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WPP Q1 REVENUES FALL 3.3%

WPP CEO Mark Read reports like-for-like revenues dropped 3.3 percent during Q1 and 7.9 percent in March as the COVID-19 pandemic spread throughout the world.

Greater China led the revenue rout as the region declined 21.3 percent during the period and 29.9 percent in March.



Mark Read

Read noted that offices in China are now operating at 90 percent occupancy and a rapid recovery in economic activity is anticipated.

COVID-19 rocked WPP's automotive, travel & leisure, and luxury & premium sectors, which generate about a quarter of spending by the Top 200 clients.

That downturn was partially offset by the performance of the technology, healthcare, pharma and consumer packaged goods practices that account for 54 percent of spending.

Read said the immediate future is highly uncertain, though he does see some positive signs.

"We have started to prepare for the reopening of our offices as and when governments begin to lift lockdowns—at substantially lower capacity and with enhanced safety measures in line with official guidance.

"Visibility of a return to normal remains low, but a number of clients are seeking our advice and support on how they should market their brands in the recovery phase."

WPP PR group led by Hill+Knowlton Strategies, BCW, Ogilvy and Finsbury charted a 1.4 percent decline in LFL revenues to \$262M during the quarter.

EX-WEBER EXEC PULLEY TO BLOOMBERG

Brett Pulley, who was let go by Weber Shandwick in February as part of a cost-cutting move, has returned to Bloomberg as bureau chief in Atlanta.

He was among five senior executives dropped by the Interpublic unit earlier this year in what it called "a small staff reduction."



Brett Pulley

Pulley joined Weber in January 2016 as executive VP in charge of corporate content and media strategy after a four-year run as dean of the Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications at Hampton University (VA).

Earlier, he spent more than 20 years as business & financial journalist at Bloomberg, senior editor at *Forbes*, national correspondent at the *New York Times*, staff reporter at the *Wall Street Journal* and reporter at the *Orlando Sentinel*.

OMNICOM'S WREN TAKES 17.2% PAY CUT

Omnicom CEO John Wren took a 17.2 percent cut in compensation to \$19.8M in 2019, according to the firm's proxy statement released April 29.

The parent company of FleishmanHillard, Mercury, Marina Maher, Portland, Ketchum, Cone and Porter Novelli registered a 2.2 percent dip in 2019 revenues to \$15.3B. Net income inched ahead one percent to \$1.3B.

CFO Philip Angelastro saw his compensation drop 2.6 percent to \$7.6M.

Jonathan Nelson, CEO of Omnicom Digital, and Michael O'Brien, executive VP/corporate secretary, enjoyed pay bumps of 8.1 percent to \$5.4M and 7.7 percent to \$4.1M, respectively.

As a COVID-19 pandemic measure, OMC's top executives didn't receive the cash portion of the 2019 non-equity incentive plans typically paid last month. That payment has been pushed to later in the year.

Those cash bonuses are \$10.6M for Wren, \$3.4M for Angelastro, \$2M for Nelson and \$1.6M for O'Brien.

Meanwhile, OMC will shrink its board from 11 to nine members as Robert Clark, Harvard professor; and Alan Batkins, one-time vice chairman of Kissinger Assocs., have reached the mandatory 75-year-old retirement age and will not stand for re-election to the board at the June 9 annual meeting slated for Greenwich, CN, and online.



John Wren

W2O PICKS SPECHT FOR TRANSFORMATION

Bryan Specht, one-time president of Olson, has joined W2O Group to accelerate its transformation to a digital healthcare firm.

As group president, transformation, consumer activation and marketing, he will lead integration of people and technology to forge new ways to work with clients and to redefine how people experience healthcare and manage their personal health, according to W2O, which tops O'Dwyer's healthcare rankings with fees of \$218.9M.

Most recently, Specht worked as chief growth and innovation officer at ICF Next, global consultancy.

Specht will help guide W2O as it infuses "the marketing principles of the consumer and influence world with science and healthcare to reach people in new ways, giving them more control to live healthier lives," W2O founder/CEO Jim Weiss said in a statement.



Bryan Specht

LINDEN POWERS PAKISTAN'S PR

Linden Government Solutions has inked a pact to provide strategic consulting services to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The six-month contract of the Houston-based firm went into effect April 15 and automatically renews for another



six months upon mutual agreement by both parties.

Pakistan and US ties are strained over the Trump administration's plan to sell \$155M in anti-ship missiles to India.

On April 17, Pakistan called the sale of missiles to its archrival "disturbing" and a move that would "destabilize" the region.

The arms deal follows Trump's high-profile 36-hour state visit to India in February in which he was feted by Indian prime minister Narendra Modi.

Linden president Stephen Payne, who has close ties with the Republican party, is leading the Pakistan account. He was a presidential advance man for George W. Bush and traveled with former VP Dick Cheney.

In 2019, Linden picked up a \$2.1M contract with The Libyan National Army rebel group, which is headed by 75-year-old US citizen Khalifa Haftar.

That pact is with the Benghazi-based Decision Support Center, which says its goal is to achieve stability and democracy in war-torn Libya.

EX-COS TO SEN. COONS HEADS TO MERCURY

Omnicom's Mercury unit has hired Adam Bramwell for the managing director slot of its Washington office.

The Capitol Hill veteran served as chief of staff for Delaware Senator Chris Coons, where he managed the DC office and counseled the Democrat on legislative, political and policy issues.

Earlier, Bramwell spent more than 13 years as general counsel to the secretary of the Senate, responsible for a \$40M budget and 250-member staff, and advisor on Lobby Disclosure Act guidance and compliance.

He also worked as counsel to the Senate Select Committee on Ethics, providing advice on the Code of Official Conduct and ethics laws.

BALLARD PARTNERS OPENS IN ISRAEL

Ballard Partners has opened an office in Tel Aviv that is led by former Congressman Robert Wexler and World Bank executive Oscar Chemerinski.



Robert Wexler

The firm will provide government relations services to Israeli companies and assist those needing representation in the US.

Wexler, a Democrat who represented a district in Florida, is a leader in the American Jewish community. In 2008, he advised then-presidential candidate Barack Obama on Israel and Middle East affairs.

Chemerinski was the Tel Aviv-based director of the global corporate coverage group for the International Finance Corp., the private sector arm of the World Bank.

Brian Ballard chaired the Trump Victory fundraising operation in Florida.

NEWS OF FIRMS

Diffusion has started up a program meant to help brands retool their campaigns, ideas and launches in light of the changes in the economic landscape brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. The Diffusion Gut Check will give brands an outside opinion on whether or not any new initiatives are a good or bad idea from a PR perspective. Ideas will be submitted (under NDA) to a group composed of both Diffusion executives and other PR leaders, who will then send back a five-minute assessment of the idea's prospects for success. The assessment is free of charge. To send in your idea, send an email to gutcheck@diffusionpr.com or click here.

Lambert general counsel Jordan Hoyer is launching Camber Engage, a firm that will offer legal consulting and fractional general counsel to clients. Lambert has endorsed the new offering. Camber Engage's services will include general business law, litigation management and merger and acquisition due diligence to middle-market companies on a fractional basis. It also sources industry and issue specialists, vetting experts from across a network of full-service firms.



Jordan Hoyer

RSM Marketing Services is joining forces with longtime client the Kansas Restaurant & Hospitality Association to support restaurants across the state. The RSM team has developed OpenInKS.com, which offers a centralized database of Kansas restaurants that are open for carryout, curbside and/or delivery. It allows customers to sort by city, service options, cuisine and view menus. Restaurants and lodging establishments can add their listing at no cost.

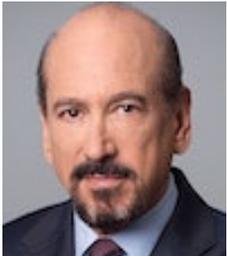
Crosby Marketing Communications of Annapolis has granted \$40,000 to the Anne Arundel County Food Bank and \$10,000 to the Community Foundation of Anne Arundel County Community Crisis Response Fund. The Anne Arundel County Food Bank grant will go to purchase meals, baby food and daily necessities for residents who have lost their jobs or are experiencing financial hardship. The Community Foundation of Anne Arundel County will use Crosby's grant to support its Community Crisis Response Fund, which provides funding to local nonprofits and faith-based organizations providing food security and basic human needs.

CommunicationsMatch and agency search firm **RFP Associates** have launched what they say is the public relations industry's first online RFP and RFQ agency selection tools and customizable templates. Agency Select allows organizations to issue an RFQ or RFP to any of the 6,000 agencies and professionals on the CommunicationsMatch platform. Following a search to identify and shortlist communications firms by such filters as industry and communications expertise, location, diversity, or professional designations and memberships, clients using the service can customize a template RFQ questionnaire as well as an RFP document.

The TASC Group—which focuses on nonprofits, mission driven companies and crisis communications work—has released a COVID-19 pandemic website, with critical content such as client resources, communications best practices, thought leadership blogs and COVID-19 and client crisis case studies. It aims to support advocacy groups, nonprofits and mission-driven companies as they work to serve their constituents and mitigate the potential effects of the virus.

CREDIBILITY DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

In my decades of experience in crisis communications, I have rarely seen such uncertain times as this for corporations and businesses, even following 9/11 and the 2008 recession. Unless you are in the enviable position of running home deli-



Michael Sitrick

ivery services or toilet paper manufacturing, there are few businesses that are likely to remain unscathed, presuming they survive. Adding to the uncertainty, consumers are bombarded every day with apocalyptic headlines and body counts, not unlike what we experienced during the Vietnam War, when the evening news provided a running tally of American deaths.

Except now, the war is at home, and those deaths are not abstract numbers. They are our neighbors, family members and coworkers. The virus is a silent enemy that lives among us, not in some faraway desert or jungle. It has not only devastated our population and altered our lifestyles, perhaps irreparably, it has leveled our economy.

Few companies are unaffected, whether it affects sales, or the health and wellbeing of employees. Many companies have had to scramble to produce new marketing messages that strike a balanced tone of concern with branding, while avoiding sounding like they are tone-deaf. Hell hath no fury like a social media mob that thinks a commercial, or for that matter a social media posting, is out of touch, to say nothing of a journalist who sees such a commercial or posting or receives an awkward PR pitch.

Companies that survive the crisis are likely to be stronger and more nimble for the experience. But they will also be evaluated for how they survived. Were they honest with customers, employees, financial analysts and stakeholders? Or did they fumble and fudge? Despite the title of my first book, “Spin,” in that book and in my subsequent one, “The Fixer,” I stressed the importance of telling the truth and being honest in one’s communications. I have done the same in my practice. Full disclosure of problems as soon as possible is often the best way to avoid giving a story “legs,” in which new revelations dribble out that create mistrust.

Fundamentally, I do not believe the core aspects of communications will change after the crisis passes, even if it lays waste to some media outlets. All constituencies—customers, employees and shareholders—deserve and demand transparency. Depending on the industry, regulators and politicians may impose it. Better to be ahead of the curve before the steering wheel is taken from you.

I have worked with individuals and corporate clients throughout my career, many facing dire circumstances and make-or-break moments. Inevitably, the successful ones don’t underestimate the situation, and plan in advance. While no one could have fully prepared for the crisis we are experiencing, there are several steps that should be taken.

• **Communicating with employees should be a top priority.** Take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the health and welfare of your employees and communicate with them on a regular basis. Keep them up to date on what is happening—both good and bad. A number of companies have adopted the term “team members.” Whether or not you use that term, treat your employees like members of the team. The saying I adopted early in the life of my firm, “If you don’t tell

your story someone else will tell it for you,” does not only apply to dealing with the media. It applies to communicating with employees, customers, vendors and investors. You can fill the information void with facts, or you can leave it empty and it will be filled with rumors.

• **How customers are treated is another area that gets outsized attention during this crisis.** The airlines, concert promoters and vacation home rental industry were harshly criticized early on in this crisis for refusing to refund money when trips and events were cancelled due to government lockdowns. Those that made amends later on saw their explanations and good deeds drowned out by the consumer outrage and media criticism.

• **Companies need to make a hard analysis when faced with these circumstances:** Is the cost of upfront goodwill less expensive in the long run than lasting reputational damage? If there is a legitimate reason for refusing the refunds legally, say so in a clear and understandable way. If you get a reporter who debates you on the law, get a company lawyer on the phone. You might also look at expanding the time period for reusing the tickets and perhaps waiving the penalty for changing flights or tickets if there is one.

• **One group that is often overlooked in communicating during a crisis are the company’s vendors.** To ensure that your goods and services continue to be provided on normal terms, make sure your vendors hear from you, as opposed to the rumor mill, which can be fueled by competitors. This is particularly important if your company has been the subject of media articles which indicate that it faces financial “challenges,” which could cause vendors to withhold shipments.

• Finally, how companies respond as corporate citizens in their communities will also be remembered in the long run. There is no shortage of opportunities to donate to local food-banks, or assist first responders, in times of crisis. For companies with strong balance sheets, these are small, symbolic efforts that pay back far more than they cost. And, the charity recipients are often happy to do the work of publicizing the good deed.

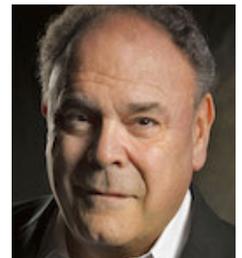
Michael Sitrick is the founder, chairman and CEO of Sitrick And Company and author of “Spin” and “The Fixer.”

EX-CBS PR CHIEF SCHWARTZ DIES AT 68

Gil Schwartz, long-time PR chief at CBS and author, died May 2 at his home in Santa Monica. He was 68.

After nearly 40 years at CBS, Viacom and Westinghouse, Schwartz stepped down in November 2018. “For the better part of three decades, Gil Schwartz led CBS Communications with creative flair, craftsman-like expertise and an abundance of personality,” said CBS in a statement. “He was a counselor to senior management, a mentor to future PR executives and a popular presence in every hallway.”

Under the pen name Stanley Bing, Schwartz wrote a column for Esquire and then Fortune where he satirized the business community. He also wrote 13 books.



Gil Schwartz

Dana McClintock, who launched the “Late Show with David Letterman” at CBS in 1993, succeeded Schwarz as chief communications officer at CBS and is departing in June following the completion of the ViacomCBS merger.

SIX VIE FOR PENSACOLA AIRPORT ACCOUNT

Six firms are competing for the Pensacola International Airport account, a PR, advertising and public information piece of business worth \$600K annually.

Vandiver Group, Adams Media Group, Finn Partners, Aqua Marketing and Communications, Image Development Marketing Group and Showcase Pensacola have been invited to make presentations, Kaycee Lagarde, public information officer for Pensacola, told *O'Dwyer's*.

Pensacola, which issued an RFP for the airport work in January, is the westernmost city on Florida's Panhandle.

Serving more than 2M passengers per year, PAC is the largest airport between Jacksonville and New Orleans.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Delta Air Lines, United, Southwest, Silver, American and Frontier offered 90 daily flights from the facility

The PAC contract will run for three years.

NBA'S ACUNTO DRIBBLES TO FINN PARTNERS

John Acunto, a 20-year veteran of the National Basketball Association's communications team, has joined Finn Partners as senior partner.

He reports to Missy Farren, managing partner in charge of consumer, lifestyle and sports, at the No. 4 independent PR firm with \$119M in fee income.

At the NBA, Acunto handled strategies for digital and social media, sports betting and esports, and developed partnerships with Nike, Facebook, Disney, Verizon Wireless and Gatorade.

He exited the league as VP-business communications.

At Finn, he will push the new sports division further into betting, esports and professional team assignments.

Acunto will work with senior partner Caroline Andrew and her team that has handled campaigns for every Olympics since 2002, along with The Dew Tour, International Championships Cup and Disney's Swim with the Stars featuring Michael Phelps.

IMRE HEALTH HIRES DIGITAS' MCDEVITT

Imre Health has recruited Digitas Health's Shane McDevitt as director of its medical and scientific affairs unit.

As medical editor at Digitas Health, McDevitt specialized in oncology brands. He will lead a team responsible for new therapies across the pharmaceutical, biotech and biopharmaceutical categories, while integrating medical and scientific savvy into existing practices.

Imre, which handles clients such as AstraZeneca, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Bausch Health and EQRx, ranked No. 8 on *O'Dwyer's* 2020 rankings of independent healthcare firms with fees of \$21M.

Jeff Smokler, President of Imre Health, said his goal is to build a new agency model, where medicine and science sit among—rather than adjacent to—the integrated suite of strategic and creative services the agency delivers.

The firm added Josh Simon as VP-social health marketing earlier this year. He joined from AstraZeneca.



Shane McDevitt

AMERICANS HAVE COVID-19 NEWS FATIGUE

The continuous flow of news and information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic continues to capture Americans' rapt attention, but many of us are beginning to show signs of COVID-19 news fatigue, according to data analysis recently released by the Pew Research Center.

According to Pew's survey, 71 percent said they have to "take breaks" from COVID-19-related news, and 43 percent reported that coronavirus news leaves them feeling worse.

Amid this constant news churn, half of Americans (50 percent) said they also often find it difficult determining what's true and what's false regarding the outbreak, and nearly two-thirds (64 percent) said they've seen at least some COVID-19 news and information that appeared to be fake.

Nearly nine-in-ten Americans (87 percent) claim they're following coronavirus-related news "very" or at least "fairly" closely, figures that remain, roughly, on par with findings from a previous Pew survey conducted in March (89 percent). More than half (56 percent) said national news outlets are a major source in getting that news, compared to 46 percent who primarily cited local outlets. About two-thirds (61 percent) of respondents said they give equal amounts of attention to both national and local sources when it comes to coronavirus news. More than half (51 percent) also said they turn to public health organizations and officials for coronavirus-related news. Only about a third (36 percent) said state and local elected officials are a major source for them, and even fewer (31 percent) cited President Trump and the White House coronavirus task force as a major source for outbreak news.

Pew's analysis was based on a survey of more than 10,100 U.S. adults drawn from its American Trends Panel, a nationally representative list of randomly selected respondents. Surveys were conducted between April 20-26.

Pew's findings were compiled as part of the nonpartisan think tank's Election News Pathways project, an ongoing initiative that examines how Americans are getting their news in the months leading up to the 2020 election.

OREGON VACATION SPOT NEEDS MARKETING

The coastal village of Yachats, Oregon, is seeking proposals from agencies that can provide marketing services for the City, as well as operate its visitor center.

Scope of the work includes: developing strategic marketing communications and brand support to assist the City's promotion of initiatives, events and programs; maintaining and operating the City's visitor information center; recommending and implementing media strategies, including media buys; offering input on the City's current digital presence; and identifying new marketing avenues.

Services are projected to commence on July 1.

Deadline for proposals 4:00 p.m. (PST) on Tues., May 26.

Proposals should be mailed to: Shannon Beaucaire, City Manager; City of Yachats; P.O. Box 345; Yachats, OR 97498

Proposals can also be hand-delivered to: Yachats City Hall; 441 Highway 101 N; Yachats, OR 97498

Bidding agencies must provide four hard copies of their proposals in a sealed envelope labeled "Confidential: City of Yachats Visitor Center and Marketing Services Proposal."

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



FTI'S PR GROUP SHOWS 1.2% Q1 GROWTH

FTI Consulting's strategic communications unit registered 1.2 percent growth to \$58.4M during the first-quarter. Profit (EBITDA) slipped 23.5 percent largely due to costs connected to a 14.7 percent rise in billable headcount to 755 people.



Mark McCall

Mark McCall, global stratcom leader, called the financial performance solid, when compared to the record-setting results in the year-ago period and the seemingly overnight changes in the business environment beginning mid-quarter with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While M&A work declined, the stratcom group saw a pick-up in public affairs, issues/crisis work and counseling clients how to respond to disruptions in the supply chains and customer base.

McCall anticipates his group will benefit during the COVID-19 recovery period from opportunities in the bankruptcy, litigation, life sciences, healthcare and environmental/social/governance categories.

WARREN SEEKS BAN ON 'RISKY' MERGERS

Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) announced plans to introduce legislation designed to impose a moratorium on "risky" mergers and acquisitions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pandemic Anti-Monopoly Act will be designed to thwart "giant corporations and private equity vultures who are just waiting for a chance to gobble up struggling small businesses and increase their power through predatory mergers," said Warren. The politicians are disturbed about media reports that Rite Aid and other companies are looking to acquire smaller businesses to consolidate and cement their industry leadership positions.

The Act's ban would cover M/As by companies with more than \$100M in revenues and exclusive patents that have an impact on the COVID-19 emergency.

The moratorium would last until the Federal Trade Commission unanimously declares that small businesses, workers and consumers are no longer under financial duress.

The legislative details of the Act are under development.

S&S ALUM VOLK SHIFTS TO EVOKE

Kristin Volk, chief strategy officer at Saatchi & Saatchi Wellness, has joined Evoke, the healthcare marketing communications arm of UK's Huntsworth. Based in New York, Volk is responsible for Evoke's global brand and engagement strategy as well as data and analytics.



Kristin Volk

Prior to S&S, she held strategy posts at GSW Worldwide, MediaVest, Arnold Worldwide and Deutsch.

Evoke CEO Reid Connolly said Volk's "vast experience and fresh perspective make her the perfect person to help lead this cross-functional offering."

Evoke has more than 600 staffers in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Los Angeles, London, Dublin, Princeton, Chicago, Singapore and Dubai.

ON THE MOVE

Walt Disney Television has hired **Kristen Andersen** as VP-communications at its Freeform cable channel. Andersen joins Freeform from Netflix, where she led campaigns for projects that included the Emmy-winning nature documentary series "Our Planet." She has also served as VP of marketing and communications at Shondaland, the television production company founded by television writer/producer Shonda Rhimes; director of publicity at Disney ABC Television Group; and manager of publicity at NBCUniversal Media. At Freeform, Andersen will lead the channel's corporate and consumer media relations.

Showtime has promoted **Erin Calhoun** to executive VP of communications. Before coming to the company in 2017, she was vice president of corporate communications at NBCUniversal Cable Entertainment, overseeing trade and business strategies and internal communications for USA Network and SYFY. Calhoun has also been VP, communications at Discovery Communications and worked at TNT as a unit publicist and press project manager. In her new post, she will supervise all corporate and business press outreach, as well as serving as Showtime's communications liaison with parent company ViacomCBS.



Erin Calhoun

dovetail solutions, a PR, branding, crisis management and public affairs firm with offices in Denver and Sacramento, California, has brought on **Julia Bulotti** and **Erin Uribe** as client services partners. Bulotti comes to dovetail from Barokas Communications, where she worked with tech clients in sectors including B2B, cybersecurity, enterprise, mobile messaging, e-commerce, nonprofits and aerospace. Uribe was recently a digital strategist for Comcast.

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry has been named PR agency of record for **TrapX Security**, a company specializing in cyber deception technology. The agency says it will use its experience and relationships in the B2B technology media landscape to showcase TrapX's technology, which works to detect, deceive and defeat advanced cyberattacks in real time. Run out of the agency's Boston office, the program will focus on raising awareness of TrapX's solutions among security and IT professionals, CISOs and cybersecurity researchers.



Clarity has been named agency of record for **AnyClip**, a company that provides tools, insights and solutions aimed at improving streaming video strategies for media companies and marketers. The account will be handled through Clarity's New York office. In March, AnyClip received support from the Google News Initiative to launch a video-on-demand experience providing a cost-effective way for media companies, brands and others to host and curate VOD pages.

Segal Communications has been named agency of record for Detroit-based tech start-up **NeedAnything?**, which has just come out of stealth mode and is preparing for a national launch. The agency will provide NeedAnything? with regional and national media relations support, influencer relations, and social media management.

COMMENTARY

Master brander Donald Trump may want to rethink his official 2020 campaign slogan, “Keep America Great,” because things aren’t looking so great these days.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis announced April 29 that the economy shrank at a 4.8 percent annual clip during the first quarter.

That drop was worse than expected, exceeding the four percent decline that was projected by economists, according to the Financial Times. It marks the biggest drop in GDP since the 8.4 percent contraction in 2008 during the financial meltdown. Much more bad news is on tap. Kevin Hassett, a White House economic advisor, predicts a “big negative number” for the second quarter, one that is likely to fall in the 30 percent to 40 percent range.

More than 30M Americans lost their jobs during the past five weeks.

Many Americans will be back on the job once the pandemic ebbs and the national lockdowns are called off.

But the cold reality: Many won’t be returning to work as companies realize the productivity achieved by at-home technology-enabled employees will allow them to downsize workforces during the “new normal.”

Keep America Great is a loser of a campaign slogan.

Rally no more... Trump has been using his daily press briefings as substitutes for his campaign rallies, but the president must be itching to get back on the road to connect with his die-hard base.

A poll from Morning Consult suggests that Trump rallies may not be what they used to be due to the spread of COVID-19 into Red States.

The poll found that only 41 percent of respondents say they feel comfortable in attending a rally in the next six months. The remainder either didn’t know or had no opinion.

That’s cutting it very close for the president. Election Day is November 3.

“Who was the masked man” was the question asked at the end of every TV episode of “The Adventures of the Lone Ranger.”

Vice president Mike Pence updated that question during his April 28 visit to the Mayo Clinic, where he was the only unmasked person in the area where COVID-19 patients are treated, in violation of the hospital’s rules.

Pence, who heads the White House coronavirus task force, ignored Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines about wearing masks in public to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The VP gave the lame excuse for not wearing a mask, saying he wanted to be able to look medical staffers in the eye and say thank you.

The unmasked Pence symbolized the White House indifference to COVID-19, which has killed more Americans than

died in the Vietnam War and has affected one million of us.

The federal government’s leader in the fight against COVID-19 may view himself as Superman, impervious to the germ.

But remember Mike; even the Man of Steel was weakened by Kryptonite.

President Trump’s COVID-19 daily briefings, in which he touted quack cures for the virus and ridiculed science, damaged his approval ratings.

The president, though, does have a core of rock-solid supporters, a segment that apparently is the target audience of the White House Gift Shop.

Established by president Truman in 1946 and the uniformed division of the US Secret Service to support law enforcement, the WHGS is memorializing Trump and the White House COVID-19 Task Force for the fight against the “unseen enemy” with a commemorative coin.

One side of the coin features the flag flanked empty White House presidential podium with the names of Trump, VP Pence, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Drs. Jerome Adams, Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx. The reverse side praises the every day heroes and citizens who did their part fighting coronavirus.

The coins, which will begin shipping June 15, can be pre-ordered for the discounted price of \$100, compared to the \$125 ticket price.

The WHGS does have a following. It boasts 96K “likes” on Facebook.

Let’s hope some of the money raised by the Trump COVID-19 coins goes to the families of the 66K American victims of the virus.

Trump’s scapegoating of China to cover up his failure to take swift action against COVID-19 appears to be paying dividends.

A plurality of Americans (42 percent) blames China’s government for the more than 65K US coronavirus deaths, according to an APCO Worldwide survey.

Only about a third (32 percent) blame Trump for his two-month delay in moving against COVID-19, while 20 percent of respondents say nobody is to blame.

Nearly half of Americans (48 percent) view China as “an enemy of the US,” while 46 percent are not confident in manufacturers that produce essential goods in China.

Trump’s “America First” policy also is taking root, thanks to the COVID-19 crisis, as two-thirds of respondents say the disease will torpedo US relations with China and Russia over the next three years. More than four-in-ten Americans expect the pandemic will trigger mistrust of key American allies in Europe and Asia.

Trump’s dream has come true. He is succeeding in walling America off from the rest of the world. —Kevin McCauley

