



Kevin McCauley
Editor-in-Chief

O'Dwyer's

The Inside News of Public Relations
& Marketing Communications odwyerpr.com

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

December 18, 2023 Vol. 56 No. 50

VIVENDI MULLS SPINNING OFF HAVAS

Vivendi is considering splitting itself into three separate units to boost the share price on the Paris Euronext market.

The French firm believes its stock trades at a “significantly high conglomerate discount,” which reduces the company’s valuation and limits its “ability to carry out growth transactions for its subsidiaries.”



Vivendi’s stock trades at €9.95 Euros. It has traded in the range of €7.99 and €10.22 since Jan. 1. The stock traded as high as €13.60 (9/10/21) during the past five years.

The company’s subsidiaries include Havas ad/PR business, Canal+ Group mass media operation and an investment company with a big stake in Lagardere, publishing and travel retail group.

CEO Arnaud de Puyfontaine claims the trio is experiencing strong growth with numerous investment opportunities.

Havas is the parent of [HAdvisors](http://HAdvisors.com) [Abernathy](http://Abernathy.com), financial communications, and PA shop.

The H/Advisors network has offices in the US, UK, Ireland, Germany, France, Spain, Belgium, China, Australia, Singapore and Japan.

WEBER SHANDWICK ALUM BARGAR TO GCI

Lilit Bargar, who was most recently an EVP in the health-care practice at Weber Shandwick, has joined GCI Health as EVP, corporate practice lead.

At Weber Shandwick, Bargar oversaw corporate thought leadership through executive communications for pharmaceutical clients. Before coming to Weber, she served as group SVP at Marina Maher Communications, focusing on healthcare corporate communications.



Lilit Bargar

At GCI Health, Bargar will work with pharmaceutical leaders to build their corporate brand as well as implementing strategies for above-brand storytelling and thought leadership.

“Lilit is a dynamic strategist and storyteller who will play a pivotal role in advancing our practice, helping to lead health companies and their executives as they navigate the complexities of today’s communications landscape and rise as leaders in their field,” said GCI Group global CEO Kristin Cahill.

Happy Holidays to our readers!

This is the last issue of the year. The next issue of the Newsletter will appear Jan. 2, but follow breaking news on odwyerpr.com.

NY NEEDS PR PUSH FOR DEI

The New York State Division of Human Rights is soliciting proposals from agencies providing marketing, advertising and public relations services.

The agency, under Governor Kathy Hochul’s leadership, recently launched a new Hate and Bias Prevention Unit. As part of the launch, DHR is looking for an agency to help develop and implement a culturally focused statewide campaign that increases awareness of the unit.

Scope of the work includes: building and developing strategy and creative content for the statewide campaign; developing an earned media plan; and building and expanding a digital campaign using paid and unpaid social media ad.

Terms of the contract call for a one-year commitment with the option to renew for an additional year at DHR’s discretion.

Proposals, due by 2:00 p.m. (EST) on Dec. 21, should be mailed or delivered to: New York State Office of General Services; Financial Administration / Agency Procurement Office; Attn: Paige Corning Proposal # 2818; 32nd Floor, Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza; Albany, NY 12242

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

MORROW SODALI ACQUIRES DOMESTIQUE

Morrow Sodali, a stakeholder engagement advisory services firm, has acquired Australian corporate communication and reputation management consultancy Domestique.

Founded in 2013, Domestique works across complex and high-profile reputation management issues, transaction communications involving large scale M&A and IPO’s, strategic investor relations, public affairs advisory and listed company disclosure.

All five Domestique partners will become Morrow Sodali shareholders. The move follows Morrow Sodali’s acquisition and integration of Citadel-MAGNUS in November 2022.

“The combination of Domestique and Citadel-MAGNUS brings together a powerhouse of complementary, expert advisers that will deliver an unprecedented level of experience and knowledge to the Australian and APAC market,” said Morrow Sodali CEO international Christian Sealey.



GA TECH WANTS TO BOOST ITS REPUTATION

Georgia Tech School of Electrical and Computer Engineering wants a firm to create an integrated communications strategy to enhance its reputation and awareness of the school's research programs, faculty expertise and brand.



Both undergraduate programs achieved their best-ever positions in the 2023 U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges rankings.

Electrical engineering moved up two positions to the No. 2 slot, while computer engineering checked in at No. 4.

ECE is looking to partner with an experienced firm to formulate a communications positioning plan to attract the best and brightest students and faculty members.

ECE looks to position its community of experts and thought leaders to be a go-to resource for external media (both regionally and nationally), as well as within industry.

Georgia Tech plans to issue a one-year contract with options to renew for four additional one-year periods.

Responses are due Jan. 4.

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

ACCENTURE BRANDS SAUDI 'FUN' CITY

Accenture and its Droga5 creative shop handled the branding and marketing strategy for Qiddiya City, which is pitched as a one-of-a-kind entertainment designation.



Crown prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz on Dec. 7 unveiled plans for Qiddiya, which is projected to have a population of 600K people.

Located 40 miles from Riyadh, Qiddiya is projected to attract 48M visitors annually once construction is complete. A project of the Public Investment Fund, it is part of the Saudi Vision 2030 to modernize the Kingdom's economy.

Accenture received \$2.8M for its branding work.

Its pact includes a "Saudization clause" that calls for Saudi nationals to staff 26 percent of "skilled" (consultants, managers) and "unskilled" (janitors, laborers) positions on the Qiddiya team.

Failure to meet the Saudization requirements could result in termination of Accenture's contract.

SOTHEBY REALTY UNIT NAMES JOHNSON CMO

ONE Sotheby's International Realty has hired Lena Johnson as CMO. Johnson was most recently VP of marketing and head of the luxury division at Compass New York.



Lena Johnson

Before that, she was senior director of marketing and sales for Vogue in the Americas, France and UK. At ONE Sotheby's, Johnson will lead the company's marketing team and develop strategies to propel brand awareness.

"Lena's expertise and fresh marketing approach aligns with our vision to deliver forward-thinking strategies that elevate the client and agent experience," ONE Sotheby's president Daniel de la Vega said in a press release.

NEWS OF FIRMS

CGPR, which has been a part of [French/West/Vaughan](#) since 2020, is acquired by Phoenix-based integrated travel and recreation marketing firm **Off Madison Ave.** Chris Goddard will continue to serve as president of CGPR, operating as a division of Off Madison Ave in the Boston, Massachusetts area. CGPR represents a range of active lifestyle brands that includes adidas Terrex, Canada Goose, ewool, Houdini Sportswear, Keen, LOWA Boots, Nite Ize, and Moosejaw. "CGPR represents a strategic addition to our company. Their expertise bridges travel with active lifestyle, deepening our roots in the travel and outdoor recreation space," said Off Madison Ave co-founder and CEO David Anderson.



Klareco Communications, a Singapore-based corporate, financial and strategic communications consultancy, is acquired by Havas. The move is intended to strengthen Havas's global strategic communications advisory arm, H/Advisors, in Asia-Pacific. On closing, the agency will be renamed H/Advisors Klareco. The acquisition follows the launch of H/Advisors in Dubai earlier this year and the recent acquisitions of Australian Public Affairs and Cunha Vaz & Associados, a firm in Portugal. "Our partnership with Klareco allows us to draw on their breadth of experience and knowledge of the Asian market as we continue to expand our Havas presence in APAC," said Havas chairman and global CEO Yannick Bolloré.

The Millerschin Group, a mobility and transportation-focused public relations and integrated marketing agency that was acquired by [French/West/Vaughan](#) in December 2022, relocates its operations to downtown Detroit. Along with the move, the agency has promoted Millerschin veteran John Tews to SVP and general manager of the new Detroit office and hired Erika Hoeft as VP. FWV also announced that TMG founder Erin Millerschin and COO John Millerschin are retiring from the agency at the end of the year. Both will remain as consultants to FWV.

The Public Relations Global Network adds Seoul-based PR House to its global network.

Founded in 2010, PR House provides reputation management services, specializing in creative integrated communications, effective and measurable implementation and communications counsel. The agency works with clients in such sectors as hospitality, technology, government, gaming, healthcare and transportation. PRGN also marked the opening of a new member office in the Netherlands by its Belgium member agency **Two cents**. The network now has 55 members



TrendyMinds of Indianapolis acquires Utah-based agency **Faktory Inc.** Based in the Salt Lake City suburb of Centerville, Faktory also has an office in Denver and nearly 30 employees in six states. The acquisition lifts TrendyMinds' workforce to 135. Contour Ridge, a San Antonio-based private equity firm that made an eight-figure investment in TrendyMinds in March 2022, partnered on the Faktory deal with Houston-based investment firm Genesis Park. "Faktory is a stellar addition to our talented team," said TrendyMinds chairman and CEO Trevor Yager.

MUSK WANTS HIS OWN UNIVERSITY

According to a report in Forbes, Elon Musk is gearing up to create a university in Austin, according to tax filings obtained by Bloomberg that revealed the educational institution is seeded with a \$100 million gift from the world's richest person.



"The organization plans to launch a STEM-focused primary and secondary school with an initial class of 50 prior to the university, which will be "dedicated to education at the highest levels" and will seek accreditation from the Georgia-based Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, according to the filing, which

requested tax-exempt status," Forbes reported.

This is a blockbuster announcement. Musk has criticized the quality of the college graduates he has sought to employ, and now he wants his own brand of higher education, possibly to compensate for the low caliber of discourse on another of his brands--X--formerly called Twitter.

But how will Musk build another university in Austin? It would be very expensive, as well as enormously controversial. That is why I believe the former site of the never-built supercollider in Waxahachie, Texas, would be ideal for a high-tech university.

The site is only 30 miles from Dallas and 166 miles from Austin, and that part of the state could really use a university besides Baylor in Waco.

In fact, Musk could even get his Boring company to build an underground rail connection between Waxahachie and Dallas, possibly even including Austin with a stop in Waco. The Waxahachie site already has extensive tunneling. They could bore rail tunnel out there all day and hardly disturb even a jackrabbit. Much better than boring tunnels in the Los Angeles earthquake zone, which seems like asking for it.

Musk would have to have a football team to give him yet another platform for controversy, and the team could play Texas A&M annually in an Aggies versus Muskies shootout. The trophy could be a tinfoil hat. The mascot might be a spaceman, or an X.

There are still-unresolved questions, such as whether Musk U. would offer degrees in X Studies, or hire faculty who espouse totalitarian government or align with MAGAdytes on everything Trump. But those details can be worked out later, like after the 2024 presidential election or Trump's first felony conviction.

PR firms, be on the lookout here for an RFP to promote the new university. And be sure you own a Tesla Cybertruck by then. You will need one for those trips to Waxahachie. And remember: no off-roading. The poor things are used to a lab environment and cannot really handle the great outdoors, especially snow.

Bill Huey is president of Strategic Communications and the author of Advertising's Double Helix: A Proposed New Process Model. Journal of Advertising Research, May/June 1999. His article about advertising effects has been cited in books and academic papers around the world.

MARK WEINER DIES AT 68

Mark Weiner, research guru and a leader in PR measurement, died on Dec. 10. He was 68.

Weiner was generous with his time and served as a mentor to many in the PR industry. Early in his career, he wrote a monthly research column for O'Dwyer's Magazine.

Weiner founded Medialink Research and then went on to helm Delahaye Medialink, and then exited for Ketchum's global research director post.

Weiner also was CEO of PRIME Research, and chief insights officer of Cision and Cognito Insights.

He is the author of "PR Technology, Data and Insights," and "Unleashing the Power of PR."

The Institute for Public Relations awarded Weiner its Jack Felton Medal for Lifetime Achievement in 2018.

A public memorial service for Weiner is slated for January.



Mark Weiner

BOB DORF DIES AT 74

Bob Dorf, who founded his own firm and then ran Dorf & Stanton with Alex Stanton, died Dec. 2. He was 74.

He began his communications career as a news writer on New York's all-news station 1010 WINS radio. That led to the launch of Bob Dorf Communications and the partnership with Stanton.

Dorf continued as a publisher and consultant in the field of customer relationship management. He helped grow boutique shop 1to1 Marketing, and co-authored "The Startup Owner's Manual."

With his late wife, Fran, Dorf founded an early intervention program for young children with developmental disabilities, now JumpStart at the Stamford JCC, in memory of their son Mikey.

Donations in Dorf's name may be made to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, JumpStart at the Stamford JCC, and buildOn.org.



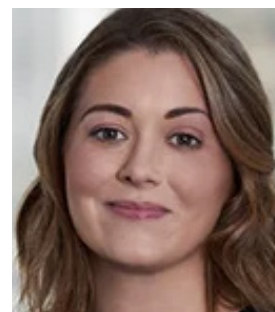
Bob Dorf

BRITBOX TUNES IN NETFLIX'S MCGAUGHEY

BritBox International, a subscription video on demand service co-branded by BBC and ITV, has hired Alana McGaughey as VP global PR & comms.

McGaughey joins BritBox from Netflix, where she launched publicity campaigns for series including "Ozark" She previously oversaw publicity for several series at Starz.

At BritBox, she will lead the global PR and comms function, working with local teams and overseeing activity across Britbox's eight territories: America, Canada, South Africa, Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland.



Alana McGaughey

FIRMS CLOSE OUT A TOUGH YEAR

The number of PR agencies that are expecting to see a jump in either revenue or profits when they close the books on 2023 has taken a considerable hit from last year, according to a new study released by legal firm Davis+Gilbert.

In its “[2023 Public Relations Industry Trends Report](#)” the firm, which specializes in the advertising, marketing communications and media sectors, got responses from 182 firms on such topics as profitability, artificial intelligence and DEI. Nearly three-quarters of those predicted that they would see revenue in excess of \$5 million for the year.

More than half of the respondents (53 percent) said that, in terms of revenue, they were expecting 2023 to wind up

being a better year than 2022.

But that’s not nearly as optimistic a view as they had last year, when 88 percent of respondents predicted a revenue hike. On the other hand, a third (34 percent) thought their revenue would drop—a big jump from the 5 percent who made that prediction in 2022.

Profit estimates showed an equal cooling down of industry optimism. While nearly half (47 percent) look for profits to increase for 2023, 69 percent did so for 2022. In addition, almost as many (40 percent) anticipate a drop in profits (up from 15 percent last year).

The effect of AI on bottom lines seems to be good. Almost half (47 percent) of all firms using AI say they expect it to result in revenue increases for the year, and 24 percent are anticipating a profit hike.

The most popular use of AI—written content creation (47 percent), with ideation (37 percent), social listening (34 percent) and conducting market research (33 percent) also being prevalent choices.

DEI is still definitely on the radar, but its growth does seem to be slowing somewhat. More than four in 10 firms (42 percent) increased the number of employees “from historically underrepresented groups” in 2023, down a bit from the 60 percent who said that for last year.

Looking toward the future, overall optimism seems to be winding down a bit as well. While 66 percent voiced a positive outlook for 2023, only 53 percent say that when it comes to looking in the crystal ball for 2024.

VENETA (OR) CALLS FOR BRANDING WORK

Veneta is looking for a branding partner to develop a prospective community identity that can be used to promote economic development, placemaking, and business retention/expansion in that Oregon city. Located in a rural, recreation-oriented area, Veneta is about 12 miles west of Eugene.



The selected partner will evaluate and refine the slogans developed by Veneta’s Economic Development Committee—“Completely Normal,” “It’s Life As You Like It,” “Inspired by Nature,” and “More Than a Stop Along the Way.”

Working with local businesses and partners, the firm will create a campaign to promote the refined slogan.

Veneta has budgeted \$30K for the work that is expected to last about three months.

Responses, due Jan. 5, go to sburke@ci.veneta.or.us.

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

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

Manifest signs on to provide PR services for travel booking platform **Omio**, which promotes such sustainable ground transport options as trains, buses and ferries, as the UK-based company expands to the US. In

addition to managing the platform’s UK and US press office work, Manifest will work on creative campaigns, influencer relations and overseeing brand awareness.

The only platform that offers train, plane, ferry and bus options all in one place, Omio has raised more than \$400m and is backed by investors including Atomico and Battery Ventures.



VVK PR + Creative, **The Martin Group** and **Hearst** are partnering as Team MVH to serve as the official communications and marketing agency of record for the **Great Lakes Water Authority**. The partnership will work to enhance and support GLWA’s brand position, media relations efforts and overall public communications. The multi-year selection follows a competitive procurement process conducted by the GLWA during Summer 2023.

Codeword, a communications design agency that is part of WE Communications, signs on to work with **ASUS’ Systems Business Group**. The agency will develop brand-building campaigns, strategic media outreach and consumer-focused thought leadership to showcase the power of ASUS’s laptops, desktops, gaming devices and phones, targeting the consumer tech, gaming and hardware domains. The goal of the efforts will be to build the brand among consumer communities which may not possess extensive technical knowledge but still value breakthrough computing experiences.

Zapwater Communications adds **Ambergris Cay**, a private island in the Turks and Caicos, to its client roster. Zapwater will execute an integrated strategic plan encompassing media relations, influencer marketing and strategic partnerships with the goal of heightening Ambergris Cay’s position in the ultra-luxury market and differentiating it from its competitors. Located 600 miles south of Miami, Ambergris Cay unveiled itself as a luxury all-inclusive private island resort and exclusive homeownership program in 2019.



Blue Door Agency, which is based in Toronto, is selected as agency of record by **Food and Beverage Ontario**, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing the province’s food and beverage processing industry. The agency has been tasked with leading overarching strategy development, creative direction and tactical execution for FBO’s workforce development initiative, **CareersNow!**, which was developed to attract and retain new talent for the industry, which aims to create 25,000 new jobs by 2025.

Resonate is selected as agency of record for **Nobu Hotel Atlanta**, located in the city’s Buckhead neighborhood. Resonate will work to elevate the property’s profile by executing internal and external corporate communications programs, fostering strategic brand partnerships and activations, and facilitating community relations and philanthropic initiatives. The hotel features 152 guestrooms and suites, a rooftop pool and event space and the Nobu Atlanta Restaurant.

LYNCHBURG SEEKS POLICE RECRUITMENT PR

Lynchburg, which is located at the geographic center of Virginia, seeks PR to help it get more cops on the beat.



It is the home of Liberty University, which was opened by the late Jerry Falwell, co-founder of the Moral Majority.

The Lynchburg Police Department has 133 officers, 22 sergeants, 14 lieutenants, five captains, two deputy chiefs and one chief. There are 30 job openings.

The LPD kicked off a marketing and branding program in 2020 but is a victim of the national trend of increased vacancies in law enforcement due to the declining appeal of the work.

The selected partner will develop, produce and execute a recruitment and marketing plan that includes online, video and print media.

Responses are due Jan. 3. LPD wants the original proposal, eight copies and a thumb drive sent to: City of Lynchburg; Procurement Division; Third Floor City Hall; 900 Church Street; Lynchburg, Virginia 24504

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

FGS DEFENDS WYNDHAM FROM CHOICE BID

[FGS Global](#) represents Wyndham Hotels & Resorts as it confirms receipt of Choice Hotels International's Dec. 12 takeover bid, which it says looks a lot like the same "highly conditional offer" of \$86 per share that the board already rejected on Nov. 14.

Wyndham believes the bid presents an "asymmetrical risk to Wyndham shareholders given the uncertainty around antitrust approval."

The targeted company pointed out that Choice "owns less than 1.7 percent of Wyndham common stock and conceded they are restricted from further purchases without antitrust approval." Consistent with its fiduciary duties, Wyndham promised to advise shareholders of its recommendation regarding the offer within ten business days.

FGS Global's Danya Al-Qattan, Paul Scarpetta and Stephen Pettibone represent Wyndham.

[Joelle Frank, Wilkinson Brimmer Katcher's](#) Andy Brimmer, Kelly Sullivan and Allison Sobel represent Choice Hotels.

EX-CLINTON PRESS SEC JOINS TEAM HARRIS

Brian Fallon, who served as national press secretary for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential run, is signing on next month as Vice President's Kamala Harris' campaign communications director.



Leslie Berland

The Washington Post reports that Fallon is known for a hard-hitting, nimble communications style.

Currently, he serves as president of DC PA shop Barracks Row Media, and executive director of Demand Justice, an advocacy group that pushes for more liberal justices on the courts.

Besides Clinton, Fallon was an aide to Senator Chuck Schumer and former Attorney General Eric Holder.

GREGORY FCA WORKS PREIT'S CHAPTER 11

[Gregory FCA](#) is working the bankruptcy filing of the Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust as the Philadelphia mall operator files its second Chapter 11 in the last three years.

The current pre-packaged filing will wipe \$880M in debt from PREIT's books, and position it for long-term growth, said CEO Joseph Coradino.

PREIT

Since the pandemic, PREIT has worked tirelessly to enhance its portfolios, improve occupancy rates and diversify its tenancy but it could not overcome inflation and high interest rates, he added.

Coradino expects a leaner restructured PREIT will emerge from Chapter 11 "as a financially stronger company with the resources and support to continue creating diverse, multi-use property experiences throughout our portfolio."

Gregory FCA's Heather Crowell represents PREIT.

MEDIA MANEUVERS

Axel Springer signs an agreement with **OpenAI** that will result in the publisher being compensated for the use of its content in ChatGPT and OpenAI's artificial intelligence tools. The deal requires that ChatGPT's answers to user queries attribute any material sourced from such Axel Springer platforms as Politico and Business Insider, in addition to providing links to the full articles. It includes otherwise paid content, and also allows for the use of Axel Springer content in training of OpenAI's large language models. "This partnership with Axel Springer will help provide people with new ways to access quality, real-time news content through our AI tools," said OpenAI COO Brad Lightcap.

The New York Times brings on Zach Seward as editorial director of AI initiatives. Seward comes to the Times from business news site Quartz, where he was a founding editor, subsequently serving as chief people officer, CEO and editor-in-chief. He was previously a reporter at the *Wall Street Journal*, where he built and led the paper's first social media team. At the Times, Seward will work with newsroom management to guide the integration of AI into the paper's operations, beginning with the establishment of principles for how it does and does not use generative AI. That work will include designing training programs for curious journalists and partnering with colleagues across the company to determine where to incorporate generative A.I. tools into its publishing tools and digital products.

The Nation, which has been in print since 1865, is transitioning from a weekly to a monthly publication, starting in January. While the magazine has seen a 3.8 percent jump in subscriptions to nearly 91,000 this year, that is less than half the 187,000 subscribers it had in 2006. As part of the change, each issue will be bumped up from 48 to 84 pages. According to Nation publisher D.D. Guttenplan, the new format is partly a response to subscriber requests for "more of what we do in print at one time, and less often." Nation president Bhaskar Sundara told the *New York Times* that the move should not be seen as "a stepping-stone towards a digital-only future," but as "a way to deliver a better print product to people, rather than to step away from print."



COMMENTARY



Sultan Al Jaber

Head over heels over COP28.

Former Federal Reserve chief Alan Greenspan used the term “irrational exuberance” during the 1990s dot.com bubble to warn about the overvalued stock market.

The same term can be used to explain the media’s glowing coverage of the COP28 climate change agreement.

The Economist heralded it as a “landmark deal,” while the *Wall*

Street Journal said it sent “an unprecedented signal to the global economy that governments are intent on cutting back on coal, oil and natural gas in the fight against global warming.”

The New York Times weighed in by reporting that the global pact calls for “transitioning away from fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal that are dangerously heating the planet.”

Part of the giddy coverage stems from staging COP28 in the United Arab Emirates with the proceedings overseen by the head of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company Sultan Al Jaber.

His company is committed to spending \$150B in drilling projects during the next five years. And Al Jaber famously said that ending the fossil fuel era would require the world to go back to living in caves.

The UAE and Al Jaber cleared the very low bar that had been set for COP28.

Environmental champion and former Vice President Al Gore noted that the influence of petrostates is evident in the half measures and loopholes included in the final agreement.

Those petrostates and allies like Saudi Aramco, PetroChina, ExxonMobil, BP, Chevron, Shell and TotalEnergies are going to use their massive PR machines to make sure that fossil fuels aren’t going to be phased out anytime soon.

Picking up where they left off... The royals at the United Arab Emirates just couldn’t control themselves. They didn’t wait until delegates at COP28 left Dubai before reverting to their horrendous human rights record.

The UAE issued new terrorism charges against about 90 imprisoned activists on Dec. 7.

James Lynch, co-director of the FairSquare human rights organization, noted that “charges on this scale in the middle of the talks, when UAE is under the global spotlight, is a giant slap in the face to the country’s human rights community and the COP process.”

COP28 though is just a warm-up for next year’s session slated for Azerbaijan.

Amnesty International says of Azerbaijan: “Freedom of expression, assembly and association remained severely restricted as authorities carried out arbitrary arrests and politically motivated prosecutions of civil society activists, crushed peaceful protests and hindered the work of independent organizations and media outlets.”

One has to wonder what the United Nations was thinking when it gave COP28 and COP29 to serial human rights abusers.

Drill, baby, drill... Donald Trump has promised that on the first day of his dictatorship he will slam the southern border shut and give the order to drill, drill, drill for oil, as if President Biden has banned energy projects in the US.

Where has Trump been? While Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act provides a massive boost for renewable energy, the President has pushed US oil companies to step up production on the home front in an effort to reduce gas prices and get inflation down.

The US is producing a record 13.2M barrels of oil a day, which is far more than Saudi Arabia. That is up 800,000 barrels a day since 2022. Another 500,000 barrels a day are expected to come on line in the 2024 presidential election year.

Trump needs to revamp his to-do list.

Despicable JD. Ohio’s performative Senator JD Vance dismissed the visit to Washington of the 21st century’s greatest freedom fighter as “disgraceful” and “grotesque.”

The Buckeye Blowhard is outraged that Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelensky is “lecturing us and demanding more American taxpayer dollars.”

He takes issue with Zelensky’s view that US politicians who want to pull the plug on Ukraine are puppets of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin.

“If you want to secure your border first, you are actually a Putin puppet,” Vance said of Zelensky’s remark. JD is a fanboy of Donald Trump, who is Putin’s No. 1 puppet.

What is disgraceful is the Republican linkage of tight control over the southern border and assistance to Ukraine.

The debate over immigration policy has gone on for years. Zelensky and the Ukrainian people don’t enjoy the luxury of time to sit back and watch the GOP theatrics.

There’s a war for survival going on.

Positively paranoid in 2024... Business leaders will face challenges next year, some of which will be surprises.

That’s why Lars Faeste, chair of FTI Consulting’s EMEA unit, recommends a “positive paranoia” approach.

“Through proactive risk management, investment in areas of vulnerability, and a heightened sense of curiosity, senior leaders can use this mindset to ensure that their business is resilient to future shocks and has the ability to innovate,” [he wrote in a Dec. 15 essay](#).

Faeste noted that so-called “black swan” events require immediate attention, diverting the focus from day-to-day operations management. They make a dramatic impact.

An FTI survey of 100 black swan events found that 32 percent of executives lost their jobs, \$200B in market capitalization was wiped out, and 14 companies went out of business in the aftermath.

Faeste points out that given the variety of modern-day crises, the probability that a major company will face zero crises over the next five years is almost zero.

That’s not paranoia. That’s just the cold hard reality waiting for CEOs in 2024.

Happy New Year.

—Kevin McCauley