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NYS OLYMPIC AUTHORITY NEEDS MARKETING

The New York State Olympic Regional Development Authority seeks marketing services support to help boost year-round revenues at its facilities in the Adirondacks and Catskills.



The venues, which hosted the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics, drew more than one million visitors in 2023 and are located minutes off Interstate I-87 between Montreal and New York City.

They include Gore Mountain, the largest skiing facility in the Empire State; Whiteface Mountain; Belleayre Mountain; Mt. Van Hoevenberg, home of the USA Bobsled/Skeleton and Luge teams; and Lake Placid Olympic Center, which runs ski jumping events, hockey and figure/speed skating events.

The selected firm will develop and execute marketing strategies, manage digital paid media efforts and drive sales across all the Authority's venues.

The Authority's 2023/2024 schedule of events includes hockey, figure skating, biathlon, ski jumping, alpine, freestyle and cross country skiing competitions.

The International Bobsled Federation World Championship is slated for Lake Placid in 2025.

Proposals are due Feb. 26. They go to: Olympic Regional Development Authority; ATT: Eugene Baritot; Digital Marketing Manager; 37 Church Street; Lake Placid, NY 12946

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

BRUNSWICK HIRES DENTONS, FTI ALUM CHOLIS

Elizabeth Cholis, who most recently was a partner at Dentons Global Advisors, is joining Brunswick Group in New York on Feb. 20.



Elizabeth Cholis

She has experience in high-stakes communications, risk management and legal PR.

Cholis joined DGA in 2021 following a 10-year stint at FTI Consulting.

As managing director at FTI, Cholis served as senior leader in its crisis & litigation practice, and counseled clients on regulatory

scrutiny, cybersecurity events, work place matters, discrimination, labor relations and COVID-19 related issues.

Earlier, Cholis was senior VP and co-head of the corporate advisory group at Ruder Finn, and managing associate at Chlopak Leonard Schechter & Assocs.

ASSANGE GETS US REPRESENTATION

Barry Pollack, an attorney at Wall Street's Harris St. Laurent & Wechsler, has registered Julian Assange as a client with the Justice Dept. "out of an abundance of caution."

He believes the Justice Dept. may view some of the ancillary services to the representation of the imprisoned journalist/publisher subject to the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Those services may include briefings about the litigation and participating in public educational events about the case, according to the Justice Dept. filing.

Assange is jailed in His Majesty's Prison Belmarsh in southeast London.

Amnesty International issued a statement on Feb. 13, saying the extradition of Assange to the US would have a profound, chilling effect on global media freedom.

If successfully prosecuted in the US under the Espionage Act of 1917, a measure not intended to target the media, Assange could face up to 175 years in jail.

He also faces a maximum of five years in prison on computer fraud charges.



Julian Assange

CLARION INVESTS IN NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Clarion Capital Partners has taken a strategic investment in Narrative Strategies, the DC-based PA and corporate reputation shop.

The New York private equity firm focuses its investment strategy on the media, entertainment and technology sectors.

David Ragins, managing director at Clarion, said Narrative fully aligns with his firm's "investment approach, market interests, and the value we place on collaboration, creativity, and discipline."

Founding partner Ken Spain said the Clarion investment will accelerate Narrative's ability to add new capabilities and offices to navigate the increasingly complex media and political environment.

He noted that clients no longer have to worry primarily about serving the needs of their customers, but now must balance the interests of politicians, regulators, activists, employees, and investors.

BrightTower, a NYC investment banker and M&A advisory firm, represented Narrative in the transaction with Clarion.



RATIONAL 360 TALKS WITH SAUDI FUND

Rational 360 is negotiating an agreement to represent Saudi Arabia's \$700B sovereign wealth fund.



The agreement is expected to call for Rational 360 to serve as government relations and communications manager for Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, according to its Justice Dept. filing. The firm also will engage with the U.S. Congress and executive branch on behalf of the fund, which is chaired by crown prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Patrick Dorton is managing partner and owner at Rational 360. Prior to launching the firm, he was chief spokesperson at Arthur Andersen during its Enron accounting scandal and ensuing collapse; and special assistant to president Clinton.

Dorton heads an 11-member PIF team that includes managing director Joe Lockhart, who was Clinton's White House press secretary, EVP-communications & gov't affairs at the NFL and VP-global comms at Facebook.

The PIF already has a \$4.1M 2024 contract with Teneo for strategic counseling for global target markets; and efforts to enhance its visibility and thought leadership.

JACKSONVILLE TRANSIT SEEKS PR DRIVERS

The Jacksonville Transportation Authority, which serves the largest city in the continental US based on landmass, wants proposals to provide marketing and communications services on an as-needed basis.



The Florida state agency designs and constructs bridges and highways and provides varied mass transit services.

It runs express/regular bus service, a downtown monorail, St. John's River Ferry, and service to various sporting events at TIAA Bank Field.

Hired firms may handle PR, corporate communications, media outreach, monitoring, community partnerships, special events and social media activities.

Interested firms should demonstrate local and regional knowledge and experience with various target markets. Experience with a public transit and/or road building agency is a plus.

Proposals are due Feb. 28 at [JTA's e-portal](#).
[Read the RFP \(PDF\)](#).

MWW RECRUITS FH ALUM LEWIS

[MikeWorldWide](#) has announced that Luke Lewis, a nine-year veteran of [FleishmanHillard](#), recently joined the firm

as executive VP and managing director of its New York corporate communications practice. It's a newly created post.

Lewis worked for the Omnicom unit in San Francisco and New York, where he was market lead for its corporate reputation practice and head of the Cisco account.

He also did stints at Hill & Knowlton, FTI Consulting and Burson-Marsteller.

Lewis has handled the Ford Motor, Genentech, Clorox, Levi Strauss and General Motors accounts in areas such as crisis/ issues management, brand positioning and thought leadership.



Julian Assange

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

LDPR adds **Newport Harbor Island Resort** in Newport, RI and Cameron House on Loch Lomond in Scotland to its client roster. Both clients sit within the portfolio of Davidson Hospitality Group, of which LDPR is a preferred PR partner. The agency will be overseeing all PR programming including print and digital media relations, influencer and brand partnerships, and media visit programs. Formerly Gurney's Newport, the Newport Harbor Island Resort will reopen in April after a \$50-million renovation. The Cameron House has 208 guest rooms and suites, comprehensive waterfront food and drink establishments, and 7,200 square feet of meeting space.



InnoVision Marketing Group signs on as agency of record for **Brotman Law**, a law firm specializing in tax controversy, compliance, optimization and tax credit services for businesses and individuals facing complex tax-related challenges. The agency will spearhead Brotman Law's marketing initiatives, providing comprehensive support across digital, video, web, PR, branding, TV and print channels. Founded in 2013, Brotman Law has nine attorneys and offices in San Diego, Los Angeles and Chicago.

The Romans New York is named consumer PR agency of record for **Grindr**, a dating app for the LGBTQ+ community. Working with Grindr leadership, The Romans will be responsible for leading the charge on PR campaigns, events, stunts and ongoing press office activities, with a focus on shifting what the brand says are outdated perceptions of what it is and isn't. The appointment comes a year after the brand went public and has experienced impressive growth, with a new marketing and communications leadership now in place. The app now boasts over 13 million monthly active users.

Allison lands Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, a global effort to accelerate a transition to clean energy. The announcement follows Allison becoming the largest agency to sign the Clean Creatives pledge, committing to refuse work from fossil fuel companies. Supported by Allison's Purpose Center of Excellence in partnership with sister agency Headstand, the team has garnered significant global media coverage around the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative's presence at the UN COP28 Climate Talks in Dubai.



Jackson Spalding comes on board as **AT&T's** lead PR firm. Other agencies working for the company include Brunswick Group, Ketchum and Extension PR. FleishmanHillard, which has long worked with AT&T, will assist the company at it moves some of its capabilities in-house. In its lead role, Jackson Spalding is tasked with helping AT&T company on its overarching strategic plan for the year while also driving stories for the company's key themes of connectivity, innovation and community and citizenship.

MGH is selected to refresh the design and messaging of **PayMore**, a chain of retail stores where individuals can sell, trade or recycle electronics. The agency has been tasked with conducting research and creating a refined visual identity for PayMore, as well as working to redefine its brand messaging to help fuel the company's expansion. Founded in Massapequa, NY, PayMore Stores currently has 24 operating locations.

AN OLD MAN'S PRESIDENTIAL PR STRATEGY

The best thing to happen to Joe Biden's 2024 presidential campaign was the hastily-called press conference on the special counsel's damning exoneration of the President's handling of classified documents because he was a "well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."



Fraser Seitel

Biden's press conference was an unmitigated disaster.

And if his public relations advisors are smart, it will set the boundaries for the President's media relations strategy against Donald Trump in November.

To say that Biden's February 8 White House press conference was "bad" gives "bad" a bad name.

His tone was too defiant and defensive, e.g. "I've been President and I put this country back on its

feet. I don't need his recommendation."

His verbal slip-ups were egregious, e.g. "Initially, the President of Mexico, el-Sisi, did not want to open the (Rafah) gate."

And in storming back at the CNN woman for questioning his competence, the President even violated the oldest commandment of media relations: "Never get in a peeing match with someone who buys ink by the barrel."

But as horrifying as Biden was, the lessons learned from his media meltdown could form the blueprint for a winning campaign media relations formula.

First, let canned communication do most of the talking.

Whether Democrats like it or not, the fact is that Joe Biden has always been a gaffe machine and dangerous off-the-cuff speaker who's gotten progressively worse as he's grown more, ahem, "elderly." That's why the vast majority of his campaign communications should be canned.

Biden's greatest assets in the upcoming campaign are first, he's running against the dreaded Donald Trump and second, the billions of dollars he'll raise to run. His greatest liability is himself and what he might say if left unscripted.

Second, get out and mingle with the voters.

Biden may not be an accomplished extemporaneous speaker, but he's a great retail politician. The man can schmooze with Mr. and Mrs. American Voter as well as anyone. And he loves campaigning.

So, the Biden campaign should release him to travel the countryside, engaging in small-group conversations with voters.

Likewise, town halls with Biden should be avoided unless it's a pre-screened—i.e., Biden-friendly voters—crowd. If this sounds "fixed," tough noogies. Biden is great with supporters and terrible with detractors.

Third, no more press conferences.

The worst communications setting for a shaky octogenarian is a free-for-all press conference with rabid-dog reporters looking to make a name for themselves.

If the *New York Times*, which is always wrong, recommends you do "more press conferences," then a smart candidate should do precisely the opposite and do none! Won't that provoke criticism of Biden for ducking the media? Sure.

But ... as special counsel Hur also wrote, Biden is also widely considered a "well-intentioned man" who takes his job seriously and works long hours, when most men his age are playing bridge and sleeping.

So, voters will cut him some slack if he chooses to avoid the media jackals, who most people don't much like anyway.

Fourth, do selective, friendly one-on-one interviews.

While Biden should swear off press conferences, he still can't avoid media interviews completely. To close the media relations gap and present at least an appearance of willingness to be interviewed, the Biden managers should sequence one-on-one interviews with friendly reporters at strategic intervals throughout the campaign.

As to broadcast, one-on-ones with anybody at MSNBC is a must. MSNBC makes no bones about being in the tank for Biden—as Fox is for Trump—and would serve as a willing doormat to focus on the President's strengths. CNN, with new management claiming greater objectivity, is a tougher call. Friendly podcasters also are a must for one-on-ones.

The point is that Biden's handlers must insist he do media interviews throughout the campaign but only with friendly interviewers.

David French, one of the few bearable Times editorial writers, has made the point that Biden's occasional slips and stumbles make it imperative that during the campaign, the President, himself, proves that he isn't in decline by "publicly demonstrating that he is not."

Fair enough. But he should do it only in the most controlled of media environments.

Fraser P. Seitel has been a communications consultant, author and teacher for more than 40 years. He's the author of the Pearson text "The Practice of Public Relations," now in its 14th edition, and co-author of "Rethinking Reputation" and "Idea Wise." He may be reached directly at yusake@aol.com.

MEDIA MANEUVERS

Paramount Global, in what chief executive Bob Bakish calls part of an effort to "return the company to earnings growth," has announced plans to shed about 3 percent of its 24,500 employees, amounting to what the Hollywood Reporter says will be about 800 eliminated positions. The cuts follow a year of corporate reorganization that has seen the company merge its Showtime and Paramount+ services and shut down MTV News. It also comes on the heels of widespread speculation that Shari Redstone, president of National Amusements (which controls Paramount Global) is planning to sell either all or part of the company.

Rolling Stone editor-in-chief Noah Shachtman is exiting at the end of the month. His departure is due to disagreements with the magazine's chief executive Gus Wenner over the direction it is taking. In a note to staff, Wenner said that deputy editor Sean Woods and digital director Lisa Tozzi would be taking over day-to-day editorial leadership of Rolling Stone until a new editor is named. Shachtman said he would continue to be a contributing writer for the magazine.

The New York Times broke the \$1 billion barrier in annual revenue from digital subscriptions in 2023, partly the result of 300,000 new paid digital subscribers in Q4, the Times Company said on Feb. 7. In the last three months of the year, the Times reported \$676.2 million in total revenue, which was essentially flat with 2022. However, operating profit spiked 8.5 percent, hitting \$154 million. Things were even looking up—relatively—at The Athletic, the company's sports vertical. Though it posted a \$4.4 million operating loss, that's a significant drop from the year-earlier figure of \$9.6 million.



X LAGS IN BRAND ENGAGEMENT

People follow brands on social media to stay informed about new products and services, gain access to special deals or promotions or simply to be entertained. However, increased social media use and a growing number of social platforms leave audiences today saturated with content, causing them to become more discerning in regards to what they engage with and where they spend their time.

New research from [social media analytics company Sprout Social](#) uncovered what types of branded content audiences engaged with most in 2023—and where they chose to do it—providing insights regarding what channels might be best suited for brands as companies allocate their marketing budgets going forward.

The report found that when it comes to audience engagement, not all networks are created equal. Specifically, when analyzing engagement trends across different social networks, audiences in 2023 engaged with branded content far more often on Facebook and Instagram than they did via X (formerly Twitter).

Brands received an average of 22 messages per day on Facebook and Instagram, according to the report, compared to 13 on X (formerly Twitter). Instagram engagement was particularly high for leisure, sports and recreation (152 messages received per day), media (128 messages per day) and consumer product manufacturing (98 messages per day). Facebook engagement is highest for media (497 messages received per day), leisure, sports and recreation (238 mes-



sure, sports and recreation (152 messages received per day), media (128 messages per day) and travel and hospitality (22 messages per day).

The report also discovered that brands in 2023 published an average of 10 social posts per day across social networks, virtually unchanged from 2022. However, average inbound engagements on content per day declined 12.5 percent, to 70 last year from 80 in 2022. Average outbound engagements, on the other hand, remained virtually the same as last year, at two.

According to the report, consumers also said that video is a preferred medium by which they'd prefer to be engaged with brands. However, it doesn't appear that many brands are focused on this format. For example, video posts comprised only about a quarter of the content brands published via Instagram in 2023, which was less than half the number of single-image posts that year (52.5 percent).

Sprout's "[2024 Content Benchmarks Report](#)" analyzed more than one million public social profiles that were active between January 1 and December 31, 2023.

SAN FRANCISCO SEEKS TO FILL PR POOL

San Francisco is collecting qualifications from firms wanting to partner with the city in the areas of stakeholder outreach and engagement services.

The work may entail media relations; communications planning; focus groups, development of websites, blogs, e-newsletters, social media content; polling; special events; data collection; market research; partnerships; and advertising.

San Francisco is also looking for a firm to conduct its biennial city survey. That study assesses residents' perceptions and experiences of city services and community issues.

The 2023 survey, which was the first conducted since pre-pandemic 2019, found that ratings for services ranged from C to B+. Libraries scored the highest marks, while the city government ranked lowest.

The deadline to submit qualifications to the city is Feb. 23.

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



SPECTRUM ACQUIRES CONTINUUM

Spectrum Science acquires clinical trial recruitment and engagement solutions provider Continuum Clinical from marketing agency Blue Chip Worldwide. Details of the transaction were not disclosed.

Continuum will merge with Spectrum's existing clinical trial recruitment strategic pillar. Continuum president Neil Weisman will continue in his role, leading Spectrum's CTR strategic pillar and overseeing a combined team of more than 130 clinical solutions specialists.

The acquisition is intended to bolster Spectrum's current offering by adding overall depth and breadth of capabilities, as well as bringing a large and diverse client roster.

Continuum also brings to the partnership its MERISTM Total Engagement Solution—a suite of proprietary, globally compliant technology products designed to enable a seamless clinical trial experience for study participants and research sites, while producing real-time, actionable performance data for sponsors.



NI'S ALLISON HEADS TO GAGEN MACDONALD

Jennifer Allison, who most recently was head of global communications at National Instruments, has joined APCO Worldwide's Gagen MacDonald unit as managing director.

Prior to NI, Allison spent 16 years at Dell Technologies before exiting as VP for executive and internal communications. Earlier, she did an eight-year stint at Publicis Dialog, counseling global consumer packaged goods, retail and fashion clients.

"Jenn comes to Gagen with an intense passion for the work we do and with extensive experience in M&A, digital transformation and the future of work," said Maril MacDonald.

APCO acquired GM, a pioneer in organizational communication and employee engagement, in 2023.



Jennifer Allison

KYIVSTAR DIALS UP FTI GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Kyivstar, Ukraine's largest telecommunications network, has hired FTI Government Affairs for representation in Washington on foreign relations/defense matters, and the potential nationalization of its assets.



The company, which has 24M mobile subscribers and 1.1M home internet customers, fell victim to a massive Russian cyberattack that knocked out service on Dec. 12. It was Russia's largest cyberattack on Ukraine since it invaded the country on Feb. 24, 2022.

In restoring full service on Dec. 15, Kyivstar thanked the Security Service of Ukraine and various law enforcement agencies for addressing the attack and restoring service.

Kyivstar is part of VEON, the NASDAQ-traded Amsterdam-based global digital operator.

Mike Pompeo, former US Secretary of State, sits on Kyivstar's board of directors.

Bryan Zumwalt, head of US government affairs at FTI's strategic communications unit, heads the firm's five-member Kyivstar team.

TEXAS WANTS PR FOR LUNCH PROGRAM

The Texas Department of Agriculture wants a firm to run a statewide media campaign for the federally funded Summer Food Service Program.



SFSP provides free meals during the months when schools are out. It runs from June 1 through August.

The firm also will educate program participants that the hired food servers are legally obligated to provide breakfast, lunch and/or dinner to all

eligible children at the meal sites.

It will use print, digital, radio and PSAs to get the word out about SFSP.

TDOA plans to issue a contract from the day of award to run through 2024. There will be three additional one-year renewal options.

Responses are due Feb. 26. They go to [TDOA's e-portal](#).

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

JOELE FRANK WORKS ENDEAVOR'S \$26B DEAL

[Joele Frank](#) handles Endeavor Energy Resources as the shale oil producer agrees to be acquired by Diamondback Energy in a \$26B deal.

The deal makes Diamondback the top independent oil producer in America's No. 1 oil field, the Permian Basin located in Texas and New Mexico.

Diamondback, which will own 65.6 percent of the combined company, edged the much larger ConocoPhillips for Endeavor.

Travis Stice, Diamond CEO, said the combined company's "inventory will have industry-leading depth and quality that will be converted into cash flow with the industry's lowest cost structure."

The merged company will be headquartered in Midland, TX. The deal is expected to close by yearend.

Joele Frank, Wilkinson Brimmer Katcher's Aaron Palash, Andrew Siegel and Lyle Weston represent Endeavor.



LIVERPOOL SEEKS DESTINATION MARKETING

Liverpool wants to enlist a travel communications partner to draw up a five-year destination management plan to add further momentum to the region's post-COVID-19 recovery.

The RFP pitches the Liverpool area as a "dynamic, diverse, vibrant sector, which has world renown brands creating global reach unlike many other UK regions."

The selected firm will align arts, culture & heritage into a wider destination brand development; strengthen relationships with the nighttime economy, food and drink establishments, and sports venues; and increase cooperation among the various stakeholders of the visitor economy.

The finished destination marketing plan is to be the Liverpool region's "invitation to the world."

The project is budgeted at \$50K. Submissions are due Feb. 23.

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



MPA PICKS POWELL FOR COMMS POST

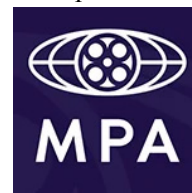
The Motion Picture Association has named Jonathan Powell senior VP for strategic communications, a new position.

Powell joins the MPA from the State Dept., where he handled speechwriting duties and advised on press engagement, social media and public diplomacy matters. Earlier he did speechwriting stints at the Commerce Dept. and Dept. of Homeland Security.

Powell also served as advisor to Los Angeles mayors Eric Garcetti and Antonio Villaraigosa.

At MPA, he reports to Charles Rivkin, CEO, and Emily Lenzner, executive vice president of media relations and communications, who is leaving her post.

Rivkin said Powell's global policy expertise and his gift of connecting with a wide range of audiences makes him the ideal choice for the new position.



KP PUBLIC AFFAIRS ADDS CA LOBBYING SHOP

KP Public Affairs has acquired Doherty Law Group, a top California lobbying shop.

John Doherty, former CEO for the Civil Justice Assn. of California, and chief of staff for the state's Assembly Majority Leader Alberto Torrico, will join Public Policy Holding Company's KP unit in Sacramento.

Michael Burns, managing partner of KP, said the addition of Doherty continues his firm's commitment to "provide the highest-level policy and political services."

Burns had headed Burson-Marsteller's PA practice in Chicago and southern California.

KP, which was launched in 1996, advises clients in areas such as

healthcare, privacy, artificial intelligence, energy, finance, insurance, emergency services, land use and water.

Washington-based PPHC acquired KP in 2022.

PPHC is the parent company of Crossroads Strategies, Forbes Tate Partners, Seven Letter, O'Neill & Assocs., Alpine Group Partners, MultiState Assocs. and Concordant Advisory.



John Doherty

COMMENTARY

Democrats should bronze or frame the hatchet wielded by special counsel Robert Hur in his gratuitous slap at president Joe Biden's advanced age.

Rather than composing a "just the facts" report about why there is insufficient evidence to charge Biden with mishandling classified documents, Hur described him as a "well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."

Bingo. Thanks, Bob.

That comment outraged Biden supporters who cast Republican Hur as a toady of Donald Trump. Their rage is misplaced.



Robert Hur

Democrats should applaud Hur for putting the age issue front and center. It's no longer the elephant in the room. An ABC/Ipsos poll released Feb. 11 found that 86 percent of Americans say Biden is too old for a new term.

The special counsel did the job Biden's sycophantic White House staff and family failed to do. He burst the Biden bubble.

Thanks to Hur, there has been a wave of media reports about the president releasing his primary delegates at the Democratic convention.

That would open the pathway for "newcomers" like California governor Gavin Newsom and Michigan's Gretchen Whitmer. They have a much better shot at beating Trump than an enfeebled Biden.

Donald Trump: loanshark. In a bid to divert attention from his disastrous statement about allowing Russia to do "whatever the hell it wants" to NATO allies that he views as deadbeats, [Trump wants to float Ukraine a loan](#).

As part of his "America First" schtick, Trump is against sending more money to Ukraine.

But after noting that the Senate approved a \$60B aid deal for Ukraine, Trump said:

"Do it this way. Loan them the money. If they can make it, they pay us back. If they can't make it, they don't have to pay us back. Why should you just hand it over to them?"

The loan idea is fresh out of Trump's business playbook, which is subtitled: "The Road to Ruin."

Four of his casino companies (Trump Taj Mahal, Trump Castle Assocs., True Hotel and Casino Resorts and Trump Entertainment Resorts) declared Chapter 11. They wrote off debt and stiffed creditors.

Shielded by US bankruptcy laws, Trump walked away from his financial carnage.

Ukraine lacks the bankruptcy protection enjoyed by Trump. It faces real carnage at the hands of Trump's buddy, Vladimir Putin.

"Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar" is a quote that can be applied to the [New York Times' Feb. 14 analysis](#) about the elevation of Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby to serve as White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

Michael Grynbaum wrote that Jean-Pierre had hoped that

her appointment as the first openly gay White House press secretary would inspire others.

But could Kirby's elevation have something to do with his crisis management qualifications for the job at a time of carnage in Gaza, the possible withdrawal of US military support for Ukraine and a presidential re-election campaign?

He served more than 28 years in the Navy, before retiring in 2015 as Rear Admiral.

Kirby became Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs on January 20, 2021, where he advised Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks.

In contrast, Jean-Pierre did a one-year stint as deputy press secretary to her predecessor Jen Psaki and was chief of staff for Kamala Harris during the 2020 campaign.

Kirby has the gravitas required to command the press room. Now is not the time for on-the-job training.

What will the Securities and Exchange Commission think? Lyft shares jumped more than 60 percent after the ride-share company released its earnings report, showing that 2024 margin growth would be up 500 basis points.

Lyft shares plunged after CFO Erin Brewer told a Feb. 13 analyst call that margin growth would actually be up 50 basis points and said a correction appeared in a revised release.

The snafu leads one to wonder about the strength of the financial controls at Lyft.

Captain Carl flies again. Financier Carl Icahn has taken a 9.9 percent stake in beleaguered JetBlue Airways. The carrier lost \$310M in 2024 on \$9.6B in revenues and had its merger with Spirit Airways blocked by a judge.

Icahn may seek board representation at JetBlue, according to his Securities and Exchange Commission filing. His disclosure of an investment stake cheered stockholders and sent JetBlue's stock up 22 percent on Feb. 13.

Investors, though, should cast a wary eye on Icahn's track record with airlines.

He burst onto the national scene with the messy 1988 leveraged buyout of Trans World Airlines Icahn cut TWA down to size by unloading routes and employees. The company declared Chapter 11 in 1992.

JetBlue shareholders should be careful what they wish for.

The New York State Department of Health is looking for partners to help it create tobacco-free communities.

Though New York State has made great strides in tobacco-control, cigarette smoking still causes the deaths of about 22K people annually, and results in \$10.4B in healthcare costs.

NYS has allocated \$46.4M over five years to support its "advancing tobacco-free communities" initiative in 21 regions. The annual awards range from \$1.6M for New York City to \$335K for Columbia/Greene Counties.

The bidding is restricted to non-profits, including healthcare networks, youth-focused groups, community organizations, academic institutions, and professional/volunteer associations.

Responses are due Feb. 27 at the [NYS Grants Gateway portal](#).

—Kevin McCauley