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The Inside News of
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PUBLICIS ELIMINATES MSL CEO POST

Guillaume Herbertte, global CEO of MSL, is leaving the firm as Publicis Groupe CEO Arthur Sadoun has decided to eliminate the position.

"We will not appoint a new global head of MSL," wrote Sadoun Oct. 15 in a note to staffers. "With the implementation of the country model, all MSL offices in the world will now report to the new country structure of Publicis Groupe."



Guillaume
Herbette

He wished Herbertte well and thanked him "for his many contributions over the course of the last four years as the head of MSL and wish him all the best for the future."

Sadoun said there is no plan for a public announcement. He referred media inquiries to Delphine Stricker, group communications director.

SWINT EXITS PRESIDENCY AT PORTER NOVELLI

Jennifer Swint is leaving the global president post at Porter Novelli on Oct. 31, according to an internal note from CEO Brad MacAfee.

The post is being eliminated as PN makes the transition to a "global purpose communications consultancy" model.

MacAfee noted that he had several discussions with Swint over the past few months and they both agreed that her job should be scrubbed as part of PN's "evolution and considering the size and scale of the agency."



Jennifer Swint

The goal of the global president, according to MacAfee, was "to drive growth among our top clients and oversee the key strategic priorities as we evolve to become a purpose communications consultancy."

MacAfee believes Margaret-Ann Cole, executive VP-global talent leader, has the organizational design & change management savvy to oversee the new consultancy model in conjunction with the Omnicom unit's executive committee.

Client relationship leaders will continue to be responsible for sparking organic growth.

NEW MEXICO UNVEILS TRAVEL PR RFP

The New Mexico Tourism Department is looking to hire a "high caliber PR agency" that is well-seasoned in national and international travel PR to increase its overall earned media value, while strategically positioning the Land of Enchantment as the primary destination for the venturesome traveler, according to its RFP.

The NMTD launched the "New Mexico True" brand in 2012 to "eliminate misconceptions that New Mexico is a dry, arid, banner desert state with nothing to do." That effort has resulted in an increase in tourism dollars every year.

The Department wants a PR firm to adopt a storytelling approach and develop "compelling key messaging that personifies the New Mexico True brand promise—adventure steeped in culture and secure third-party validation of the brand promise."

The desired communications outfit will forge "a world-class PR cooperative tourism industry partner program into the overall PR strategy" and maximize earned media opportunities via focus on themes surrounding the introduction of commercial space tourism and the Virgin Galactic inaugural launch" from New Mexico.

The NMTD plans to award a contract of up for four years.

Proposals are due Nov. 1.

They must be sent via express carrier to:

Ray Maestas; Procurement Management; RFP #20-418-2002-00002-00 (NMTD Public Relations Agency); State Purchasing Division; 1100 St. Francis Dr., Room 2016; Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

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



OMNICOM PR GROUP REVENUES DROP 5.3%

Omnicom CEO John Wren reported a 5.3 percent drop to \$337.2M in Q3 PR revenues, and a 3.8 percent dip organically.

The Mercury, Ketchum, Porter Novelli, Fleishman-Hillard and Marina Maher Communications-led group posted a 4.2 percent decline \$1B in nine-month revenues and a 1.9 slide on an organic basis.

OMC suffered a 2.4 percent drop in overall revenues to \$3.6B, a slippage that Wren attributes in part to the negative impact of foreign currency translation and a decrease in acquisition revenue, net of disposition revenues.

Net income was off 2.9 percent during the quarter to \$290.2M.

RUSSIA'S STATE BANK TAPS GS

Vnesheconombank, Russia's state-owned development unit, has hired Geopolitical Solutions to a \$750K one-year pact to fend off additional US sanctions.

Grace Fenstermaker, who is leaving Qorvis Communications after a seven-year stint, handles the account. Qorvis parent, Publicis Groupe, declined to take on the Russian business.

GS is to provide PR services and research "that may include meetings with US government officials and members of the media regarding potential new sanctions (not existing sanctions) that could affect the activities of VEB.RF," according to its agreement with the International Centre for Legal Protection, located in Moscow.

VEB.RF arranges for financing of large scale projects to develop the economy, infrastructure and technological base to improve the quality of life for Russians, according to the federal filing.

Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev chairs its supervisory board.

MIAMI'S "UPTOWN BEACH" FLOATS PR RFP

Surfside, which calls itself Miami's uptown beach, seeks a communications partner to develop a "results-oriented PR campaign" to showcase it as a destination with all downtown has to offer minus the hustle & bustle.

It invites Gen-Xers and Millennials, segments deemed by Town of Surfside Tourist Board as "best value" travelers, to "discover the secret charm of Surfside" at their own pace.

STB's RFP calls for a PR firm to "develop a strong positioning statement that differentiates Surfside while placing the destination within the greater Miami story," pitch stories, secure partnerships for photo shoots/filming, arrange media tours and engage international media.

A mandatory pre-RFP submission conference is slated for Oct. 23 at Surfside Town Hall, 9293 Harding Ave., Second Floor Commission Chambers.

Proposals are due Nov. 25.

Click [here](#) for the RFP.

EX-REP MOLINARI SIGNS ON AT APCO

Former Staten Island/Brooklyn Congresswoman Susan Molinari has joined APCO Worldwide's international advisory council.



Susan Molinari

Most recently, Molinari did a seven-year stint at Google as VP-public policy for the Americas, where she handled issues such as data privacy, cybersecurity, government regulation, sustainability and inclusion.

Mark Isakowitz, chief of staff to Ohio Republican Senator Rob Portman, replaced Molinari at Google last month.

The Republican pol, whose father was Staten Island borough president, was in Congress from 1990 to 1997. Molinari subsequently worked as president of Ketchum PA and president/CEO of the Washington Group.

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

Zapwater Communications has been hired by **Pin-stripes, Inc.** Zapwater will provide strategic communications support as the brand accelerates its national expansion and growth, managing media relations, influencer relations, partnerships and events. Pin-stripes is an experiential dining and entertainment



concept that features Italian American cuisine, wine and cocktails, and bowling and bocce. Headquartered in Chicago, Pinstripes operates in ten locations nationwide.

Columbus, OH-based **FrazierHeiby** has added **St. Elizabeth Healthcare**, one of the largest medical providers in the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky region, to its client roster. FrazierHeiby will serve as agency of record for St. Elizabeth, leading national media, influencer relations and communications strategy. The agency has also signed on to lead strategic branding, website development and member engagement programming for Ohio Insurance Agents, an association of independent insurance agents in the state, and will lead internal and external communications projects for Silfex, a provider of custom silicon components for the solar, optics and semiconductor markets.

BackBay Communications has been chosen as agency of record for strategic human capital advisory firm **29Bison**. BackBay founder and CEO Bill Haynes says the agency's remit is to raise awareness of how 29Bison "can help companies, private equity and venture capital firms, as well as other acquirers, mitigate transaction risk and capitalize on opportunities." 29Bison provides clients with human capital due diligence, value optimization and pre- and post-transaction services.

Lou Hammond Group has added the **New Jersey Division of Travel & Tourism Development** to its client roster, providing public relations, digital marketing and positioning services for the organization. LHG will work to support New Jersey's profile as a world-class, four-season destination. The agency has also won business from clients including Manhattan's Fifth Avenue Business Improvement District, South Carolina's Cherokee Plantation and the Kimpton Key West.



Uproar PR has been named agency of record for **WHILL**, which makes intelligent personal electric vehicles, as it partners with personal transportation solutions company **Scootaround**. Uproar will promote brand awareness for the companies through ongoing media relations and social media efforts, highlighting how the companies have joined together to offer a mobility as a service (MaaS) model for assistive devices worldwide. WHILL previously worked with Uproar to help it garner coverage for the Consumer Technology Association's Consumer Electronics Show in 2017, securing news stories in publications such as Engadget and TechCrunch. As the company's PR partner, Uproar will continue to target national media for WHILL along with top-tier mobility trade and technology publications

ADVANCING TRUST IN HEALTHCARE

Healthcare has advanced by leaps and bounds in recent years, from the emergence of more precise diagnostic tools, to the discoveries of life-saving treatments for rare diseases, to the use of artificial intelligence to empower clinical trials, patient records and robotics-assisted surgeries, among other remarkable innovations. But is trust in healthcare advancing as rapidly as the industry itself?

The Edelman Trust Barometer found healthcare was just barely trusted in 2019, with only 61 percent of Americans agreeing they trust the sector to do what is right. While this score shows an eight-point rebound in trust



Susan Isenberg

from 2018, in the U.S. healthcare ranks among the bottom three of all sectors of business studied in terms of trust, tying with fashion and with only financial services behind it.

Trust in healthcare also has concerning disparities across several important populations.

Though globally the industry is trusted by both the informed public (defined as those who are between 25-64 years of age, college educated, in the top 25 percent of household income per age group in each market and report significant media consumption and engagement in public policy and business news) and the mass population, this year marked a record high in inequality between trust levels across these two groups. There's a global ten-point trust gap between these audiences, with 75 percent of the informed public reporting that they trust healthcare versus 65 percent of the mass population reporting the same. This widening gap underscores the instability of trust. It also may be reflective of the mass population continuing to feel left behind in their ability to access healthcare innovations even as they recognize the advances being made. Given the environment today, and that the mass population is particularly less trusting, healthcare may see increasing demands for change and regulation.

There's also a gap in how men and women trust healthcare. Only 53 percent of American women said they trust healthcare, versus 69 percent of American men. This divide has grown over the last few years. Given that women are often the "chief medical officer" for their families, they are a critical group for restoring trust.

One area where healthcare companies may have more room to build trust is around technological advances. The Edelman Trust Barometer shows that, globally, people feel generally positive about health tech, with 76 percent agreeing they trust health tech to make life better for "people like me."

People trust tech as much as they see their own benefits linked to it, though personal data can be the Achilles' heel. For healthcare companies to build on the trust halo around their technology, consumers must know their data is private and protected. How will patient data be leveraged to create efficiencies in the delivery of care and more personalized treatments? How will technology provide behavioral reinforcements that improve patient adherence and compliance needs? These questions will need to be clearly explained as health and tech continue to merge.

Telling a company's health tech story is one opportunity to build trust. Another is to activate across multiple communications channels to ensure key audiences—particularly women and the mass population—are reached.

Globally, the Edelman Trust Barometer found that while media is still distrusted, media engagement rose this year; meaning more people are reporting consuming news weekly or more. Trust in both traditional media and search engines also rose. Traditional media remains an important part of the communications model, but it is important for health companies to recognize that this does not fulfill the need for organizations to also tell their own stories. In fact, trust in owned media saw an eight-point jump, one of the largest increases we have seen across the types of media studied.

Edelman Trust Barometer data also showed healthcare companies' content about medical conditions and their treatments is seen as credible by 68 percent globally, up four points since the 2018 Trust Barometer. This is an opportunity for health companies to leverage their owned media channels to reach consumers.

Finally, to earn and keep trust, healthcare companies must be transparent, particularly about pricing.

The Edelman Trust Barometer found that globally, being transparent around the cost of products and services was the most important factor for how healthcare companies can earn and keep trust. All healthcare companies must be prepared to discuss cost, particularly in markets like the U.S., where there's been a call for government action.

The innovations healthcare companies provide to society are remarkable and much needed to prevent and treat disease and enhance overall human wellness. When speaking to these advancements, our healthcare stories need to match audience expectations so that the industry's remarkable breakthroughs are trusted.

Susan Isenberg is Global Chair at Edelman Health.

ANGELS PR EXEC GAVE SKAGGS OXYCODONE

Eric Kay, director of communications for the Los Angeles Angels, told federal investigators that he supplied oxycodone to pitcher Tyler Skaggs, who died July 1, and



Eric Kay

used it with him for a number of years, according to an ESPN report.

Kay told US Drug Enforcement Administration agents that at least five other players used opiates while they were on the Angels baseball team and that two executives on the team knew about it.

Skaggs died in Southlake, TX, after choking on his vomit. The local medical examiner found evidence of fentanyl, oxycodone and alcohol in the system of the 27-year-old.

Kay alleged that Tim Mead, former VP-communications of the Angels, knew about Skaggs' drug use.

Mead, now president of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, denies knowledge of Skaggs' opioid abuse.

Kay, 45, currently in outpatient treatment for substance abuse, is on paid leave from the Angels, whom he joined as an intern in 1996.

BALLARD PULLS PLUG ON TURKISH BANK

Ballard Partners, which has close ties with president Trump, terminated its relationship with Turkey's Halkbank on Oct. 16, the day after the US Justice Dept. filed fraud and money-laundering charges against the country's No. 2 state-owned bank.

The charges stem from the US District Court for the Southern District of New York investigation into whether Halkbank helped Iran dodge US sanctions.



BP began providing strategic communications and advisory services to Halkbank in August 2017 under a one-year contract worth \$1.5M.

The firm of Brian Ballard, who was president Trump's chief fundraiser in Florida, was already working for the Republic of Turkey at the time under a one-year \$1.5M contract that went into effect in May 2017. That relationship lasted until November 2018.

Halkbank signed a three-month extension with BP on Aug. 21 at \$40K a-month.

Ballard handled the Halkbank business with Jamie Rubin, former assistant secretary of state for PA in Bill Clinton's White House and Syl Lukis, head of BP's Washington office.

UND POSTS UNMANNED AIRCRAFT RFP

The University of North Dakota is soliciting proposals from agencies that can provide PR and marketing services and strategies to promote the state's unmanned aircraft systems industry.

UND is looking for a PR/marketing firm that can boost the visibility of North Dakota's UAS sector in an effort to drive increased business opportunities, investment, infrastructure and relocation of future UAS companies and workforce members.

Scope of the work includes executing a targeted campaign to generate feature articles, event listings and related publicity; providing recommendations on PR and branding strategies; providing talking points, speeches, presentations and press releases; creating and managing an editorial calendar; contacting media; assisting with social media marketing; coordinating messaging with industry partners and arranging media interviews; planning press conferences; tracking coverage and measuring efforts; and sending media clips on a regular basis.



Terms of the work are set to run for one year after contract begins.

UND has not presently established a budget for the work.

Proposals are due by 2:00 p.m. (CST) on Nov. 5 and can be submitted by going here and clicking on solicitation # 53-202 ("Unmanned Aircraft Systems Network Public Relations/Marketing Communication Services"). Bidders can then click on "Upload Response" to post a maximum of five documents. Bidders must upload their technical proposals and cost proposals in separate files.

Questions should be directed to procurement officer David Krause, david.krause@und.edu. Deadline for questions has been extended to Oct. 25.

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

BGR STEPS INTO RUSSIAN SANCTIONS FIGHT

BGR Government Affairs represents Allseas Nederland, Dutch energy company that is laying pipe under the Baltic Sea for the controversial Nord Stream 2 project.

Fifty-percent owned by Russia's Gazprom, the 760-mile NS2 pipeline would move natural gas from eastern Russia to Germany. Royal Dutch Shell and Germany's BASF are among Gazprom's partners in the project.

Sens. Ted Cruz (R-Tx) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) have introduced a bill that would slap sanctions on "certain vessels involved in the construction of Russian energy export pipelines."

They say NS2 will increase Europe's dependence on Russian natural gas while cutting the amount of energy that flows through the existing pipeline in Ukraine.

Allseas is using BGR for strategic guidance and counsel regarding issues and legislation regarding European energy security.

BGR founding partner Haley Barbour (former chairman of the Republican National Committee and governor of Mississippi) heads the lobbying team that includes Walker Roberts (special assistant to president Reagan) and Lester Munson (ex-staff director of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee).

MSL ALUM SMITH HEADS INVARIANT'S PR PUSH

Stephanie Smith, who was global client and business development officer at MSL, has landed at Invariant to spearhead the government affairs/PA shop's push into strategic communications.

At the Publicis Groupe unit, Smith also served as global account lead for the agency's Netflix business, which included overseeing its work on the streaming platform's simultaneous launch in over 130 countries.

Before joining MSL in 2004, Smith was a producer at ABC News, working on such programs as "Good Morning America" and "Nightline," and World News Tonight with Peter Jennings.



Stephanie Smith

Invariant CEO & founder Heather Podesta says that moving into strategic communications is a "natural extension" of the firm's work.

OLSON OF FINGERPAINT ELECTED PRSA CHAIR

Michelle Olson was elected 2021 PRSA National Chair at the 2019 PRSA Leadership Assembly.

Olson, who runs the Scottsdale, AZ office of New York-based Fingerpaint, has served PRSA as a director, representing the organization's western district, since 2017. She will be chair-elect in 2020, succeeding Children's Hospital of Alabama chief communications officer T. Garland Stansell, who will serve as chair.

Also elected to PRSA's executive committee were Alyeska Pipeline Service Company chief communications officer Michelle Egan, who takes on the role of treasurer, and Prisma Health Midlands Foundation vice president, public relations Amy Coward who will serve as secretary.

LITIGATION PR PRO MCCALED JOINS MERCURY

Ian McCaleb, who led Hogan Lovells' litigation communications & crisis group and chaired Levick's legal advisory practice, has joined Mercury as managing director.

He was senior spokesperson at the criminal division of the Justice Dept. and served as the sole media consultant for the multi-agency task force created to assess damage from the leak of classified data to WikiLeaks.org.

McCaleb worked as reporter/producer at Fox News, CNN, UPI and McClatchy specializing in legal affairs, law enforcement, politics, legislation, terrorism and conflict and the U.S. defense/intelligence establishment.

Kieran Mahoney, Mercury CEO said McCaleb's background as "trusted advisor to some of the world's most influential law firms," Justice Dept. official, US intelligence specialist and journalist makes him "a formidable addition as a communications strategist for a variety of legal and reputational matters."

Omnicom owns Mercury.

GEOHERMAL COUNCIL COOKS UP PR RFP

The Geothermal Resources Council, founded in 1972, is looking for a firm to help develop a "sharp and modern PR that reaches out across society to promote awareness of geothermal energy," according to its RFP.

The Council wants a communication partner(s) to build a marketing plan and website for the organization and for the geothermal community and industry that targets the organization's mission.

A selected firm will also review the GRC name and recommend whether a new moniker would bolster branding efforts.

Estela Smith at grc@geothermal.org will handle written questions about the RFP before 10 PM Pacific Time on Oct. 31. She'll accept PDF responses to the RFP until 10 PM Pacific Time on Nov. 15.

Will Pettitt, GRC executive director, will select the firm(s) with the final budget approved by the board of directors.

The RFP is [here](#).

FAMILY CIRCLE IS SHUTTING DOWN

Family Circle, which has been publishing since 1932, is being shuttered by Meredith Corp. after its December issue. The closure is part of a restructuring at Meredith's magazine division that is claiming 70 jobs, including the 25 being lost at *Family Circle*.

FC had more than 4 million subscribers at the end of June, the last period for which complete figures were available, according to the Alliance for Audited Media.

Meredith Corp., which bought *Family Circle* from Gruner + Jahr in 2005, also owns *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Real Simple*, *Magnolia*, *Martha Stewart Living* and *Southern Living*.

When Meredith purchased Time Inc.'s magazine assets in 2017, it said it hoped to generate \$500 million in new revenue through cost cutting and sales. It subsequently sold off *Time*, *Fortune* and *Sports Illustrated*.

NEWS OF FIRMS

Burrelles (formerly BurrellesLuce) has rebranded its corporate identity and launched an expanded portfolio of data and media monitoring services, such as analytical research, data services and custom reporting through partnerships with firms. The new offerings also include the Burrelles AM Headline Briefing and industry reports tracking news flow in specific areas of the economy.



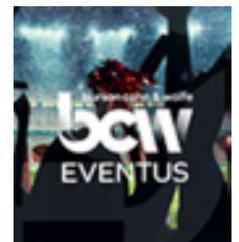
Gavin, a digitally focused PR and marketing agency with offices in York and Harrisburg, PA, has acquired brand strategy and integrated design services firm **Holberg Design**. Rick Holberg is coming on board at Gavin as VP of creative strategy and branding. With the acquisition of Holberg Design, the Gavin team has expanded to more than 20 people.

NJF PR client Etihad Airways joined with first lady of New York City Chirlane McCray, partners and community members to unveil a group of mini soccer pitches across the city as part of the New York City Soccer Initiative. Etihad is working to help NYCSI expand free soccer programming to an additional 10,000 young New Yorkers by 2021 and has pledged \$750,000 over five years to complete 50 mini-soccer fields in underdeveloped neighborhoods across all five boroughs.

French|West|Vaughan CEO Rick French's Prix Productions is set to produce "Not Without Hope," a film adaptation of Nick Schuyler's bestselling book. The film, which is to be distributed by U.K.-based financing and production outfit Goldfinch, recounts Schuyler's rescue by the U.S. Coast Guard 70 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico following a boating accident that left three friends dead, including NFL players Marquis Cooper (Oakland Raiders) and Corey Smith (Detroit Lions) and his former University of South Florida teammate and best friend, Will Bleakley.

Motion has acquired branding and design consultancy **Remedy**, which focuses on health, wellness and social change. Motion says the acquisition is intended to help the firm bolster its healthcare practice. The combined agency will be known as Motion, and operate from one Chicago office location. Client lists have also been consolidated.

BCW has introduced BCW Eventus, an end-to-end offering from the agency's sports practice that uses three complementary methodologies to harness the power of global sporting events for all of the parties involved. BCW Eventus ATTRACT is aimed at helping countries and cities attract major events to their home turfs. BCW Eventus ACTIVATE offers assistance in developing a comprehensive strategy that event hosts can use to maximize awareness, engagement and return on investment. BCW Eventus ASSESS employs targeted event evaluation systems, combining primary audience research with advanced data analytics, to monitor communications strategy and impact before, during and after an event.



COMMENTARY

The writing may be on the wall for public relations at France's Publicis Groupe.

The decision of CEO Arthur Sadoun to ax MSL Group chief Guillaume Herbette after a four-year stint, and then eliminate the CEO position, is not exactly a ringing endorsement of PR.

It's a shocking blow to the prestige of MSL, which traces its roots to the formation of Manning Selvage & Lee during the recession.

"All MSL offices in the world will now report to the new country structure of Publicis Groupe," wrote Sadoun in a memo to staffers.

Though Halloween is fast approaching and tales of the Headless Horseman abound, prospective global clients aren't going to flock to the roster of a leaderless PR firm. Who's in charge? Who knows? Does Arthur even care?



Arthur Sadoun

Then there's the sad story of Publicis' Qorvis Communications shop.

The DC PA firm is a leader in the public diplomacy category, proudly taking on all comers.

That swashbuckling attitude may be coming to an end.

Publicis has whiffed on a \$750K one-year contract to represent Vnesheconombank, Russia's state-owned development unit, in its effort to ward off more US sanctions.

An independent Qorvis would have jumped all over the Russian bank, which has a supervisory board chaired by the country's prime minister Dmitry Medvedev.

If Sadoun is gun-shy about working for the Russians, how does he allow Qorvis to continue its representation of Saudi Arabia a year after the torture, murder and dismemberment of *Washington Post* contributor Jamal Khashoggi and Saudi atrocities in Yemen?

How does Kekst CNC fit into the Frenchman's vision for Publicis? It certainly gets involved in some nasty corporate fights.

Does PR even still register with Sadoun, who dreams of transforming Publicis into a data and technology leader that delivers personalization at scale?

Publicis shelled out a whopping \$4.4B earlier this year to acquire Alliance Data Systems' Epsilon marketing services business. Sadoun's quest is to merge Publicis' "leadership in media with Epsilon's unmatched deterministic, behavioral and transactions data, powered by AI."

Heady stuff, indeed. Sadoun apparently has bigger fish to fry than PR.

Time, though, may not be on his side as Publicis reported a lousy third quarter that fell below internal expectations and it cut guidance for the full year.

Wall Street may decide that Sadoun's data/technology dream is nothing more than a flight of fantasy.

Calling Shep Smith.... CBS chief Shari Redstone, fresh from her boardroom triumph of merger the one-time Tiffany Network with Viacom, is thinking about launching a conservative TV outlet to compete with Rupert Murdoch's Fox News.

Redstone already has chatted up former Foxer Megyn Kelly, whom Trump trashed for her less-than-tender line of questioning during the 2016 presidential debate, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*.

Fox News is a juicy target as it "mints" more than \$1B in profit annually. Redstone has already swung by the White House to talk with president Trump, though it's unclear whether she spoke about her plan to give Fox a run for the money. "He's always been very good to me and a tremendous supporter of me personally," Redstone told THR after Trump was elected president.

Trump has been critical of Fox for its recent less-adoring coverage of him. He tweeted Oct 10 that Fox News "doesn't deliver for US anymore. It's so different than it used to be."

Smith quit Fox on Oct. 11.

It's a pretty safe bet that NBA commissioner Adam Silver can't wait for tomorrow's 2019/2022 season opener as the champion Toronto Raptors tip off against the New Orleans Pelicans.

The new season should move the China controversy triggered over a single tweet by Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey in support of the Hong Kong pro-democracy protestors off the radar.

China's government run CCTV on Oct. 19 vowed that Silver will face "retribution sooner or later" for telling a *Time* 100 Health Summit in New York that China wanted him to fire Morey.

The government media mouthpiece went on to say, "Silver is making every effort to portray himself as a defender of free speech and is using so-called 'freedom of speech' to cover for Morey, who voiced support for violent elements in Hong Kong."

Morey didn't condone violence in Hong Kong. He voiced support for people who fear that China is slowly tearing up the agreement it made with the UK to support an amount of free expression in the former British colony.

In backing Morey's right to free speech, Silver said "the values of equality, respect and freedom of expression have long defined the NBA and will continue to do so."

He told the Summit that he doesn't know how the tussle with China will play out but that the NBA will take a "fairly dramatic" financial hit.

The multi-millionaire players of the NBA should support their commissioner's bold statement in favor of free expression, instead of whining about loss revenues from sneaker and jersey deals in China. He made all of us proud.

—Kevin McCauley