



Kevin McCauley
Editor-in-Chief

O'Dwyer's

The Inside News of PR & Marketing Communications



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

February 28, 2022 Vol. 55 No. 9

WPP CHARTS 12.1% SPURT IN '21 REVENUES

WPP chief Mark Read reported a 12.1 percent jump in 2021 revenues to \$13.8B due to a strong demand for digital marketing, media, e-commerce and technology services.



Mark Read

Sparked by the fastest organic growth in more than 20 years, WPP hit its 2023 revenue target in 2021, according to Read.

WPP expanded ties with Unilever, Bayer and Google and picked up new assignments from TD Bank, AstraZeneca, L'Oréal, Under Armour and Beiersdorf. Coca-Cola named WPP its global marketing network partner.

Read said WPP made “substantial strategic progress, creating the world’s leading board-level communications firm through the merger of Finsbury Glover Hering and Sard Verbinnen.”

On the PR front, the BCW, Hill+Knowlton Strategies, Ogilvy and FGH operation enjoyed an 11.5 percent jump in 2021 like-for-like revenues to \$1.2B. The unit was up 15.1 percent in Q4.

Read said WPP entered 2022 with “a strong balance sheet, good momentum from new business wins and a comprehensive client offer.” He projected 2022 revenue growth in the five percent range.

SURIS TO LEAD EDELMAN'S NY OFFICE

[Edelman](#) has named Oscar Suris as president of its New York office. Suris was most recently executive managing director for C-suite strategies and crisis communications at Zeno Group, Edelman’s sister agency.



Oscar Suris

He was previously head of corporate communications at Wells Fargo and director, corporate communications at both Ford Motor Company and AutoNation. Earlier in his career, he was executive assistant to the chairman and publisher at the *Miami Herald* and worked as a reporter at the *Wall Street Journal*, *Orlando Sentinel* and *Miami News*.

“Oscar is a proven leader and a seasoned counselor who will set the pace and tone for our New York operation,” said Edelman US chief executive officer Lisa Osborne Ross.

UNLV SEEKS TO ENROLL PR PARTNER

University of Nevada, Las Vegas is seeking a marketing services partner to reinforce/enhance its brand, highlight the quality of its education and promote the positive effect it has on the community.

UNLV, which says it is emerging as a “premier urban university,” offers 290 undergraduate, masters and doctoral degree programs. The 340-acre campus is near McCarran International Airport and the Las Vegas Strip.

The selected firm will handle PR, social media, advertising, web design and video production.

The budget will run up to \$250K.

Proposals are due March 10 at www.ngemnv.com.

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

LAZAR SUCCEEDS KUHL AT FINN HEALTH UNIT

Finn Partners has named Fern Lazar global practice leader of its health unit.

She succeeds Kristie Kuhl, who will take over Zeno Group’s health and wellness practice at the end of March.

Lazar joined Finn Partners after it acquired her shop, Lazar Partners, in 2019. She will now head the more than 200 member health practice, while continuing to lead Lazar/Finn.

Kuhl succeeded Bashe as health chief in July 2021.

Finn Partners is No. 4 in [O’Dwyer’s healthcare rankings](#).



Fern Lazar

SEN. SINEMA'S CD JOINS ROKK SOLUTIONS

John LaBombard, who most recently was communications director for Sen. Krysten Sinema (D-AZ), joins ROKK Solutions as senior vice president.

LaBombard was previously communications director for former Sen. Claire McCaskill. He also served as deputy campaign manager for McCaskill’s unsuccessful reelection bid in 2018 and deputy press secretary for Sen. Jon Tester.

“His extensive work with ‘red state’ Democrats brings a unique perspective that will complement our existing team,” said ROKK partner Kristen Hawn.



John LaBombard

FTI CONSULTING'S Q4 PR REVENUES UP 15.5%

[FTI Consulting](#) registered a 15.5 percent jump in Q4 PR revenues to \$69.9M and a 38.3 percent surge in operating income to \$14.2M.



Mark McCall, who helms the strategic communications segment, told O'Dwyer's that robust demand

in the crisis, issues, regulatory, government intervention and transaction segments spurred growth.

For all of 2021, the stratcomm unit's revenues were up 17 percent to \$267.6M, while operating profit increased 57.1 percent to \$49.7M.

The PR division's billable headcount rose 5.7 percent to 814 staffers in 18 countries at year end 2021.

McCall noted that FTI recently added Abernathy McGregor's Pat Tucker to head its mergers/acquisitions and activism practice. Tucker has handled clients such as KKR, BDT & Company, Carlyle Group, Conoco Phillips and Sanofi.

The firm also recruited Brian Papp, formerly staff director on the Senate Finance Committee's subcommittee on international trade, customs and global competitiveness, to advise clients on public policy and government relations matters.

IRELAND WANTS PR FOR LOCAL GOV'TS

Ireland's state agency that provides professional services to 31 local governments has floated an RFP for PR and communications services.

The Local Government Management Agency, which supports authorities across the country, is looking for a firm to help represent it and local government authorities to the media to promote positive messages about their mission.

The firm will "improve the visibility of local government services and reinforce the vital role that local authorities have nationally and within their communities."

LGMA will award a one-year contract. There will be an option for another year.

Proposals are due March 7.

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

LONGACRE, BRUNSWICK WORK HASBRO FIGHT

Longacre Square Partners handles media for Alta Fox Capital Management, which is pressing Hasbro Inc. to spin off its fast-growth gaming unit to bolster its stock price.



Fort Worth-based Alta Fox, owner of a 2.5 percent Hasbro stake, has nominated five members to the toy company's board of directors.

Alta Fox claims Hasbro can simplify and improve its corporate structure by spinning out the Wizards of the Coast segment, which it calls "a hidden gem"

with a completely different growth, margin and valuation profile than the consumer products and entertainment units.

The Wizards of the Coast and gaming division chalked up 42 percent revenue growth in 2021, compared to Hasbro's 17 percent jump in total sales.

Hasbro, which is represented by Brunswick Group, claims it is on the right path to deliver sustainable growth for shareholders.

Longacre's Greg Marose and Charlotte Kiaie represent Alta Fox.

Brunswick's Nik Deogun handles Hasbro.

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

[FINN Partners](#) picks up **Best Day Brewing**, which produces non-alcoholic beers. FINN will manage PR and social efforts as the brand grows its regional distribution and national DTC presence. FINN's onboarding comes in tandem with expansion of the Best Day Brewing's leadership team. Ron Lindenbusch, previously CMO and head of distribution at Lagunitas, has joined the brand as head of product. Also recently joining the brand is Jim Gunning, CMO, who was previously director of marketing for Red Bull North America.



[Zapwater Communciations](#) lands **Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa** for the North American media marketplace. The agency will handle media relations, influencer marketing, strategic partnerships and in-market events from its Miami outpost on behalf of the resort. "Zapwater's creative approach and expertise within the travel space make them the ideal partner to generate a deeper awareness of the resort's offerings," said Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa general manager Gary Brielmayer.

Thorpe Marketing is selected as public relations agency of record for **Donnelly Cycling**, which makes cyclocross, gravel and road tires for bicycles. In addition to managing PR for Donnelly, Thorpe will assist the company's marketing department with their communications strategy in North America. Donnelly says its tires have been raced to world championship, world cup and national cyclocross titles.

W Communications, which has offices in London and New York, is named US public relations agency partner for private aviation company **Instajet**. W will work with the brand to communicate its pricing strategies. Following an initial European launch, Instajet is rolling out in the US. "For us it was important to find the right partner to help introduce the brand to the domestic market, while understanding our British roots," said Instajet chief executive officer Nick Davis. "W has just that, a rich legacy working with luxury, travel and aviation brands and the British nuance we were looking for."

[Magrino](#) is named agency of record for **Conrad Tulum Riviera Maya** and **Hilton Tulum Riviera Maya All-Inclusive Resort**. The agency will work on creative programming and brand awareness development for the properties in the US market through integrated public relations strategies and marketing campaigns. The Conrad Tulum Riviera Maya, which overlooks the private bays on the Mexican resort's beaches, has 349 oceanfront rooms. The Hilton Tulum Riviera Maya, which is set to open this spring, will have 735 rooms/suites. Margino is also AOR for the Hilton Vallarta Riviera and Hotel Louis, a boutique hotel in Wilson, Arkansas.



Proven Media is providing marketing communications services for the **Council for Federal Cannabis Regulation, DIZPOT**, and **RR Brothers Group**. For the CFR, a 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) non-profit, Proven Media has been named as the organization's media relations agency, in a collaboration with agency Winter | Brontman | Fried. DIZPOT, a national branding and logistics company providing packaging for the cannabis industry, has named Proven as its PR agency of record. RR Brothers Group, a national THC edibles company, has engaged the agency as AOR for marketing communications strategy, public relations, branding and social media.

THE ESSENTIALS OF EQUITABLE HEALTHCARE

Do you know how common disability is? Almost everyone will experience some form of disability during their lifetime, either temporary or permanent. More than 1.85 billion people



Sena Pottackal

around the globe and 61 million in the United States identify as a person with a disability. Nearly 300 million people have a visual disability, and I joined this community in 2004 when I learned I was legally blind due to a progressive eye condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa. I and other persons with disabilities face significant healthcare disparities in comparison to our non-disabled counterparts.

According to the World Health Organization, PWDs are [“three times more likely to be denied healthcare and four times more likely to be treated badly in the healthcare system.”](#) As a blind woman, I observed firsthand how inaccessible communications have hindered disability inclusion during and before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The blind and partially sighted community in the US continues to struggle to safeguard our health due to disability exclusion and inaccessible communications. As a simple illustration, because we rely on our sense of touch to navigate the physical world, we’re more likely to contract the virus. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ignored this and omitted blindness/low vision from the list of high-risk medical conditions prioritized as a vaccination group.

When we did become eligible, we faced accessibility barriers, further delaying our vaccination because the online vaccine portal wasn’t designed to support the inclusion of blind and partially sighted patients through screen reader navigation.

According to Kaiser Health News, “A web accessibility nonprofit, WebAim checked COVID vaccine websites gathered by KHN from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In January 2021, it found accessibility issues on nearly all 94 webpages.” By failing to meet accessibility standards, these webpages violated both the Americans with Disabilities Act and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The government learned from some of its past mistakes by developing a screen-reader accessible website for requesting free COVID tests. However, these tests are inaccessible to blind consumers, creating another barrier. As our government and healthcare organizations prepare for future health crises, they must design websites, programs and products with better disability inclusion and accessible communications.

Even before the pandemic, blind and partially sighted patients encountered negative health interactions caused by numerous inaccessible touchpoints throughout the patient experience.

This is the sequence of inaccessible communication challenges we might face when attending a doctor’s appointment.

First, it may commence with the absence of accessible mechanisms to discretely disclose our disabilities, request accommodations and independently complete intake forms.

Second, we may encounter medical professionals without exposure to disability etiquette or training.

Finally, it may conclude with the distribution of inaccessible documents (e.g., patient summaries, doctor referrals,

scripts, informational pamphlets and follow-up reminders).

The patient experience for blind and partially sighted individuals could be improved considerably by taking onboard these recommendations:

Create an accessible communications mechanism to allow patients to electronically complete paperwork, disclose a disability and request accommodations before an appointment.

Allow patients to choose their preferred method of communication. Preferences can vary from person to person, even if they identify as having the same disability.

Educate staff about how to guide patients to and from an examination room with verbal directions and/or sighted guide assistance. When directing patients to rooms, ask us if we need help. If we say yes, ask if we’d like guidance by a sighted guide and/or verbal directions. If we request a sighted guide, offer your arm and ask from which side we’d prefer guidance.

If we request verbal directions, instruct us when to turn left or right, whether we’re approaching stairs or an obstacle; etc.

Train staff how to facilitate an inclusive conversation during the examination. Throughout the visit, treat your patient as your primary point of contact and speak directly to them, unless they defer a particular question or the entire conversation to their companion.

Provide accessible materials in alternative formats, such as a Braille document, an accessible electronic format and/or a large print document.

Accessible communications also enable the inclusion of nearly 400 million with a hearing disability, approximately 200 million with a cognitive disability and about 18 million people with a speech-related disability. A Current Global study, “Digital Accessibility: The Necessity of Inclusion,” surveyed 800 people with disabilities to understand their lived experience consuming content. You can find out more about [the implications of this study](#) and how its results crystallize the benefits of embracing accessible communications.

A community of nearly two billion with \$13 trillion in collective buying power is hard—and foolhardy—for any company or brand to overlook. To find out more about how firms like Current Global are championing accessible communications and helping address and confront the health equity issues facing so many of us as PWDs, visit [accessible-communications.com](#).

Sena Pottackal is a Junior Associate at [Current Global](#).

CO COUNTY SEEKS COVID-19 OUTREACH

Larimer County is looking for partners to run communications and outreach campaigns aimed at groups that were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using fiscal recovery funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, Larimer wants to address the root causes of social vulnerabilities, health outcomes and economic disparities in the Colorado community.

The County plans to award multiple contracts to organizations with experience in conducting outreach to underrepresented and/or marginalized communities.

Selected partners must have “proven experience in authentically engaging” with those communities.

Proposals are due March 8 at [www.bidnetdirect.com/colorado](#).

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



S-3 REVIEWS CANADA'S DIGITAL STRATEGY

S-3 Group is working with Canada's DC embassy to review the effectiveness of its [Connect2Canada](#) online platform.



The firm will help the embassy better communicate its advocacy messaging as well as its other activities across social media platforms.

The goal of the digital strategy is to tell a cohesive story that leads to greater C2C brand awareness across the US and stimulates interest in Canadian affairs.

S-3's agreement calls for it to reimagine the diplomacy outreach beyond the embassy to include Canadian business executives, celebrities and thought leaders.

The work began Feb. 1 and runs through April 22. S-3 will receive payment of \$28K for its efforts.

PARK SHOPS AT BJ'S WHOLESALE CLUBS

BJ's Wholesale Clubs has hired Catherine Park as VP-investor relations.

Park comes to the company from MGM Resorts International, where she was executive director of investor relations.



Catherine Park

Earlier, she served as VP, corporate banking at JPMorgan Chase.

In her new role, Park will be responsible for providing strategic counsel to the BJ's Wholesale Clubs executive leadership team in managing its investor relations activities.

"Catherine's broad financial and investor management experience will help elevate our buy and sell-side relationships, while providing our executive leadership team with trusted counsel on a range of activities, including quarterly earnings," said BJ's EVP and CFO Laura Felice.

Westborough, MA-based BJ's chalked up a 7.2 percent hike in nine-month sales to \$12.3B. Earnings slipped 1.9 percent to \$319M during the period ended Oct. 30.

The company's stock trades at \$62.39. 52-week range is \$74.09, \$37.15.

There are 222 BJ's Wholesale Clubs in 17 states.

JOELE FRANK SHORES UP PARAMOUNT GROUP

Joele Frank represents Paramount Group as the real estate investment trust received an unsolicited takeover bid from Monarch Alternative Capital.



**PARAMOUNT
GROUP**

The \$12 per share offer values Paramount, which owns, operates and manages Class A office buildings in New York and San Francisco at \$2.2B.

Paramount, which promises to revive the office building market as the COVID-19 pandemic winds down.

It reported brisk leasing growth during Q4 2021 that underscores the "substantial opportunities to drive financial growth as the company repositions assets to fit the needs of high-quality tenants."

Joele Frank, Wilkinson Brimmer Katcher's Jon Keehner and Andrew Siegel represent Paramount Group.

NEWS OF FIRMS

Stagwell expands its global marketing services into Africa through affiliate partnerships with **Incubeta** in South Africa, **SBI Media** in Nigeria and Dubai-based **Orient Planet Group**. To date, Stagwell has added over 50 affiliates to its roster, representing countries across Latin America, MENA, Asia-Pacific and Eastern Europe. Incubeta is a digitally focused firm working with clients in such sectors as retail, travel, finance FMCG, iGaming and app development. SBI Media's capabilities span branding, strategy and planning, PR strategy formulation, media management and digital marketing. Orient Planet Group is a public relations, marketing and communications consultancy serving clients in North Africa and the Middle East.

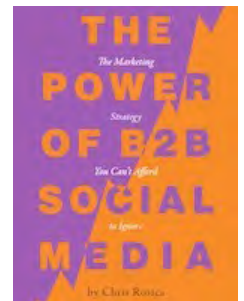
The Next Practice Group launches **CTRx Pathways**, a service designed to accelerate and diversify clinical trial enrollment. The service represents a series of media models created while The Next Practices team worked over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic with the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and Department of Defense as part of Operation Warp Speed. The accelerated enrollment initiative and partnership with Hopkins and the DoD was led by Michael Roth at [The Bliss Group](#) and Colin Foster at The Next Practice.

The Public Affairs & Advocacy Alliance, a network of leading public affairs companies, launches. The Alliance includes 720 Strategies, Jasculca Terman Strategic Communications, KP Public Affairs, Martin Waymire, Ostroff Associates, Inc., Sachs Media, Saxum, Singer and Associates, and Strategic Public Affairs. The network aims to provide unique strategy and effective guidance to address key issues affecting organizations and industries across the country.

The Brandon Agency's holding company, TBA Worldwide, acquires search and performance firm **Eight Oh Two Marketing**. Founded in 2009, Eight Oh Two offers services that include pay-per-click advertising, search engine optimization and content marketing. It will continue to operate as a stand-alone unit with the existing senior management team remaining in place. Eight Oh Two will leverage the expanded service offerings of the TBA Worldwide agencies (which also include TBA Outdoors and TravelBoom Marketing) and access to capital to accelerate growth.

Rosica president and CEO Chris Rosica has released **The Power of B2B Social Media**, a book that highlights the benefits social media marketing can provide for B2B companies and nonprofits. The book shows companies with a B2B social media program how they can take steps to protect online reputation, drive website traffic, step up content marketing, use influencers to increase their reach, and develop and maintain thought leadership.

MAPRagency rebrands, introducing a new name — **Comprise** — and a new visual identity. The agency says its new name and look better describe the company's full suite of services, including public relations, content creation, social media strategy and management, SEO, web design and development, webinar production, and creative services.



REPORT SLAMS BABY FORMULA MARKETING

Baby formula companies are responsible for “a sustained flow of misleading marketing messages,” some of which are in violation of international standards on infant feeding practices, according to a new report commissioned by The World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund.



The report found that 51 percent of parents and pregnant women said they’ve been targeted by baby formula companies with marketing messages in an attempt to persuade them to choose formula feeding over breastfeeding.

The WHO/UNICEF report claims the “aggressive” marketing practices employed by the baby formula industry to parents and health workers include messages that are “often misleading, scientifically unsubstantiated” and reinforce myths about breast milk and breastfeeding. The report claims some of these tactics also violate the WHO International Code of Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes, which was adopted in 1981 to promote safe and adequate nutrition for infants and protect mothers from aggressive marketing practices.

The report specifically cites the use of industry marketing techniques that include “unregulated and invasive online targeting; sponsored advice networks and helplines; promotions and free gifts; and practices to influence training and recommendations among health workers.”

According to the report, exposure to formula milk marketing reached 84 percent of all women surveyed in the United Kingdom, 92 percent of women surveyed in Vietnam and 97 percent of women surveyed in China.

“We need robust policies, legislation and investments in breastfeeding to ensure that women are protected from unethical marketing practices—and have access to the information and support they need to raise their families,” said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell in a statement.

The report surveyed 8,500 parents and pregnant women, as well as 300 health workers in eight countries (Bangladesh, China, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Vietnam) between August 2019 and April 2021.

PORTLAND SEEKS FLOOD CONTROL PR

The Multnomah County Drainage District, which operates and maintains the flood management system that protects the lives of people living in Portland, OR, is looking for a strategic communications partner.



The selected partner also will handle public opinion research and community/stakeholder engagement.

MCDD and adjoining water districts maintain the 27-mile levee system that runs along the Columbia River and Columbia Slough.

They support critical infrastructure, such as Portland International Airport, electrical substations and three interstate highways. The districts also are the region’s back-up drinking water supplier.

The water districts plan to negotiate PR contracts for up to five years pegged in the \$2M range.

Proposals are due March 11. Firms must be registered at the Oregon Buys portal at <https://oregonbuys.gov/bs>.

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

BEZOS EARTH FUND NAMES COBOS CCO

The Bezos Earth Fund, a Jeff Bezos-funded organization dedicated to driving climate and nature solutions, hires Stacie Cobos as chief communications officer.

Cobos was most recently vice president, brand marketing and communications at the International Fund for Animal Welfare.

She has also led communications at The Climate Reality Project, was senior vice president of public affairs at Hill + Knowlton Strategies and served as national press secretary for the Democratic National Committee.



Stacie Cobos

The fund says it plans to disburse \$10 billion in grants by 2030.

SVC BOOKS HOUGHTON MIFFLIN DEAL

Sard Verbinnen & Co. handles Veritas Capital as it inks a \$2.8B deal to acquire Houghton Mifflin Harcourt “learning technology” company for students K-12.

HMH says it closed the deal after discussions with several potential strategic and financial bidders.

Partnering with Veritas, according to HMH CEO Jack Lynch, will “accelerate our momentum and increase our impact on the 4M teachers and 50M students that we support.”

Veritas CEO Ramzi Musallam called HMH “one of the storied brands in education” and he’s excited to “expand its market-leading digital solutions.”

The deal is expected to close during the second quarter.

SVC has Jenny Gore and Julie Rudnick representing Veritas.

Finsbury Glover Hering owns SVC.



MEDIA MANEUVERS

NBCUniversal says that the Beijing Winter Olympics racked up the smallest prime-time audience ever recorded for the games. This year’s average of 11.4 million viewers was down 42 percent from the 19.8 million average number of viewers brought in during the 2018 Pyeongchang games. Those figures follow a disappointing performance for the 2020 Tokyo games, which only managed to pull in an average of 15.5 million viewers—down more than 43 percent from the 27.5 million recorded for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro games.

Truth Social, Donald Trump’s social-networking platform, is up and running—sort of. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, some potential users say they were unable to create an account or got error messages when they tried setting up an account. But snafus do not seem to be dimming the platform’s prospects. Digital World Acquisition Corp., the blank-check company that is merging with Trump Media & Technology, saw its shares jump by 19 percent in premarket trading on Feb. 22.

Tegna, which owns 64 television stations in 51 US markets, is acquired via a partnership deal between private equity firms Standard General and Apollo Global Management. Standard General founding partner Soo Kim will become Tegna’s chairman, and its CEO, Deb McDermott, will serve as Tegna’s chief executive officer. The partners beat out a rival offer from Byron Allen’s Allen Media Group.

COMMENTARY



Is Donald Trump auditioning for his own show on Russia's RT network? That must be the reason why he is once again cozying up to Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Trump, a self-described “stable genius,” lauded Putin as a genius for moving Russian

troops into two breakaway regions of Ukraine.

He also praised Putin for sending “more army tanks than I’ve ever seen” into Ukraine and mused that the US should do the same on the border with Mexico.

RT does have a soft spot for washed up western politicians. Alex Salmond, who was first minister of Scotland, hosts his own political chat show, where “he vows to battle the mainstream media narrative,” according to a RT blurb.

Nicola Sturgeon, Salmond’s successor, is appalled by his continued involvement with the Russian propaganda network.

“I don’t think it’s any secret now that I don’t think he should ever have had a television show on RT, but it is even more unthinkable now that it should continue,” she said.

Trump may be angling to take over William Shatner’s RT program that “seeks to answer fascinating and timely questions that pique the natural interest of everyone but that are too-often overlooked by establishment media.”

The former president could put a populist spin on Shatner’s show, which tries to reach “curious intellectuals who’d rather be educated than merely entertained by their TVs, coming face to face with some of today’s most perplexing conundrums with each mind-blowing episode.”

Trump could even keep the name of Shatner’s show. It’s called, “I Don’t Understand.”

BGR Government Affairs takes sanctions hit. The DC firm terminated its relationship with Nord Stream 2 AG, the company behind construction of a pipeline between Germany and Russia, after President Biden sanctioned it on Feb. 23 following Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.

Nord Stream 2, which is controlled by Russian energy giant Gazprom, had stepped up its lobbying push at BGR as Putin massed troops along Ukraine’s border.

It shelled out \$420K in lobbying fees from Jan. 1 at BGR until the firm ended the relationship on Feb. 24.

That outlay compared to \$210K during Q4 2021 and \$870K for all of last year.

Gazprom funds 50 percent of Nord Stream 2’s operating budget and is 38 percent owned by the Russian Federation.

Walker Roberts, co-head of BGR’s international and trade practice, led the push for Nord Stream 2.

He served in the Reagan White House and was chief foreign policy aide to Congressman Henry Hyde when he chaired the House Committee on International Relations.

McDonald’s shouldn’t mess with corporate raider Carl Icahn, who first made his mark with the hostile takeover of Trans World Airlines in 1986.

Animal lover Icahn wants McDonald’s to change the way that its suppliers treat pigs.

Icahn, who owns 200 McDonald’s shares, plans to nominate two directors to the company’s board to advocate that the company end the practice of keeping pregnant pigs in crates.

McDonald’s issued a snooty statement on Feb. 20, knocking Icahn’s nominations as representing a “narrow issue,” while its board works to foster sustainable value creation by “acting on some of the world’s most pressing social and environmental issues that are important to our stakeholders.”

McDonald’s in 2012 made its commitment to not buy pigs from producers who use gestation cages. That promise is now a decade old.

The company says it is on track to source 100 percent of its pork from sows housed in groups by 2024.

Icahn, 86, is apparently tired of waiting. “We’re not going to fool around with them any more,” he told Bloomberg.

The company shouldn’t be so dismissive of Icahn, who has a knack of shaking things up.

Former CBS anchor Dan Rather is looking at you, Fox News. In his Feb. 22 blog about Russian strongman Vladimir Putin invading Ukraine, Rather is disturbed about something he’s never seen before.

“There are many in this nation, cheered on by powerful media voices, who seem more aligned with a dangerous foe to America and a peaceful world order than they are with our own leadership,” he wrote on his “Steady” blog.

Rather believes America’s divisions are weaknesses that our enemies can exploit.

“We do their bidding with our bickering. To reduce the world order to shortsighted political calculations is to undermine our own national security,” he wrote.

It’s your call, Rupert Murdoch.

Americans are turning off national news as the pandemic winds down and the 2020 presidential election fades into memory.

Gallup/Knight Foundation poll found that only 33 percent of Americans in December 2021 said they are paying “a great deal of attention” to national news compared to 54 percent of respondents in the year earlier poll.

The pollsters attribute the fall-off in national news ratings due to declining interest on the COVID-19 and political front.

Interest in national news peaked at 56 percent in March 2020, which was the onset of the pandemic in the US. The 2020 election and controversy over alleged fraud also triggered an uptick in national news as 54 percent of Americans paid a great deal of attention to those events.

The poll found that Democrats are tuning out national news at a greater clip than Republicans and Independents.

Thirty-four percent of Democrats reported paying a great deal of attention to news in 2021 vs. 69 percent in 2020. Republicans report a five-point drop to 40 percent, while news attention declined 15 percent to 29 percent for Independents.

Democrats better start paying attention to the news again as the midterm elections draw near.

—Kevin McCauley