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TEXAS HEALTH COMMISSION ISSUES RFPs

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission is floating two RFPs with the intent of creating a pool of firms to work for the Lone Star State on an “as-needed basis.”



The firms may respond to one or both of the RFPs, which are for 1) public awareness, education and communication services, and 2) marketing research and evaluation services.

The Commission has in the past issued contracts worth from \$200K to \$8M.

It plans to award three-year contracts with two additional one-year options.

The public awareness campaign includes strategic planning, production and implementation of multiple outreach materials and products, distribution strategies, and methods for measuring effectiveness.

The research RFP covers brand strategies, brand identity, positioning and tracking, trend analysis, behavioral change, target audience profiles/personas, message testing, communication audits, social media strategies and market segmentation.

Proposals are due May 29. They go to: Health and Human Services Commission; Procurement and Contracting Services Building; ATTN: Response Coordinator; 1100 W. 49th MC2020; Austin, TX 78756

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

ACLU NAMES LOWELL EDWARDS CCO

The American Civil Liberties Union is bringing on Rebecca Lowell Edwards as chief communications officer, effective June 1. She succeeds Michele Moore, who left the organization in December to become VP of global communications at the Ford Foundation.



Rebecca Lowell Edwards

Edwards most recently served as senior VP, global communications at Schneider Electric. She was previously director of strategic communications and public affairs at the International Olympic Committee, chief communications officer for GE Oil and Gas and Sub-Saharan Africa, and has worked as a consultant with Ruder Finn and Douglas Gould and Company.

She began her career as a journalist, having worked as a copy editor at Dow Jones Newswires, and a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*. At the ACLU, Edwards will oversee the civil liberties organization’s national communications, media relations, branding, and engagement strategy functions.

BCW SHUTS BWR ENTERTAINMENT FIRM

BCW has shuttered BWR entertainment firm, which had offices in Hollywood and New York, as part of the plan to restructure to better fit the needs of clients and the marketplace.

It folded the BWR brand into BCW Entertainment, effective immediately, according to a statement, due to “a variety of considerations and the tremendous impact COVID-19 has had on the entertainment industry.”

Some BWR staffers will shift to BCW Entertainment in Los Angeles and New York.

Others will not, as BCW said it had “to say goodbye to some members” of the BWR team. It’s unclear how many people are being laid off.

BCW “is incredibly grateful to them for all of their contributions to BWR” and promised to support them during the transition.



WELLS FARGO BANKS ON HURST FOR CSR

Nate Hurst will join Wells Fargo & Co. on June 1 to direct its newly combined corporate responsibility, philanthropy, community relations and sustainability organization.

He will shift to the San Francisco-based bank from HP, where he was chief sustainability & social impact officer in charge of corporate giving, environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

His efforts helped HP grab the top rating in 2019 on *Newsweek*’s roster of “most responsible companies.”

Earlier, Hurst was director of sustainability, PA and government relations at Walmart, a member of the White House Council on Environmental Quality during the Clinton presidency, and national spokesperson for The Ocean Conservancy.

Bill Daley, vice chairman of PA at Wells said Hurst will “advance Wells Fargo’s commitment to addressing the needs of underserved communities, particularly as we work to ensure housing security, small business stability, and consumer financial health in the wake of the COVID pandemic.”

Hurst also will serve as president of the Wells Fargo Foundation.

Wells announced last year that it will spend \$1B through 2025 to tackle the nation’s housing affordability crisis. The Foundation made more than \$450M in grants during 2019.



Nate Hurst

SPG LANDS \$2M PACT TO FREE SAUDI ROYAL

Sonoran Policy Group has inked a \$2M six-month pact to advocate for the release of Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud with US, UK, France and European Union officials.

Robert Stryk, founder/executive chairman of SPG, has close ties with the Trump administration.

Paris-based Pakistani businessman Hashim Mughal, a former associate of Prince Salman, hired SPG for the effort. It began work on May 15.

Saudi Arabia authorities arrested Prince Salman, whom the *New York Times* profiled as a “billionaire philanthropist with influential connections” throughout the world, in January 2018. He spent a year in a maximum-security facility before being transferred to home detention in a Riyadh villa with his father, who also is under arrest.

The Times reported that Saudi Arabia’s defacto ruler 34-year-old Prince Mohammed bin Salman may have ordered the arrest of Prince Salman due to a fit of jealousy.

COYNE PR ROLLS ‘OPEN SOURCE’ WEBSITE

Coyne PR has unveiled a new website that takes an open-source approach to sharing key learnings, best practices and practical tips and advice related to COVID-19 and beyond.

The new website, which opens with a thank you to health-care and other essential workers, shares strategy, expertise and learning that the agency has acquired while helping clients revise communications plans, develop proactive initiatives, build full-scale launch campaigns and advise on bounce back strategies.



Tom Coyne

Visitors to the site are immediately directed to a collection of original COVID-19 resources. Those include recent blog posts with advice from employees as well as issues of “Business as UNusual” – the agency’s weekly e-blast highlighting successful client

initiatives achieved during the pandemic.

It provides educators with access to hundreds of online case studies and a video library featuring detailed accounts and color commentary. Coyne PR professionals are also offering their services as virtual guest lecturers to universities.

“First and foremost, we wanted to create a destination where industry professionals could go for useful resources,” said CEO Tom Coyne.

Coyne came in at #18 on O’Dwyer’s 2020 list of top PR firms, with \$32 million in 2019 net fees.

KASICH MAKES DC MARK WITH MARKQUEST

Kasich Company has hired Markquest for DC representation on regulatory and legislative issues and COVID-19-related CARES tax provisions.

Headed by John Kasich, former Ohio governor and Republican presidential candidate, and Beth Hanson, gubernatorial chief of staff & Kasich for America campaign manager, KC says it helps clients cut through “bureaucracy and inertia to prepare, equip and support organizations to adopt change.”

It offers “a set of fresh eyes and frank advice” to help clients navigate their next crisis.

Steve Rosetti founded Bethesda-based Markquest after stints at the Pentagon and House Armed Services Committee.

NEWS OF FIRMS

Finn Partners and experiential production and creative services agency **IDEKO** have teamed up with Hip Hop Public Health on a campaign to encourage positive health behavior changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The “20 Seconds or More” initiative is an extension of HHPH’s mission to reach underserved communities with health-related messages. At the center of the effort is a three-minute music video produced by IDEKO, showing proper handwashing techniques. To ensure maximum reach and impact, Finn Partners mobilized a 24/7 Hip Hop Public Health News Bureau, while working with HHPH to facilitate wide distribution of the video at virtual community health events and with faith-based organizations in cities across the country.



The Public Relations Global Network is adding three offices. In Denver, Novitas Communications is coming on board. Novitas specializes in corporate communications, issue management and crisis communication. In Little Rock, AR, the organization will be represented by Ghidotti, which represents such clients as McDonald’s and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. Prichard Communications will be joining the organization in Portland, OR. Prichard, a Certified B Corporation, focuses on social changemakers, working with foundations, nonprofits and government agencies.

The Institute for Public Relations is hosting the first-ever IPR Virtual Run for Research 5K/10K, which will raise funds for IPR’s research efforts. Those taking part will pledge to walk or run at least 3.1 miles individually or with a team and then complete the challenge from August 1 to September 15. Participants will receive a t-shirt and a finisher medal. For more information about the run, [click here](#).

Taylor has joined with **United Negro College Fund** to establish an HBCU Class of 2020 Loan Forgiveness Grant. The grants will be administered by UNCF to 2020 HBCU (Historically Black Colleges & Universities) graduates. The goal of the campaign is to raise \$50,000, which would provide a minimum of 25 grants of up to \$2,000 each. To help launch the fund-raising drive, more than two dozen Taylor colleagues came together via Zoom to deliver a video tribute to this year’s graduates of HBCUs nationwide.

LLYC has acquired Colombian innovation consultancy firm **Adaptive**. Adaptive CEO Andrés Venegas will join the LLYC team. “With the methods and experience of Adaptive, we are again stepping out of our comfort zone in search of bringing even more added value to our clients,” said LLYC partner and chief strategy and innovation officer Adolfo Corujo.

Hemsworth Communications has launched a “Public Relations Stimulus Program” to provide financial relief to businesses in the firm’s three core sectors – Travel & Tourism, Hospitality (Food/Wine/Spirits) and Franchising—that have been impacted by COVID-19. The program’s offerings include pro bono help for those who meet certain criteria (with an emphasis on government-affiliated destination marketing organizations, tourist boards and CVBs), up to 50% reduced monthly retainers through 2021 and a new “Flex Contract” that grants deferred payment options to businesses who qualify, along with additional client-friendly terms.

BUYING MAY NOT REBOUND AFTER COVID-19

U.S. retail sales plunged a record 16.4 percent in April, which combined with March's 8.7 percent drop accounts for the single greatest two-month spending decline on record. As states begin to reopen, however, retailers and analysts have been hoping to see a return to pre-pandemic spending levels as Americans venture outside for the first time in months.



But that turnaround might not come so easily. Like virtually every other facet of American life, consumer purchasing behaviors—as witnessed in the boom in online shopping, as well as curbside restaurant pickup—have been significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. With more than 36 million currently unemployed and millions more expressing trepidation regarding the stability of their jobs as well as a general lack of confidence in the economy, Americans seem cautious about spending whatever savings or disposable income they have.

Several recent forecasts now suggest that many consumers plan to maintain their COVID spending behaviors even after the pandemic is over, leaving the retail sector in continued uncertainty and further impeding the chances of a speedy recovery for the U.S. economy. The fact is, it matters little if businesses are back if there's no demand.

A Harris Poll survey conducted in April found that 79 percent of respondents said they'll likely continue to spend less and save more once the coronavirus outbreak ends, and more than two-thirds (68 percent) said they'll continue to avoid nonessential travel.

An April USA Today/Ipsos poll found that COVID-19 had influenced more than a third (35 percent) of respondents to cut back on spending or delaying an important purchase.

Only 17.8 percent of Americans said they currently plan to get a haircut or go to a restaurant when the lockdown in their area is lifted, according to a May survey by San Francisco-based tech PR firm Bospar.

So, what are Americans doing with their money? Recent reports suggest they're saving it. The federal government's Bureau of Economic Analysis in late April reported that the personal savings rate in the U.S. climbed to 13.1 percent in March, totaling \$2.17 trillion in personal savings. This accounts for the highest savings rate since November 1981.

This behavior was reflected in the USA Today/Ipsos poll, which found that COVID-19 had influenced 12 percent of respondents to start an emergency savings fund.

Meanwhile, the BEA reported that personal income decreased two percent (or \$382.1 billion), disposable personal income decreased two percent (or \$334.6 billion) and personal consumption expenditures decreased 7.5 percent (or \$334.6 billion) during the same period.

These figures suggest that increased job instability and household income declines are influencing many Americans to hoard their money, a development that bodes poorly for an economy whose growth depends on consumer spending.

According to an April survey released by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's Center for Microeconomic Data, the mean perceived probability of losing one's job within the next year stands at 21 percent, the highest percentage ever recorded in the NY Fed's survey since its inception in 2013.

Meanwhile, the perceived probability of voluntarily leaving one's job within the next 12 months, the probability

of finding a job within the next three months and household income growth, as well as household spending growth all fell to record-breaking lows.

"The data is depressing," said Curtis Sparrer, principal of Bospar. "We predict that consumer spending will continue its slump. What we're particularly concerned about is the concept of a 'second wave' of infections when more states open up."

GLOVER PARK GUIDES US FOODS

Glover Park Group is helping US Foods, a top foodservice distributor to more than 300,000 restaurants and institutions, as the country begins to reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic. The New York Stock Exchange-listed company released its "Restaurant Reopening Blueprint" to provide operators a how-to for putting key COVID-19 guidelines into practice as they open for business.

In preparing the Blueprint, US Foods conducted interviews with restaurant owners in China to understand what lessons might be applicable for American restaurants.

The Blueprint covers regulatory requirements, principles for planning an effective reopening, best practices for approaching front-of-house and back-of-house operations, and specific solutions for other foodservice formats such as cafeterias, quick-service restaurants, fast-casual restaurants, food courts, and bars and lounges.

Jim Osborne, US Foods senior VP of customer strategy and innovation, called the Blueprint "an invaluable resource for helping operators make sense of the new business practices."

Glover Park has more than 10 staffers on the US Foods business.

They include managing directors Joel Johnson (President Clinton's senior advisor for policy & communications), Susan Brophy (Clinton's legislative advisor and senior VP for global policy at Time Warner) Grant Leslie (senior advisor to ex-Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack), and Randy DeValk (deputy chief of staff for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid).

ON THE MOVE

Heineken has appointed **Stacey Tank** chief corporate affairs and transformation officer, effective June 1. Tank returns to Heineken, where she led corporate relations until 2015, from Home Depot, where she served as chief communications officer and led the company's installation services and measurement services businesses. Her new role encompasses public affairs, sustainable development and global communications, in addition to supporting key change and transformation initiatives.

Helicopter Association International has brought on **Robert Volmer** as VP of marketing communications. Volmer is a founding partner of Crosby-Volmer International Communications. He was previously manager of corporate communications at the Air Transport Association. At HAI, Volmer will oversee branding, messaging, research, technology and media for the association.



Stacey Tank

MARYLAND NEEDS PR FOR HEALTHY WEIGHT

Maryland's Department of Health is looking for a firm to develop messaging and graphics for a statewide campaign to promote healthy weight for women of childbearing age.

According to age-adjusted data from the 2018 Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 35.7 percent of women living in The Old Line State had a healthy weight. Nearly half (49 percent) of women aged 18-to-39 self-reported not having a healthy weight, according to a University of Baltimore survey conducted for the Department.

The RFP notes there are greater incidences of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cataracts and severe osteoarthritis among people who have not maintained healthy weights.

The goal of the marketing communications campaign is to increase physical activity and improve nutrition in women from ages 18 to 44, according to the Department's RFP.

The effort will target college students, working women, mothers and persons with disabilities.

Proposals are due May 29. They are to be emailed to procurement officer Littia Silver at littiad.silver@maryland.gov.

Click [here](#) for the RFP.

SARD VERBINNEN ALUM TO SILVER LAKE

Matthew Benson, a 20-year veteran at Sard Verbinnen & Co., has joined Silver Lake tech investment firm as managing director & head of communications.

At SVB, Benson was managing director in its New York and San Francisco offices.



Matthew Benson

Prior to joining SVB, he was senior director at the Bivings Group, DC-based digital communications shop, and a legislative aide to Congressman Dave Bonior (D-MI). He also did a two-year stint at the Dukakis for President campaign headquarters in Boston.

Founded in 1999, Silver Lake has offices in Silicon Valley, New York, London and Hong Kong and more than \$40B in assets under management.

The firm recently joined Facebook as an investor in Jio Platforms, which targets the digital services market in India, especially small merchants micro-businesses and farmers.

In April, Silver Lake announced investments in Expedia Group and Airbnb.

LAWRENCE TUNES IN ROKU

Dallas Lawrence, a digital/crisis and public affairs veteran, has joined Roku streaming TV service as head of communications for its business platform.

He's held a variety of key PR jobs such as VP-corporate affairs at Mattel, chief global digital strategist at Burson-Marsteller and senior VP for digital media at Levick.

Lawrence also did a stint with the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad and at the Pentagon in the office of public liaison & community relations for Defense Secretaries Rumsfeld and Gates. Most recently, he was chief communications & brand officer at OpenX, the Los Angeles-based advertising technology company.

STILL MAKING SUMMER VACATION PLANS

While Americans remain apprehensive about summer travel, a new survey that MMGY conducted for the U.S. Travel Association shows that the desire to make a warm-weather getaway has not completely vanished.

Thirty-six percent of the respondents to the Travel Intentions Pulse Survey that was made from May 1-6 said they were still planning on taking a domestic leisure trip in the next six months, a slight dip from the 38 percent who said they had such plans in the April 17-22 version of the survey.

The preferred way of getting to a travel destination was—by a large margin—the family car. More than two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) said they felt safe traveling in their own car.

As regards the travel destination itself, parks (34 percent) and beaches (26 percent) were thought to be the safest options, with hotels/resorts coming in at 18 percent.

Keeping things close to home is also a priority for summer travelers. Just 19 percent of respondents said they would be willing to drive more than 500 miles on a leisure trip in the next six months.

For most travelers, the biggest consideration in making their summer plans was slowing down the spread of COVID-19 in the US, which was cited by 58 percent of the survey respondents.

The online survey, which MMGY has been conducting biweekly since March 27, polls 1200 US residents who have taken an overnight trip for either business or pleasure over the past 12 months. To see the complete report, [click here](#).

PR'S TOP PROS TALK COVID-19



Putting together a playbook for agency life in the post-COVID world is the topic of the two latest video interviews produced by D S Simon Media in partnership with O'Dwyer's.

MWWPR founder and CEO Michael Kempner's interview with Doug Simon ([available here](#)) looks at how the actions that brands take now will shape their performance during the next phase of the COVID economy.

"The number one issue with stakeholders today and how they're going to judge companies coming out of this," Kempner tells Simon, "is how they treat their employees." Kempner also stresses the importance of clear and decisive leadership, as well as the need for transparency, authenticity and empathy.

In Ketchum partner and managing director Tamara Norman's discussion with Simon ([available here](#)), she sets up guidelines for how brands and businesses on the rebound can successfully communicate with stakeholders.

Like Kempner, Norman stresses the importance of clearly communicating with employees, calling them a company's "number one stakeholder." Diversity and inclusion should also be top of mind in the current environment, she says.

All of the interviews in the "Navigating COVID-19 with PR's Top Pros" series can be seen [here](#).

CHINESE BUSINESS LEADERS TARGET US

Despite trade tensions with the US, Chinese companies consider America their No. 1 growth market, according to a survey by Brunswick Group. There's room for growth, as Brunswick reports that 128 countries do more business with China than the US does.



Thirty-nine percent of Chinese business leaders said the US is their top overseas growth target, up four percent from a 2018 study.

They may face an uphill battle in their bid to crack the US market as their country's favorability rating lags here.

At 45 percent, the US is near the bottom in the developed nations polled by Brunswick, only topping Canada (44 percent) and Japan (41 percent).

Brunswick found that developed countries agree that China will surpass the US as the world's leading technological and economic power during the 2020s.

Currently, the US holds a 40 percent to 37 percent edge over China in the technology sector. Those numbers will flip to 43 percent to 31 percent in China's favor.

The US today tops China (51 percent to 35 percent) on the economic front. It will trail 47 percent to 30 percent with the dawn of what Brunswick calls "The China Century."

G&S REFRESHES BRAND

G&S Business Communications has launched a new brand identity, which includes a narrowing of its market focus, a repositioning of its services to amplify the agency's digital-first strategy and an overhaul of its full brand image and website.

G&S chief growth officer Steve Halsey said the changes are meant to shift the agency's services toward the five core markets in which it has the deepest expertise: advanced manufacturing & energy, agribusiness, home & building, financial & professional services and healthcare & wellness.

The visual side of the rebrand was led by vice president of creative and brand experience Chris Martin.

G&S has also created a campaign to go along with the launch of the rebrand. "We are G&S" spotlights the diversity of people and skills across the agency.

NFL NAMES MILLER TO OVERSEE COMMS, PA

The National Football League has promoted Jeff Miller to executive vice president of communications, public affairs and policy.



Jeff Miller

Miller joined the NFL in 2008 as senior vice president in charge of governmental and public affairs. In 2012, he was named executive vice president of health and safety initiatives, where he was charged with leading the league's efforts to improve safety in the sport.

Prior to joining the NFL, Miller was stationed on Capitol Hill for a decade, where he served as chief counsel and staff director to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee's Antitrust and Business Competition Subcommittee.

Miller will be tasked with managing the league's communications and public affairs. In addition to the new role, he'll continue to oversee health and safety initiatives.

MEDIA MANEUVERS

Tribune Publishing has put off posting its financial results for the first quarter of fiscal 2020 until June 5. The previously announced date was May 22. The company says it needs more time to assess the valuation of certain assets and determine if a non-cash impairment charge is required, primarily as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the past few weeks, Tribune has made a deal to furlough all unionized newsroom employees making \$40,000 or more for a week in May, June and July, and canceled a \$9 million quarterly dividend it was planning to award to shareholders.



Facebook has launched a new feature that is intended to move it further down the path toward being a major online shopping destination and offer small businesses a way to find new buyers. Facebook Shops will let businesses set up product listings on their Facebook page, Instagram profile, Stories or in ads, the company says. Also planned are options that would let businesses sell products to customers through the chat features of WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram Direct.

The American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA) has launched the ASJA Crisis Coverage Awards: COVID-19 Edition, which will recognize professional writers for their coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak. The contest is now open, and submissions will be accepted until July 3. "ASJA is proud to recognize our colleagues' vital work as they help audiences make sense of all aspects of the coronavirus pandemic," said Janine Latus, chair of the ASJA Crisis Coverage Awards Committee.

ON THE MOVE

Ogilvy has named **Philip Heimann** worldwide chief marketing & growth officer and has promoted **David Ford** to worldwide chief communications officer. Heimann has been with Ogilvy since 2008, leading teams working on such brands as S.C. Johnson, Coca-Cola and Netflix. He has led the firm's Paris office, as well as its new business and marketing functions for EMEA. Ford came to Ogilvy in 2019 as chief communications officer, USA. He was previously senior vice president of corporate communications and PR at Fusion Media Group, and has served as senior director of publicity at ABC News.



Philip Heimann

Bullpen Strategy Group has hired **Vaughn Jennings** as senior vice president at DC-based Bullpen Strategy Group. Jennings comes to Bullpen from Airlines for America, the trade group representing major US passenger and cargo airlines, where he most recently served as vice president of communications. He was previously press secretary and director of digital media for former Rep. John Sullivan (R-OK). At Bullpen, he will be tasked with growing the firm's strategic and crisis communications practice.

Dane Creek Capital Corp., a private equity venture owning several pet food manufacturing businesses in Canada and the United States, has brought on **Alexandra Wood** as vice president of marketing and communications. Wood was previously corporate brand manager at Mercato Hospitality. At Dane Creek, she will manage the company's 14 pet food, treat, supplement and alternative protein brands.

COMMENTARY

For goodness sake, just wear a mask, Donald. Why does everything have to be so difficult?

Two-thirds of American voters want Donald Trump to wear a facemask when he's out in public, while 27 percent say he shouldn't, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released May 20.



Ninety percent of Democrats and 66 percent of independents want Trump to cover his mouth and nose when outside. Thirty-eight percent of Republicans say the same.

Michigan Congresswoman Debbie Dingell told CNN ahead of Trump's visit to her state: "Leaders need to lead. I hope the president will follow the

protocols, because people will see the importance of wearing those masks. It matters."

And that's the nub. Presidents Obama, Bush II, Clinton, Bush I, Reagan and Carter certainly would have worn a mask during a pandemic, if recommended by the CDC.

They considered themselves leaders of the government. Trump, in contrast, views himself as a non-president.

The *Washington Post's* Greg Sargent reports that Trump plans to run for re-election as an "outsider" in a bid to dissociate himself from the mess that he made. That's pretty rich after occupying the White House for more than three years.

A possible re-election slogan: "transitioning to greatness." That begs the question: Where is the US transitioning from: the depths of hell?

A face covering, according to the CDC, is meant to protect others in the event that the wearer has the virus.

The narcissist-in-chief, though, doesn't care a lick about others. Americans get it. The Quinnipiac poll found that 56 percent of us say Trump doesn't care about average people.

The president shuns the mask because he feels it somehow conveys weakness, or an acknowledgement that COVID-19 is a deadly virus.

Trump's miserable response to the outbreak is the signature failure of his administration and the reason why the US death toll is moving to the 100K-mark. Fifty-six percent of Quinnipiac respondents disapprove of Trump's handling of the pandemic. That's up from 51 percent in April.

Voters believe Joe Biden would have done a better job in handling COVID-19 by a 55 percent to 39 percent margin. Hopefully, we'll find out if that is true.

Two can play that game. China has launched a Twitter barrage in a bid to distract attention from its cover-up of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its government has targeted the discredited report that COVID-19 originated in a Wuhan lab, a false claim parroted by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

China's Foreign Affairs Ministry is spreading the conspiracy theory that the virus was born in the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, MD.

"Why not open up Fort Detrick & other bio-labs for international review?" tweeted the Ministry.

Twitter, which has promised to combat disinformation, is

giving China a free pass.

Here's the policy: "Official government accounts engaging in conversation about the origins of the virus and global public conversation about potential emergent treatments will be permitted, unless the content contains clear incitement to take a harmful physical action."

Twitter needs to step up because, in these crazy times, there is a possibility of harmful physical action between China and the US. It may be triggered by a tweet.

Let's Make the CDC Great Again.....

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which once sent scientists through the US and around the world to combat diseases and new viruses, is now a shadow of its former self due to conservative politics that eroded the agency's ability to mount "effective evidence-based public health responses," according to an editorial in *The Lancet*, the world's premier medical journal.

It believes the flagship US public health service has seen its role minimized and become an ineffective and nominal adviser in the effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Trump administration has questioned CDC guidelines, which has undermined its leadership and work.

The *Lancet* admits that the CDC made mistakes in testing during the early stage of the pandemic, but marginalizing it and hobbling it is not the solution.

"The Administration is obsessed with magic bullets—vaccines, new medicines, or a hope that the virus will simply disappear. But only a steadfast reliance on basic public health principles, like test, trace, and isolate, will see the emergency brought to an end, and this requires an effective national public health agency," according to the British journal.

The *Lancet* urges Americans to put a president in the White House come January 2021, who will understand that public health should not be guided by partisan politics.

Reporters throw a "Hail Mary" pass in their effort to save local newspapers.

The NewsGuild-CWA has kicked off a "Save the News" advocacy campaign on Capitol Hill to stave off the collapse of more newsrooms during the COVID-19 crisis.

About 1,800 newspapers, mostly small papers outside major cities, have vanished since 2004 and the NewsGuild believes the pandemic might be the final nail in the coffin of the industry. COVID-19 has devastated advertising revenues, leading to layoffs, furloughs and pay cuts for tens of thousands of journalists.

Ironically, readers are turning to local papers for up-to-date information about the impact the pandemic has had on their communities.

The Save the News effort focuses on federal aid to the news business via direct grants to media workers, participation of local papers in the Paycheck Protection Program and federal advertising spending in local outlets.

"Congress needs to act to save the news, before it's too late," said Jon Schluess, NewsGuild president. The clock is ticking.

—Kevin McCauley