K's build-out of its stateside Innovation + Creative hub. In addition to previously working at H+K London and New York, Holmes has also served as creative director at Jack Morton London and Bisqit. He has created global brand experiences and content platforms for Adidas football, Facebook and Konica Minolta.

**Lambert & Co.** has brought on **Jordan Hoyer** as general counsel and **Lisa Wilkes** as senior director of talent and culture. Hoyer, who previously supported Lambert in private practice, has litigated commercial and financial service disputes in state and federal courts and in facilitative mediation, and also worked on business law and M&A. Wilkes comes to Lambert from First Perform, where she was a human resources consultant. She was previously an HR business partner at Chicago-based healthcare company R1 RCM.

**CFM Communications** has hired **Kendra Beasley** as vice president of communications. Beasley was previously senior director, communications at Nacha, where she managed the development and execution of multifaceted communications campaigns that blend content, media relations and targeted promotions. Prior to her tenure at Nacha, Beasley oversaw conference planning and messaging for FEMA's Risk Mapping, Assessment and Planning (Risk MAP) Program at ICF International. At CFM, she will offer counsel and provide support for communications planning, content development and program execution.



**Kendra Beasley**

**Harlem Children's Zone** has named **Karen Sodomick** chief communications officer. Sodomick joins the organization from New York-Presbyterian Hospital, where she was VP of communications. Before that, she was VP of communications and marketing for the Phoenix House Foundation and managing director of marketing and events for Teach for America. In her new post, Sodomick will work to raise awareness of HCZ's mission of disrupting the cycle of generational poverty in Central Harlem. She will help amplify the organization's voice in the education and anti-poverty fields in traditional, digital and social media, as well as through marketing.

## COMMENTARY

**Harold Burson, 98-year-old founding chairman of Burson-Marsteller**, has decided to relocate from New York to Memphis on July 23 to enjoy the slower pace of his hometown and be closer to his family.



**Harold Burson**

That will end an extraordinary 73-year run in NYC for one of the most influential people in modern public relations.

The O'Dwyer Co. has much admiration for Harold's communications skills and his all-out commitment to serving and anticipating the needs of clients.

But we especially appreciate the generosity and graciousness that Harold showed us over the years.

Jack O'Dwyer viewed Harold as the consummate PR professional, a guy who always was available for a phone chat about the goings-on at B-M and throughout the world of PR.

I accompanied Jack on lunch dates with Harold at B-M's Park Ave. South headquarters, where we were treated to first-class dining and updates from B-M's top managers.

To Jack, Harold was PR's gold standard. He frequently suggested to other PR firm CEOs that they should follow Harold's lead and invite him and his sidekick to lunch at their HQs. Unfortunately, we didn't get many bites. We always had Harold.

In the July 17 press release announcing Burson's return home, BCW CEO Donna Imperato praised him as a master of influence, true icon, extraordinary business leader and an incredibly kind, generous and worldly man.

She hit the nail right on the head.

BCW sponsored the July 8 Museum of PR event that marked the unveiling of its collection of Harold's documents and mementos. Burson talked about his career for about 40 minutes.

In covering the ceremony, I spoke with PR interns and college students who were in absolute awe of the great man. They reminded me of myself many years ago when I was a cub reporter at O'Dwyer's placing a call to Harold. The PR legend would get on the phone to take my sometimes off-the-wall questions as if they were the most thoughtful inquiries that he had ever received. He made me feel like I could make it in PR.

I'm sure BCW is planning a bash to mark Harold's 100th birthday on Feb. 15, 2021.

I can't wait to go.

Until that time, O'Dwyer Co. wishes nothing but the best for its friend, Harold Burson.

**Freedom House, which has been warning about the erosion of democracy overseas since 1941**, has issued a report outlining some danger signs developing here that are undermining the "pillars of freedom" in the US.

"Political polarization, declining economic mobility, the outsized influence of special interests, and the diminished influence of fact-based reporting in favor of bellicose partisan media were all problems" in the US before 2017, says the FF report called "Democracy in Retreat: Freedom in the World 2019."

However, FF believes there's little question that president Trump is straining America's core values and testing the stability of the country's constitutional system.

Here are key excerpts from the report:

"Trump has assailed essential institutions and traditions including the separation of powers, a free press, an independent judiciary, the impartial delivery of justice, safeguards against corruption, and most disturbingly, the legitimacy of elections. Congress, a coequal branch of government, has too frequently failed to push back against these attacks."

While past presidents have criticized the press, Trump stands alone for his "relentless hostility for the institution, itself." The president "deployed slurs like 'enemy of the people,' flirted with the idea that the media are responsible for and perhaps deserving of violence and defended his own routine falsehoods while accusing journalists of lying with malicious, even treasonous intent."

The US has a well-established and resilient democracy though FF calls the pressure on the American system as serious as any experienced in living memory.

"The judiciary has repeatedly checked the power of the president, and the press has exposed his actions to public scrutiny. Protests and other forms of civic mobilization against administration policies are large and robust. More people turned out for the midterm elections than in previous years, and there is a growing awareness of the threat that authoritarian practices pose to Americans.

"We cannot take for granted that institutional bulwarks against abuse of power will retain their strength, or that our democracy will endure perpetually.

"Rarely has the need to defend its rules and norms been more urgent. Congress must perform more scrupulous oversight of the administration than it has to date. The courts must continue to resist pressures on their independence. The media must maintain their vigorous reporting even as they defend their constitutional prerogatives. And citizens, including Americans who are typically reluctant to engage in the public square, must be alert to new infringements on their rights and the rule of law, and demand that their elected representatives protect democratic values at home and abroad."

Freedom House promises to watch and speak out in defense of US democracy. "When leaders like Mohammed bin Salman or Victor Orbán take actions that threaten human liberty, it is our mission to document their abuses and condemn them. We must do no less when the threats come from closer to home." —Kevin McCauley