



Kevin McCauley  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's Newsletter



The Inside News of  
PR and Marketing  
Communications

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## MIAMI BEACH V&CA LOOKS FOR PR FIRM

The Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority has issued an RFP for PR services to further its goal of positioning the city as a vibrant community and superb tourist destination.

Besides its seven miles of beachfront, Miami Beach boasts of its extravagant nightlife, culinary offerings, shopping, world-class resorts, boutique hotels and cul-



tural attractions such as its New World Symphony and Miami City Ballet. The city is also noted for its "walkability."

The MBVCA's RFP is available at [www.publicpurpose.com](http://www.publicpurpose.com). Questions may be submitted via that portal or directed to Grisette Roque Marcos at (305) 673-7050 and [groquemarcos@miamibeachvca.com](mailto:groquemarcos@miamibeachvca.com).

A non-mandatory pre-bid conference is slated for 10 a.m. Jan. 22 at MBVCA's office at 1701 Meridian Ave. MBVCA will review the PR proposals next month.

## RBB ACQUIRES Z|COMM

rbb Communications has acquired Miami-based publicity and consulting practice Z|COMM. Financial terms of the transaction weren't publicly disclosed.

Formerly known as ZMPR, Z|COMM counts The Related Group, Artefacto, Perry Ellis International and One Thousand Museum by Zaha Hadid Architects as clients. The agency was founded in 2001 by Amy Zakarin, who also serves as president.

Z|COMM retains its name and branding as a luxury lifestyle division of rbb. Zakarin remains president of Z|COMM and joins rbb's senior leadership team. All other staffers will retain their positions and accounts.

rbb president Lisa Ross told O'Dwyer's that the deal bolsters the agency's team and capabilities in the lifestyle sector.

The acquisition, which brings rbb's total staff roster to 90, is the latest in what has been an agency purchasing spree for the Miami-based independent marketing PR firm. rbb in recent years also acquired full-service advertising and marketing outfit OutOfTheBlue Advertising, web search and digital marketing shop SpiderBoost Interactive and social media unit Digital Park.

rbb accounted for more than \$11 million in net fees last year, according to O'Dwyer's rankings of PR firms.



Lisa Ross

## SKADDEN SETTLES UKRAINE/MANAFORT SUIT

Lobbying powerhouse Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom will pay \$4.6M to settle a civil suit, alleging that it failed to register as a foreign agent for Ukraine work headed by Paul Manafort, president Trump's former campaign manager.

According to the agreement, Skadden contributed to "a public relations campaign directed at select members of the US media," without filing under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Following multiple inquiries from the Justice Dept.'s FARA unit, a "partner then at Skadden made false and misleading statements to the FARA unit," which led it to believe that it was not obligated to file, according to the Justice Dept.'s Jan. 17 statement.

The Justice Dept. ultimately determined that Skadden was required to register in 2012 and under the settlement agreement has agreed to do so retroactively.

According to the Agreement, Ukraine Ministry of Justice, with the assistance of Manafort, hired Skadden to write a report on the evidence and procedures used during the 2011 prosecution and trial of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and to address various questions regarding its fairness.

The \$4.6 million represents the fees/expenses that Skadden got from Ukraine.



Paul Manafort

## OGILVY PR CHIEF HEADS TO HEALTH FOOD CO.

Stuart Smith, head of Ogilvy's global PR group, is leaving the WPP unit to take the chief marketing & growth job at Vegoluntary Foods, the Los Angeles health food company founded by his wife and former Edelman western region CEO Gail Becker.

He joined Ogilvy in 2011 following a seven-year run as Edelman UK chief and three years at Hill & Knowlton, where he rose to head the corporate EMEA group.

Smith played the leading role in the folding of the standalone Ogilvy PR into an offering of a single-branded company.

Ogilvy CEO John Siefert will assume Smith's duties on an interim basis.

Los Angeles-based Vegoluntary is noted for its ready-to-cook Caulipower gluten-free pizza.

Becker launched Vegoluntary in 2016.



Stuart Smith

## EDELMAN FINDS SLIGHT UPTICK IN TRUST

Edelman reports a slight uptick in people's trust in business, NGOs, government and media, according to its 2019 Trust Barometer.

People though remain distrustful of government and media with each scoring 47 percent trust ratings, up three percent. They are more bullish on NGOs and business at 56 percent each.



The firm finds a 16 percent trust gap between the “informed public” (65 percent) and the “mass population” (49 percent).

Women are less trustful than men by a 50 percent to 55 percent margin. There's a double-digit gender trust gap of 15 percent in the US, driven by women's lower trust in business.

The Trust Barometer shows a 38 point gap in trust in media between Democrats (69 percent) and Republicans (33 percent). Republicans, in turn, are more trustful of business by a 66 percent to 51 percent score.

Sixty-five percent of Americans and Canadian trust traditional media, while little more than one-in-three (34 percent) trust social media. About three-quarters (73 percent) of respondents overall worry about false information or fake news being used as a weapon.

“My employer” (75 percent) is the most trusted institution. That trust “cements the employer-employee relationship,” according to the Barometer. Nearly eight-in-ten (78 percent) of employees who trust their employer are more likely to advocate on its behalf. Only 39 percent of workers who did not trust their employer are willing to lobby for it.

## OPEC MULLS US PR PUSH

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which supplies 40 percent of the world's oil, is considering a PR program in the US to bolster its image.

The campaign would counter president Trump's Twitter barrage blasting OPEC for jacking up oil prices, antitrust challenges and increased competition from American shale producers, which has powered the US to the top of the world's top oil producers list.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the so-called “Americans to Americans” PR effort would be targeted at thought influencers, such as think tanks, trade groups and academics.



The PR campaign, which would be the first such effort in OPEC's 59-year history, would position OPEC as a force for global energy price stability and a reliable supplier to the US and its allies.

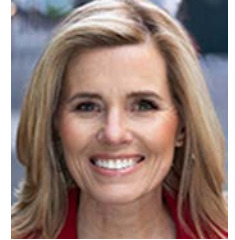
OPEC's 14 members are expected to discuss the PR effort, which would cost about \$500K, at a series of meetings slated next month at the group's Vienna headquarters.

Iran, which is at odds with Trump ally and OPEC's top energy producer Saudi Arabia, opposes any US outreach.

## CNN'S WALLACE HITS TRAIL

Kelly Wallace, who has served as an on-air news correspondent for CNN, Fox News Channel and CBS, has been named managing director of TrailRunner International's New York office.

Wallace was most recently at CNN as a digital correspondent and editor-at-large. She also worked as an associate producer at the network in the 1990s, and later returned as a correspondent covering the White House, the Mideast and the 2004 presidential campaign of John Kerry. She has also served as executive director of video and chief correspondent at iVillage, a company that operated several websites targeted at women.



**Kelly Wallace**

In her new role, Wallace will lead TrailRunner's New York team, as well as working with clients on corporate reputation, media affairs, crisis management and influencer engagement.

## ANGELO EXITS NY POST PUBLISHER SPOT

Jesse Angelo is leaving the *New York Post* publisher/CEO job after a 20-year run. Sean Giancola, chief revenue officer, will slide into Angelo's slot.

“We thank Jesse Angelo for his many and varied contributions to our company,” said Robert Thomson, CEO of News Corp. “Jesse has truly helped create a great platform for digital growth.”



**Jesse Angelo**

Angelo, who was in the running to take over for Roger Ailes at Fox News, is a good friend of James Murdoch, CEO of 21st Century Fox.

Prior to joining the Post in 2015, Giancola was VP-national sales at AOL Advertising and ad/marketing executive at American Express and Time Inc.

## MEDIA MANEUVERS

**Tribune Publishing** chairman and CEO Justin Dearborn has stepped down. Tim Knight, currently president of the company will move to the CEO spot and join Tribune's board. David Dreier will become chairman. Dearborn had been chief executive since 2016, when he took over from Michael Ferro, who resigned following allegations of sexual misconduct outside the company.

**The Forward**, which started out as *The Jewish Daily Forward* in April 1897, is stopping its print editions. It also plans to lay off about 40 percent of its editorial staff — including editor-in-chief Jane Eisner, executive editor Dan Friedman, digital director David Goldiner, design director Kurt Hoffman and vice president of marketing Kathleen Chambard. Started as a Yiddish-language daily, the Forward launched an English-language weekly edition in 1990, which became a monthly magazine in 2017. The Forward says the shift to digital-only is meant to capitalize on its growth among under-35 readers who prefer to read news online. Currently it says that segment amounts to a third of total readers.

## WHY THE ART OF CRISIS GOT PERSONAL

The state of the art of crisis communications isn't static; it's quickly evolving, morphing as rapidly as media itself. We see it most clearly in the sudden appearance of the vigilante questioner of your integrity and intent, who has many easy to access platforms from which



**Gil Bashe and Michael Heinley**

to choose to launch questions, inquiries or attacks against you.

It's an increasingly difficult landscape. Individuals can raise questions that encourage

others to join the chorus in doubting your integrity and share those questions to an increasingly wider circle through the ripple effect of social media. In addition, crisis management is exacerbated by the fluid meaning of "truth" itself. What is the truth? In the current era of undermining careful, methodical reporting through innuendo, lies and flat out attacks against the integrity of editorial, does objective truth still exist?

Consider this likely scenario: while you evaluate the nature and extent of your detractor's claims to best formulate your response plan, you come up against issues driven by virality. New questioners — enlisted through passionate social media posts — may or may not have familiarity with your company or a clear idea of the issues they're reacting to and amplify the magnitude of your problem even before you fully understand your problem.

You used to have a 24-hour news cycle to get this right. In the '90s and earlier, we still had news cycles; broadcast was the fastest media and you had a day to address stories. With print media, you had an even larger window of time to investigate, analyze and engage. Certainly, those outlets remain important and can sway and influence audiences, but digital media sped the news cycle up to minutes, not days. Now, we've left that second age of news cycles and if you're going to effectively manage crisis, you need to recognize that shift and deal with what's upon us.

It's the age of Twitter and blogging. Less than a decade ago, the digital news cycle was driven by the news and it included opinion from thought leaders and advocacy groups — not that different from the age of print and broadcast. Fact-checking and accuracy was the gold standard for solid reporting. Now, while there are certainly traditional media outlets and respected digital outlets in the game, social — corroborated or not — drives the news. Trends must be aggregated, analyzed and acted upon in seconds.

The quotable, memorable zinger puts a pundit on the same level as a creditable reporter. A lone Tweet can — and does — start a firestorm. Perspective is becoming more dominant than news; it's being treated as news and doesn't require fact checking to be widely accepted as fact. Many news networks report perspective every day. Their producers realize it gets more eyeballs than actual,

reputable news.

As the standard for fact-based rigor loosens across all forms of media, editors have moved toward including the mud-stirrers in their stories. Print media will fact check and hold until ready, but because the news cycle is so splintered, even the *New York Times* will go with the facts and perspective, though the Times and others clearly label it as such.

This shift in news media leads to them having a more "authentic" voice and perspective. Authenticity comes with a price; many media outlets now have a more compelling voice because they no longer rely on facts for every part of a piece.

Companies need to watch that new norm. They also need to ask themselves in every crisis or potential crisis: Do I pay attention to national perspective? Do powerful pundits and their non-factual perspective need to be taken into account? How do I support factual reporting when it's easy for editors to become overwhelmed by the roiling seas of social conversation?

In recent crises involving trusted and long-established brands, we've seen reputations and customer relationships put on the line. We used to build a crisis plan with a strong position at the center, work with media and thought leaders to convey our point-of-view. However, with citizen media (e.g., Twitter, Blogposts and comments posted to mainstream media) so accessible, crisis management has become infinitely more complex and personal.

Think about the moment when you're bumped from a flight and tweet-out your dissatisfaction. Almost immediately, the airline's social media staff will engage and take the conversation offline. The personal nature of social media means that we need to be more responsive, more attentive, to maintain reputation and relationship — especially in issues management.

You need pattern recognition skills. Social media pundits may cause a reputable company to stand down. Are you prepared to stand strong in the social media swirl? To have the staying power to be kicked in the shins for a day or so until an issue goes away? What will be the impact on your lasting digital footprint or stock valuation — just a blip, or hobbling damage that will hurt you for weeks, months and years to come?

Those are the different realities of crisis communications now, and you need to task knowledgeable experts, able to monitor and engage using the clock and media channels that appeal to Boomers and Millennials alike. That same personal skill that serves customer service professionals well must become part of the crisis management process. And crisis response needs to be a much more thoroughly thought out process. When you look at the companies undergoing crisis that are using only mass media, you'll understand that social and digital now requires a shift in your approach. If you're not working an issue or crisis from the perspective of an individual impacted — taking it personally — your detractors will.

*Gil Bashe is Managing Partner, Global Health at Finn Partners. Michael Heinley is Partner and Deputy NY Health lead at Finn Partners.*

## **COMMUNICATORS IN FAVOR OF CEO ACTIVISM**

Communications and marketing execs are on board with the current trend toward CEO activism, according to a study from Weber Shandwick and KRC Research.

A sizeable majority (62 percent) of the executives polled for the study said they would approve of their company's CEO taking a public position on such issues as climate change, gender pay equity, immigration and same-sex marriage. For companies whose CEO has already spoken out on a hotly debated issue, the approval rate rises to 78 percent.



One reason for that approval: Four out of five respondents (80 percent) said that some advantage to their company's reputation would likely result if the CEO were to speak out on issues. At companies with experience of CEO activism, 67 percent said that it did have a positive impact on company reputation.

Because of the increasing power of CEO activism, most companies are spending more time planning for it. More than half (53 percent) of the execs surveyed reported that their company spends time discussing whether their CEO should speak out on hotly debated current issues. Of those companies, 59 percent said that they have increased the amount of time devoted to discussing CEO activism over the past few years.

The study also asked respondents what organizations should do to prepare CEOs to respond to issues. "Get all the facts," "keep up to date on current events" and "invest in research and media training" all came up on the list of strategies for implementing CEO activism.

"CEO Activism: Inside Comms & Marketing" was the result of an online survey conducted in May 2018 of 500 communications and marketing professionals in the US, UK and China.

## **B-M'S EX-PA CHIEF TO SOUNDEXCHANGE**

Helaine Klasky, the former chair of Burson-Marsteller's U.S. public affairs and crisis practice, has been named chief communications officer of SoundExchange, a company that manages sound recording and music works rights.



**Helaine Klasky**

Klasky has also served as chief communications officer at both GE Energy Management and Yale University. In government, she has been deputy assistant secretary for public affairs at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, deputy assistant U.S. trade representative for public affairs, and ran the office of media affairs at the State Department.

In her new position, Klasky will oversee SoundExchange's global communications, industry relations and public policy teams. SoundExchange President and CEO Michael Huppe said that Klasky's skills and experience "will enable SoundExchange to be an even more effective advocate for creators, publishers and the music industry as a whole."

## **MERCURY SCORES BIG WIN FOR PUTIN ALLY**

Mercury Public Affairs scored a major victory Jan. 16 as Republicans in the Senate blocked a bid to restore sanctions on aluminum and energy companies controlled by Oleg Deripaska, Russian oligarch and confidant to strongman Vladimir Putin. The Treasury Dept. last month eased the sanctions, claiming that Deripaska restructured his ownership position in Rusal, the world's No. 2 aluminum company, and its parent EN+ Group.

Mercury's connection with Deripaska is via a contract signed last May with British politico Gregory Barker, EN+ Group chairman and a member of the UK House of Lords.



**Oleg Deripaska**

The British Parliament is investigating Barker for "alleged breach of the code in relation to personal honor, parliamentary services and paid advocacy."

Former Louisiana Republican Senator David Vitter heads Team Mercury, supported by partner Morris Reid (former leader of BGR's international practice and staffer to former VP Al Gore) and senior VP Deirdre Stach (Clark & Weinstock alum and aide to ex-Pennsylvania Republican Congressman Robert Walker)

Mercury receives a \$108,500 monthly fee for representing Deripaska's work.

## **BALLARD LAUNCHES STRATCOMM BIZ**

Federal lobbying powerhouse Ballard Partners, which has close ties with the Trump administration, has opened a strategic communications unit.

Raj Shah, who spearheaded the White House's communications push to confirm Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court, helms the group with Jamie Rubin, ex-State Dept. official during the Clinton administration who joined Ballard in 2018. Prior to his White House principal deputy press secretary posting, Shah was research director at the Republican National Committee.

Brian Ballard, who led the Trump Victory organization in Florida during the 2016 campaign, launched the stratcomm arm because his lobbying clients asked for "sophisticated media relations and PR affairs counsel."

## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

**Red Lorry Yellow Lorry**, a B2B technology PR and integrated communications specialist agency, has been named U.S. agency of record for **Seismic**, a tech startup focusing on marketing and sales enablement. The agency will work to increase awareness of Seismic in key business, regional and trade press. Its efforts will target decision-makers through thought leadership development, trends analysis and pain point identification.

**S&A Communications** is now agency of record for **McAdams**, a engineering and design firm located in North Carolina and Texas. S&A will provide McAdams with marketing communications services including content marketing, media relations and digital marketing. McAdams focuses on large-scale commercial developments, residential communities, education campuses, municipal projects, energy companies and healthcare facilities.

## **PROMOTING HEALTH BENEFITS OF CANNABIS**

Governor Andrew Cuomo, in the first State of the State address of his third term in office, pledged to legalize cannabis in New York within a hundred days. Societal attitudes toward what used to be called a “gateway drug” have drastically changed, and, like same-sex marriage before it, the law is slowly catching up.

The opportunity created is borderline unprecedented: the ushering into the open of one of the biggest black-market industries on Earth.



**Eric Yaverbaum**

Perhaps the most surprising aspect has nothing to do with recreational use; as businesses focus on cannabis’s potential in the wellness industry, the zonked-out stoner on the couch may be giving way to fit, active, urbanite professionals.

That’s because CBD, the non-psychoactive component in cannabis, has a growing reputation in the management of both pain and anxiety. The shift away from cannabis as a purely recreational substance to a regular component in a fit and active lifestyle, however, will require changing the conversation about how society sees cannabis, and consequently, how cannabis exists in the market. The public perception about cannabis is likely to remain dominated by glassy-eyed stoners.

But there’s a huge opportunity in bringing other uses to the fore, getting ahead of the legalization discussions that are happening across the United States with a bigger, broader picture of what cannabis is and can be.

This is a PR issue, not a marketing one. Marketing can do and say whatever it wants; the trick isn’t going to be getting your product in front of consumers, but getting the right message out there, in earned media, that marijuana isn’t what you might think it is, moving the conversation away from THC and even medicinal marijuana and towards its role in a fit, healthy lifestyle.

It’s uncertain, unsteady ground, but it’s an exciting business investment opportunity that’s unprecedented, save perhaps for the personal computer revolution. Bringing that to fruition is going to require new kinds of positioning: expert, clean-cut, adult, credentialed. It’s a change that’s coming, no matter what we do; the question is going to be who gets to control the conversation, and the business that takes command of it is the business that’s going to attract investors.

Now is the time to find your experts and carve out your niche. The snowball is rolling down the hill, and it’s vital to stake your claim. I keep thinking about the success of JUUL e-cigarettes; they didn’t bring anything to the market that wasn’t already there, but they took ownership over e-cigs, not simply as an alternative to smoking, but as a hip lifestyle choice. Smoking got to be cool again. That’s a huge cultural movement, and one JUUL capitalized on – not only with marketing, but with a PR blitz focusing on health, youth prevention, and technology. They understood the potential of their industry. Commanding cannabis will require the same foresight.

*Eric Yaverbaum is President of Ericho Communications.*

## **30% GO ON SOCIAL MEDIA 10+ TIMES DAILY**

Nearly a third of U.S. social media users post, like or share content via their social channels more than 10 times every day, according to a recent survey released by business news site The Manifest.

The Manifest survey, which sought to assess Americans’ social media usage and interactions, discovered that most social media users (86 percent) use their social media channels at least once a day, and 30 percent said they interact on social media in some form more than 10 times a day, be it in terms of liking, posting or sharing content.

Interacting with other people’s content (liking and sharing) seems to be the most important social media activity, cited by nearly half of social media users (48 percent), which was nearly twice as popular as the activity of sharing their own content (24 percent).

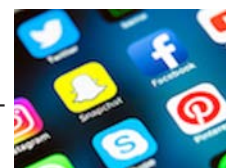
But virtually all social media users (94 percent) said they post content to their social channels at least sometimes, and nearly half (42 percent) said they do so daily.

When it comes to what content users like to post, a majority said images remain the most commonly uploaded content (69 percent), followed by life updates/announcements and videos (47 percent and 46 percent, respectively) and opinions (42 percent). Quotes and events bottomed out the list, at 39 percent and 36 percent, respectively.

Facebook remains by far the most popular social media channel: more than half of respondents said they use Facebook more than any other social platform to share their own content (52 percent) as well as to like/share someone else’s content (54 percent). This was distantly trailed by YouTube (16 percent) and Instagram (14 percent). Snapchat and Twitter followed with six percent each.

The Manifest’s “2019 Consumer Social Media Survey” polled approx. 630 U.S. adults who said they use social media at least once a week.

The Manifest is the sister site of D.C.-based research and consulting firm Clutch.



## **WE COMMUNICATIONS KNOWS CODEWORD**

WE Communications has acquired content marketing agency Codeword.

The agency will take the name WE Codeword, and continue to operate as a separate entity, maintaining its own client portfolio and partnering with WE on new business and joint client opportunities.

Codeword partners Mike Barash, Jeff Lind, Michael McKloskey and Kyle Monson will still lead the agency, working in partnership with WE leaders through a joint board headed by WE North America President Kass Sells.

With offices in New York, San Francisco and Salt Lake City, WE Codeword focuses on editorial and content, and is building out services in PR, social media, strategy and analytics.

“This move represents growth and diversification for both of our independent, people-focused, high-performing, financially strong firms,” said Melissa Waggener Zorkin, CEO of WE.

## COMMENTARY

### What was the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey thinking?

Following a firestorm of protest, the Port Authority has agreed to relocate the “Candy Nations” art installation, which features the flags of the G20 nations as a series of colorful candy sculptures, from the site of the World Trade Center.



At issue: the nine-foot sculpture of the flag of Saudi Arabia, the nation that provided 15 of the 19 hijackers that crashed their planes into the WTC towers nearly 18 years ago and killed 2,977 people. The travesty of displaying

the Saudi flag at the WTC is akin to raising the Japanese flag over the Pearl Harbor memorial.

The apparently clueless Port Authority should have known better. It lost 37 police officers in the 9/11 attacks, including its chief James Romito, and superintendent Ferdinand Morrone.

A coalition of family members of the 9/11 victims spoke for all New Yorkers in its statement: “The sculpture’s presence at this site, depicting the KSA [Kingdom of Saudi of Arabia] flag, is an outrageous affront to the 9/11 community and all other Americans who seek justice for the attacks on our nation of September 11, 2001.”

PR counselor Jay Winuk whose brother Glenn died in the 9/11 attack, handles media relations for the coalition. “As a group, we felt strongly that this collective objection not be perceived by the Port Authority, the artist, or the public at large as an attempt at censorship or to compromise anyone’s First Amendment rights,” he said.

Winuk Communications also has represented Kreindler & Kreindler LLP, one of the lead law firms for the 9/11 families in the law suit in federal court against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Winuk said the 9/11 family members exercised their First Amendment rights to “publicly object to the Port Authority’s insensitive and unfathomable choice to place this particular sculpture celebrating the Kingdom at the site of a mass murder for which many believe it was complicit.”

The Port Authority will now relocate (e.g., banish) Candy Nations to JFK Airport’s AirTrain systems miles away in Queens.

The original plan was to blanket the 16-acre WTC complex with the flags. The sites include the Oculus, the PATH Fare Zone, 2WTC Transit Lobby, 4WTC Transit Lobby, Oculus Plaza, West Plaza (outside of the One World Observatory), Liberty Park, and the Millennium Hilton New York Downtown. They were to remain in place until Feb. 4.

French sculptor Laurence Jenkell, who created Candy Nations, said she thought about removing the Saudi flag from the WTC exhibit, but decided against it

because the country is part of the G20. She could have saved the Port Authority a lot of grief.

The Port Authority says it's moving the flags because it “respects the unique sensitivities of the site.”

Unique sensitivities? Spare me.

There is nothing unique about the desire to ban an entity responsible for the second bloodiest day on American soil, after the Battle of Antietam, from a mass gravesite of its victims.

**Donald Trump continues his precedent-setting presidency** as his demand for a southern border wall that a majority of Americans do not want results in the first time in US history that service members in the US armed forces have not be paid due to a government shutdown.

Since the Coast Guard is part of the Dept. of Homeland Security, it has received no funding since Trump’s shutdown.

The president, who in the past has showered praise upon the Coast Guard has ignored the financial struggles of its service members caused by his shutdown.

During his Thanksgiving teleconference with the military, Trump said, “There’s no brand that’s gone up like the Coast Guard over the last few years,” perhaps referring to its role in hurricane relief efforts in in the waters of Texas, Puerto Rico, North Carolina and South Carolina.

A better bet: Trump likes the Coast Guard brand because it protects him when he hobnobs with the wealthy clientele of his members-only Palm Beach estate.

After all, with the president, it’s always about him.

Coast Guard cutters, helicopters, patrol boats and anti-terror personnel protect Trump when he vacations at Mar-a-Lago.

That protection costs some serious coin. The *Washington Post* reported July 28, 2017 that the Coast Guard spent more than \$6.6M protecting Trump during his seven visits to Mar-a-Lago in the spring of that year.

That Trump protection money is funding diverted from drug interdiction, search & rescue, inspections or port patrols.

While the president shows no empathy for his vacation bodyguards, USAA has stepped up via a donation \$15M in interest-free loans to financially-strapped Coast Guard members. The American Red Cross will handle electronic distribution of the loans up to \$1,000 and \$750 for service members without dependents.

San Antonio-based USAA provides banking, investments, insurance and retirement products to 12.8M current/former members of the military.

Hat’s off to USAA.

Of the little presidential respect shown toward the Coast Guard, the service’s founder Alexander Hamilton must be turning over in his grave. —Kevin McCauley