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WPP SPILLS \$3.4B IN 2020 RED INK

WPP posted a \$3.4B pretax loss in 2020 due to \$3.7B in COVID-19 impairment charges compared to a \$1.4B year-earlier profit.

The goodwill impairments relate to acquisitions whose carrying values have been reassessed in light of the pandemic, according to WPP. They were driven by a combination of higher discount rates used to value future cash flows, a

lower profit base in 2020 and lower industry growth rates.

WPP CEO Mark Read called the financial performance “remarkably resilient” during a “tough year for everyone.”

He said the effort to slash debt, and transform and simplify WPP’s businesses after the exit of founder Martin Sorrell, paid dividends during 2020.

Read expects 2021 to be a “year of solid recovery,” despite questions about the impact of vaccine roll-outs and economic growth.

WPP’s PR units chalked up \$1B in 2020 revenues, down 4.0 percent on LFL and 4.9 percent on a reported basis.

Flagship shop BCW continued to improve during Q4, while Hill+Knowlton Strategies posted weaker results due to a tough year-ago comparison. Finsbury Glover Hering, a combo announced in July, “achieved strong traction, both with clients and in attracting new talent,” according to WPP.



Mark Read

W2O REBRANDS AS REAL CHEMISTRY

Healthcare marketing and communications network W2O Group has announced that it has rebranded under a new name, Real Chemistry.



The agency, in a statement, said the name change addresses the disruption facing the healthcare sector since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This moment is about so much more than a new name or approach,” Real Chemistry founder and CEO Jim Weiss told *O’Dwyer’s*. “It’s about how our ethos of action, our two decades of intentional evolution and our drive for constant improvement helped us create what we see as the real chemistry between people and the brands born to change their lives.”

The San Francisco-headquartered network, which was founded in 2001, is the [number-one independent healthcare PR firm](#), according to *O’Dwyer’s* annual rankings, accounting for about \$219 million in net fees in 2019.

FAHLGREN MORTINE MERGES WITH PRECISION

Columbus, Ohio’s [Fahlgren Mortine](#) plans to merge with Sacramento-based Precision Public Relations.

The transition becomes official on April 1. Financial terms of the arrangement weren’t publicly disclosed.

Precision, which was founded in 2005, focuses on product promotion, media relations and crisis communication issues for clients in the food, wine and agricultural industries.

Precision will adopt the Fahlgren Mortine name and branding in light of the merger, and owner John Seagle will join the agency as Senior VP, Western Region.

“Precision’s impressive client roster complements our own, and John has fostered many relationships that will be advantageous to our team,” FM President and CEO Neil Mortine told *O’Dwyer’s*.

FM was acquired in 2018 by Memphis, TN-based private holding company Eastport Holdings, LLC. Later that year, FM merged with fellow Eastport property and fellow Columbus-based ad shop SBC Advertising.

The agency in 2019 accounted for nearly \$30 million in net fees, according to [O’Dwyer’s rankings of PR firms](#).



Neil Mortine

USO SEEKS TO ENLIST PR FIRM

United Service Organizations, a nonprofit formed in 1941 to support America’s armed forces and their families, is looking for a PR firm.

The USO, which pitches itself as the “force behind the forces,” runs more than 250 centers worldwide.



The successful bidder will have a track record in the conceptualization and creative development of marketing content and materials that support brand awareness and fundraising.

The firm will bolster brand understanding, differentiation and relevancy and increase the familiarity and favorability of the USO’s work to military audiences with eyes toward active-duty service members and their families. It will also target current and prospective donor segments.

USO plans to award a contract on March 29 for work kicking off April 5 running through the end of the year. Responses are due March 22 at the Coupa sourcing portal.

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

D&M TAPPED TO REP MYANMAR

Dickens & Madson has a \$2M agreement to represent the Republic of the Union of Myanmar “to assist in explaining the real situation in the country.”



Myanmar’s military staged a coup on Feb. 1 then launched a brutal crack-down on peaceful demonstrators that has led to at least 100 deaths.

The US has condemned the military junta.

Dickens & Madson, which is based in Montreal, is to counsel Myanmar’s government and to advocate on its behalf before the Biden administration and Congress in support of humanitarian aid for its people.

It also will push for the removal or modification of existing US sanctions on Myanmar.

D&M, which signed its agreement with Myanmar on March 4, also represents the country in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel and Russia, as well as before the United Nations, African Union and NGOs.

WEBER SHANDWICK ROLLS COVID-19 VAX UNIT

[Weber Shandwick](#) has launched Plan Vx, an initiative to help business leaders get the message out about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Plan Vx builds on vaccine-related work already underway at the agency to provide information and advice on how companies can effectively work with employees around the issue.

A central part of the initiative is [Plan Vx: A Playbook for the Business Response to COVID-19](#). The agency is also hosting “COVID-19: The Path Forward”, a three-part webinar series hosted by Weber Shandwick chairman Jack Leslie, in which experts in public health and epidemiology will examine the latest science around COVID-19 virus variants, the state of vaccine access across the world and key considerations for the private sector. There will also be a companion series of podcast episodes.

In addition, Plan Vx will offer management consulting on how to connect with employees (such as internal education and incentive campaigns), as well as providing public affairs and communications support to help clients reach stakeholders in the communities where they operate.

GRAYLING’S BARCLAY TO ALLISON+PARTNERS

Sharon Barclay, who led the enterprise technology portfolio at Grayling as a senior VP, has come on board at [Allison+Partners](#) as executive VP.

At Grayling, Barclay created integrated communication strategies, directed global teams and provided senior counsel to executives at such companies as MicroStrategy, Flex and CourseHero.



Sharon Barclay

Before joining Grayling, she was a principal at Blue Trumpet Group, an independent contractor focused on corporate and executive visibility. She has also managed Cisco’s Partner PR program and led MWWPR’s San Francisco office.

At Allison+Partners, Barclay will handle executive visibility, corporate narratives, product marketing, crisis communications and analyst relations.

COLORADO FLOATS VACCINE EDUCATION RFP

The Colorado Dept. of Public Health and Environment is looking for a firm to run an immunization campaign to encourage residents to get vaccinated.

The Department’s immunization branch uses a variety of strategies to promote education, optimize vaccine resources, assure access to vaccines, and maintain the computerized information system that collects and consolidates immunization data for Coloradans of all ages.



It wants a firm to engage and sustain a coalition of scientific and evidence-based immunization experts and stakeholders and provide immunization-related education.

The budget for the PR campaign is set at \$180K per year. Colorado plans to issue a one-year contract with four one-year renewal options. The campaign will launch July 1.

Responses to the RFP are due March 22.

They should be sent to: Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment; Purchasing and Contracts Unit; Mail Room (B1); 4300 Cherry Creek Drive South; Denver, CO. 80246-1530; Attention: Allan Smith, Senior Purchasing Agent

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

SOURCECODE UNIT BACKS WORKING MOMS

SourceCode Communications has unveiled WeRaise PR, a full-service agency that delivers integrated campaigns to brands while advancing working mothers in the PR industry.

WeRaise was founded to support what it calls “an empathy-first working culture that enables working mothers to excel professionally.” The agency is led by Moon Vitello, who previously was a co-founder and partner at Crave Communications.



“Following the launch of our Diversity Marketing Consortium and in response to the crisis facing working women caused by the COVID Pandemic, we wanted to build an agency that works with personal priorities not against them,” said SourceCode co-founder and managing partner Rebecca Honeyman.

PROSEK PICKS PERRAS

Justin Perras, who was global director of media relations at international law firm White & Case, has joined Prosek Partners as managing director.

Prior to joining White & Case in 2016, Perras led communications for Credit Suisse’s Asset Management division, overseeing internal and external communications, crisis communications and messaging.

He spent five years at J.P. Morgan overseeing press outreach and messaging for the corporate & investment bank’s credit and debt-focused businesses.

“He will be a great addition to our strong leadership team, and we expect our client base will benefit from Justin’s deep financial and professional sector experience,” said Prosek Partners founder and managing partner Jennifer Prosek.

Prosek came in at [#3 in O’Dwyer’s 2020 rankings](#) of firms specializing in financial PR and investor relations.



Justin Perras

IN FOOD INDUSTRY, TRUST IS ESSENTIAL

With COVID, calamitous weather and a widening human divide nationwide, nature appears to be running amok and making a direct hit on safety and health. Ultimately, as studies have shown, it has manifested in a lessening of trust in each other, in our institutions and in our way of life, all long taken for granted. For the food industry—as producers, retailers and responsible employers—the impact of the last year will reverberate for decades. As communicators, however, this isn't a doomsday scenario. We've seen historic marketplace and cultural meteors before.



Michael Fineman

Food businesses and executives who make smart, credible and genuine moves will lead, but it's going to require a doubling down on consumer trust and embracing change. The question of who and what you trust must

be answered, and we all must demonstrate the answers with well-considered decisions and activities.

What's changed across the board? The speed by which critical information—and misinformation—is shared and the crucial nature of getting it right, especially when it comes to human health and safety. So, how best to build trust and meet consumer, customer and employee expectations?

Our experience in helping clients successfully communicate consumer messages tells us to focus on building trust from the inside out. Take a brutally honest look at your corporate reputation and brand, how consumers and your own people view your organization.

Here are some pathways our own food and beverage clients are taking:

Increase employee communications

Out of sheer necessity, communicate often and visibly. Provide brief, regular, fact-based updates to your website, your employees and your customers. Demonstrate your partnership with regulatory and public health entities. Especially during these times, it's these public guardians that consumers will trust most (over the word of for-profit companies). Communicate with a tone of concern for your audience's health and welfare. Tone is often more important than content; optimism and encouragement never hurt.

Connect with your community

Remember your local communities where many of your employees and their families live and where you often have an outsized shadow. Your town's tax base is often, in large part, dependent on your decisions. Local businesses and civic organizations will appreciate your support and patronage wherever you can provide it.

Gut check your reputation

Re-vitalize your assets and allies, especially your employees. Take an honest audit of commentary on social media, internal chat channels and employee forums.

How credible is your message?

Are there local or industry experts that would be valuable to enlist for expert counsel and for referral sources when the media calls? Have you conducted studies and surveys that could be of interest to others? Are there forecasts or other research—trade or medical—that you've used to help guide your initiatives? Leverage them and keep eyes open for new partners who can support you and add credibility to your brand promise and values.

Update your game plan

Don't wait until there's some semblance of "normal" to evaluate your communications strategy. Even though we are far from the "end" of this challenging period, all of us have seen organizational changes, personnel shifts, and the re-ordering of priorities. Take a fresh look at your scenario plans and crisis preparation. Review your most reliable and/or updated tools for pushing out content and measuring impact. Revisit new threats to your business. Take an audit of competitors in the news. Think about developing trends, threats to your business and community, potential disasters and hazards, and competitive concerns that could have a pernicious effect. Then, act. Develop a position for these issues and scenarios, no matter how brief, that can be updated and customized when needed. Determine which events or developments might trigger your need to address the situation. Use this time to regroup wisely and retire outdated practices. It all adds up to help bulwark brand trust.

Social distance isn't for social media

Now's the time to lean into social media to connect with your audience where they're choosing to spend time. Keep up with potentially new audiences, look for ways to genuinely connect with your followers and build loyalty through content that matters to them. This isn't the time to overproduce or overspend; there's no need to be perfect or slick. It's about telling your story authentically and contributing to the real-life conversations and experiences that are helping us all get through these times, together.

Be willing to change

Innovation is what fuels our industry and our personal growth. The changes in our professional world will continue, as will the changes in our daily lives. A trust mindset for business and for ourselves will help evolve how we communicate, how we connect, how we function, and how we support a constantly shifting consumer marketplace and food supply. Be open to change. Communicate trustworthiness and the promise reflected by your brand.

Michael Fineman is President of [Fineman PR](#).

OH COMMERCE DEPT. ISSUES MARKETING RFP

The Ohio Department of Commerce is soliciting proposals from agencies providing digital marketing services.

COM is looking for an agency with expertise in digital marketing and advertising services that can develop marketing concepts that showcase how the department is leveraging technology to better serve Ohioans and create integrated campaigns that promote the department's outreach and education efforts.

Scope of the work includes developing marketing concepts that creates awareness of how COM is leveraging technology to better serve Ohioans and businesses; creating integrated campaigns to promote the department's outreach and education efforts; providing ad and digital marketing services; developing marketing and social media strategy; promoting the COM website; providing paid media strategy; and providing website optimization services and measurement.

The project period runs from April 1 through June 30, 2025 and comes with a budget cap of \$50,000 annually.

Proposals, due by 3:00 p.m. (EST) March 20, and questions should be emailed to carol.cook@com.state.oh.us.

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



IR PROS SEE UPSWING IN M&A ACTIVITY

About eight in 10 investor relations officers (81 percent) expect to engage in M&A transactions in 2021, according to a [new survey from the National Investor Relations Institute and Gladstone Place Partners](#).



That's a healthy increase from the 67 percent who made that prediction last year.

However, most of those transactions are expected to be lower-risk "bolt-on" deals, with only 18 percent of respondents saying they were likely to participate in "transformative" deals.

The main driver behind potential acquisitions was thought to be the need for growth (29 percent), followed by industry consolidation pressure (24 percent).

As regards the biggest threats posed by activist investors, financial performance and capital allocation were each seen as their company's most vulnerable area by 30 percent of respondents.

The power of ESG initiatives was big for companies—but less so for investors—the survey found. A majority of respondents (53 percent) said they expect their company to allocate "significantly increased resources" to ESG concerns, with 33 percent anticipating "slightly more resources" for ESG. Only four percent think that less resources will be allocated.

But when asked about shareholders, the story is different. More than two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) said they had not received any shareholder pressure to increase the diversity of their company's board. In addition, only 28 percent said that ESG issues were seen as a major reason for shareholders to sell their stock in a company.

The survey also asked which component of ESG respondents thought was most important. "Social" was the big gainer, up from nine percent last year to 33 percent this year. "Governance" was up slightly, from 30 percent to 32 percent, with "Environmental" seeing a dip from 24 percent to 22 percent.

When it comes to what the policies of the Biden administration are likely to be as regards M&A transactions, respondents were fairly evenly split. Slightly more than half (51 percent) expect Biden to take a more aggressive stance on antitrust regulations, with five percent thinking he will take a less aggressive approach and 44 percent expecting things to remain pretty much the same.

BERLINROSEN SNAGS EDELMAN'S CUMMINGS

Brittany Cummings, VP-brand at Edelman, joined BerlinRosen as VP-strategic campaigns on March 15.

The agency's strategic campaigns unit works with clients such as HBO Max, Innocence Project, Black Futures Lab,



Brittany Cummings

Color of Change and 15 Percent Pledge on racial justice, cultural and entertainment matters.

At Edelman, Cummings counseled on social justice issues and forged paid, earned & owned communications campaigns for consumer-oriented Hilton Worldwide, Dubai Tourism and Shutterstock accounts.

She also did stints as media strategist at Weber Shandwick and news producer at CNN.

IS BIG OIL SERIOUS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

It seems that all God's children gotta have a climate strategy or a sustainability schtick these days, and Big Oil is no exception. ExxonMobil and Chevron—two of the nation's largest and once best-capitalized operators—have embraced the goal of "decarbonizing the economy" or getting to zero emissions by the year 2050.



Bill Huey

But how will they do it? Chevron CEO Mike Wirth told CNBC that his company would employ carbon reduction processes and carbon credits to achieve zero "net" emissions.

Pay attention to that last part, because using carbon credits to achieve "zero net" emissions is like Donald Trump using dodgy accounting methods to pay a pittance in taxes on his vast real estate holdings.

Carbon credits work like this: A company knows its emissions are going to be higher than the goal, so they purchase credits from some do-gooder organization so they can claim a much lower number. It's like the old practice of selling indulgences in the Catholic Church—to cut your time in Purgatory, purchase some indulgences for your sins.

The modern version originated in the Reagan Administration. Back then, it was to make up for the blatant, outright kind of air and water pollution that was causing acid rain and fouling public water supplies. Today, it is much more sophisticated, and amounts to selling air, or Wall Street derivatives.

Defenders of carbon credits will say that the setup is replanting rain forests and restoring wetlands, but honest accounting is honest accounting, and carbon credits are a dodge like any other dodge.

So next time you see a warm, fuzzy television commercial about the strides being made by these companies, switch your PR radar to high beam, and look closely at the real numbers.

Bill Huey is president of Strategic Communications and the author of Carbon Man (Kindle, 2010).

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

Crosby Marketing Communications hunts down **Cybercrime Support Network** to create a national awareness and activation campaign to help military personnel, veterans and their families recognize, report and recover from cybercrimes. Crosby will work with CSN to develop the campaign strategy, brand identity and integrated outreach effort.

Carolyn Izzo Integrated Communications adds **Kind Traveler** to its roster of travel and tourism clients. CIIC will lead Kind Traveler's strategic public relations efforts. Kind Traveler is a hotel booking and sustainable travel education platform that empowers travelers to positively impact the communities they visit.



The Vox Agency takes on **Nirmy** (pronounced "near me"), a Las Vegas-based business-discovery app providing consumers a way to explore restaurants, retail, services, entertainment options and more throughout Southern Nevada. Vox is providing Nirmy with media relations, community outreach and brand building support. The app is available for Android and iOS.

AMERICANS NIX MANDATORY COVID SHOT

Though employers (68 percent) trail only hospitals/doctors (78 percent) as the most trusted source of information about COVID-19, Americans reject the idea that a COVID-19 shot



should be required in order to return to the workplace, according to a special report of the Edelman Trust Barometer.

Nearly seven-in-ten (69 percent) say the decision to get the COVID-19 vaccine is a personal choice.

The Edelman survey, conducted to mark the one-year anniversary of the pandemic, found that 81 percent of respondents want their employers to update pandemic and vaccine-related information on at least a weekly basis.

A majority wants the government to take a conservative approach to re-opening the economy.

Sixty percent say the government's top priority is to save as many lives as possible even if the economy takes a hit, while 40 percent believe the country is approaching the point where it is more important to save jobs than to take every precaution to keep people safe.

WARNERMEDIA'S HORN JOINS PRECISION

Denise Horn, who was most recently senior director of inclusion marketing and communications at WarnerMedia, has joined Precision as managing principal, communications.



Denise Horn

Horn previously led corporate communications for Turner. She was director of African American media for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, and has worked at Facebook, where she helped to develop the platform's political communications strategy.

At Precision, Horn will be a senior member of the agency's client management teams. She will also help build out Precision's entertainment practice.

"Denise is an exceptional communications professional who has developed messaging and strategy for some of the top corporate brands as well as high-level political campaigns," said Precision co-founder and partner Stephanie Cutter.

PELOTON WORKS OUT ON CAPITOL HILL

Peloton Interactive has registered Justin Kintz, senior VP-government relations & public policy, as its first in-house Capitol Hill lobbyist.



Justin Kintz

He joined the home exercise equipment company in February after exiting Uber as VP & head of public policy following a seven-year stint.

Kintz also was director of government affairs at Orbitz Worldwide, corporate & PR manager at the European-American Business Council and special assistant external & intergovernmental affairs at George W. Bush's Interior Dept.

At Peloton, Kintz handles "Made in America" manufacturing, social justice/equity and health & wellness issues with a focus on COVID-19 recovery.

STAGWELL POSTS UPBEAT Q4 PERFORMANCE

Stagwell Marketing Group reported a 67.5 percent surge in Q4 revenues to \$313.1M, sparked by growth in its technology and digital businesses.

Organic revenue growth advanced 29.1 percent to \$182.7M.

Jay Leveton, Stagwell partner, noted the robust financial performance occurred amid "a challenging environment brought on by the pandemic," which took a toll on the company's travel and entertainment units.

Bolstered by the 2020 elections, Stagwell's communications, public affairs and advocacy group posted a 333.3 percent surge in full-year revenues to \$78.9M.

That segment covers activities such as strategic communications through traditional media relations, social media and in-person engagements, as well as utilizing digital channels to mobilize and raise funds from supporters and constituents.

It includes SKDKnickerbocker, Targeted Victory and Wye Communications.



Jay Leveton

UCF SEEKS PR FOR PTSD CENTER

The University of Central Florida wants to hire a firm to provide PR and communications services for its research center for people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders.

UCF Restores, which is in Orlando, offers a three-week outpatient program for first responders; front-line medical personnel; military veterans; and survivors of sexual assault, mass violence and natural disasters.

The selected firm will promote UCF Restores as a respected research center and a trusted source of science information to the media and public.

The PR partner will drive traffic to UCF Restore's website/social media sites and "inspire well-qualified potential donors to consider providing financial support," according to the RFP.

Responses to the RFP are due on March 25.

They go to UCF's bonfire portal at <https://ucfprocurement.bonfirehub.com/opportunities/39411>.

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



FENTON NAMES DE LA GARZA CEO

Fenton Communications has named Valarie De La Garza CEO. She is both the first woman and first person of color to lead the organization. She has been with Fenton since 2016, most recently serving as the managing director of the agency's west coast offices.

Before joining Fenton, De La Garza led communications and marketing for the California Community Foundation, ran her own independent communications consultancy and was a vice president at The Rogers Group.

In her new role, she will oversee Fenton's four offices. "Valarie De La Garza's ascension to CEO is the natural culmination of her many years of successful leadership of the firm," said Fenton owner James Marcus.



Valarie De La Garza

COMMENTARY



Lachlan Murdoch

Fox Corp. CEO Lachlan Murdoch is blowing smoke when he thinks Fox News is going to thrive as the loyal opposition to the Biden administration, as MSNBC did during the Trump White House.

Here is a news flash for Lachlan: “Sleepy Joe” is no match for the 24/7 outrage, distort, attack, distract and deny machine that just exited Washington for the Sunshine State, where he plots revenge and charts a comeback.

And then there is the inconvenient fact that Biden has done more good for America during his first 50 days in office than Trump “accomplished” in four years.

His \$1.9T American Rescue Plan is a winner, approved by 70 percent of the US, according to Pew Research, and 41 percent of Republicans and GOP-leaning independents.

The president also scores high marks for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine rollout.

The Conservative Political Action Conference, a bash favored by fire-breathing right-wingers, drove home the point that Uncle Joe just doesn’t generate outrage.

Washington Post’s David Weigel wrote Feb. 27 that few CPACers spoke of Biden because he has failed to reach the bogeyman status of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

“I can’t give the Biden stuff away,” said MAGA merchandise vendor David Solomon, who was trying to unload t-shirts with images of the president with a Hitler-style mustache and the message “Not my dictator.”

Lachlan should trash the loyal opposition bit.

What he needs is a Howard “Mad as Hell” Beale-type to energize a Fox World desperate for entertainment. Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity are yesterday’s news.

Dr. Seuss and Mr. Potato Head are fun cancel-culture tidbits, but where is the raw meat that Foxers are accustomed to chomp on?

What would Lachlan’s dad, Rupert, do? Since “Network”’s Beale is not available, Rupe should return Piers Morgan, who worked for a bunch of Murdoch newspapers during the ’80s and ’90s, back into the fold.

Morgan, who just stormed off the “Good Morning Britain” set and quit the hosting job after he launched a fierce tirade against Meghan Markle, would ignite Fox News.

He did flop in America in 2014 after a three-year run at CNN, which hired him to succeed Larry King. But that was during the pre-Trumpian age when showmanship and outrage were not yet keys to TV success.

Lachlan, who reportedly has his eye on sports betting as a growth engine at Fox Corp., could accept wagers on when Piers would blow and storm off the TV set.

It would be must-see TV and a ratings smash.

Outgoing New York governor Andrew Cuomo received another blow to his already battered image when Crown Books decided to stop promoting his “American Crisis: Leadership Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The Penguin Random House division has no plans to re-print the Cuomo “Crisis” or issue it in paperback form due to the probe into whether the governor underestimated nursing home deaths from COVID-19.

That investigation undermines the entire rationale of “American Crisis,” which the publisher rushed into print.

Released Oct. 13, Cuomo’s book apparently has sold about 50K copies though I haven’t seen a single one being read on the subway.

One sad note: a good chunk of the book’s proceeds were supposed to go to a COVID-19-related charity group.

Cuomo’s harassment crisis torpedoed both book sales and donations. Whatever the outcome of Crisis II, you can bet the governor won’t be writing another book any time soon.

Mississippi governor Tate Reeves sure has his priorities screwed up. Fresh from his March 3 move to lift the mask-wearing mandate in the Magnolia State, where 6,864 people have died from COVID-19, Reeves signed into law a bill banning transgender women from competing in female sporting events.

Upon signing the Mississippi Fairness Act, Reeves said the law would “ensure that young girls are not forced to compete against biological males.”

Nobody has a clue about how many transgender people compete athletically in Mississippi. Zero? One? Two?

A Gallup survey released in February found that 0.6 percent of American adults identify as transgender.

A UK researcher said of 200K women participating in college sports, fifty consider themselves transgender.

Certainly, Reeves has bigger catfish to fry than fretting about transgender people in sports.

The “non-issue” distracts attention from the Jackson water scandal. A good chunk of people living in Mississippi’s capital, a majority Black city of 160K people, have been without water since the mid-February freeze.

Mississippi, one of the nation’s poorest states, needs about \$1B to modernize the century-old water system, which has been starved of investment over the years.

“I do think it’s really important that the City of Jackson start collecting their water bill payments before they start going and asking everyone else to pony up more money,” said a snarky Reeves.

A reminder for the governor: If you plan to police a girls’ basketball game in Jackson, bring a couple of water bottles.

Warner Media’s Jason Kilar, the Amazon executive who was hired to slash staff, has the starring role in the AT&T compensation story. He hauled in a robust \$52.2M in 2020 total compensation, largely due to stock awards of \$49.3M.

That topped the \$29.2M comp earned by executive chairman Randall Stephenson, \$21M for CEO John Stankey, \$18.6M for general counsel Dave McAtee and \$16.1M for CFO John Stephens.

Kilar signed a contract with a base salary of \$2.5M and an annual cash target bonus award of \$2.5M.

What is he going to do for an encore? —Kevin McCauley