



**Kevin McCauley**  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's

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## NEXT 15 POSTS 5.6% H1 GROWTH

Next Fifteen Communications Group has reported a 5.6 percent growth in first-half revenues (ended July) to \$197.4M despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UK-based operation reported an operating loss of \$500K largely due to a \$14M write-off of no-longer-needed office space. It posted a \$9.8M year-ago profit.

Chairman Richard Eyre and CEO Tim Dyson noted Next 15's performance came during a "sector backdrop of double-digit declines in revenues." They attributed Next 15's "resilient performance to the COVID-19 related disruption of economic activity" to the firm's strength in the high-tech category, which generates 55 percent of overall revenues.

The B2B group benefitted as clients prioritized short-term revenue generation over long-term brand building and the fall-off in the live events industry, according to the joint statement from Eyre and Dyson. Spending from consumer-oriented clients took a hit, but is showing signs of recovery.

Based on the success of the COVID-19 driven work-at-home model, Next 15 is shedding a third of its real estate in London, New York and San Francisco. The firm is marketing the 100K sq. ft of "surplus to requirements" space. Eyre and Dyson predicted the office downsizing would result in a \$3.6M savings in 2020 and \$2M in 2021.

Next 15's PR units include Outcast, Archetype, M Booth and Blue Shirt Group.

## MCDONALD'S SNARES HILTON'S FALLON

McDonald's has hired Katie Beirne Fallon as chief global impact officer. Fallon joins McDonald's from Hilton, where she served as executive vice president, global affairs, managing the company's communications, government relations and corporate responsibility efforts.



**Katie Beirne Fallon**

Before that, she worked in the Obama White House as director of legislative affairs and deputy communications director. Her other positions include legislative director for Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY), deputy staff director for policy for the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee and policy director at the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

At McDonald's, Fallon will oversee a team responsible for government relations, communications, sustainability and oversight for the company's corporate philanthropy and ESG strategy.

## EX-NY GOVERNOR PATERSON JOINS KIVVIT

Former New York governor David Paterson has joined Kivvit, the PA and strategic communications shop.

The Democratic politico will provide strategic counsel and help Kivvit's managing partners develop and implement a diversity, equity and inclusion plan.

Paterson was lieutenant governor when he succeeded governor Elliot Spitzer upon his resignation in 2008 due to a prostitution scandal. He is the Empire State's only Black governor.

Paterson said that he's worked with lot of PA firms, but none of them impressed him as much as Kivvit. "Their continued commitment to data, analytics and innovation is unparalleled in this space," he said in a statement.



**David Paterson**

Kivvit also announced the hiring of Josh Vlasto as managing director. He was press secretary to NY senator Chuck Schumer, chief of staff to governor Andrew Cuomo and head of corporate communications at MacAndrews and Forbes.

## GRAND RAPIDS SEEKS ECODEV PARTNER

Grand Rapids, Michigan's second-largest city with a population of 200K, is looking for a communications partner to handle economic development work.

The city's Economic Development Department, which oversees 10 agencies, wants to create "a transparent and visible centralized information hub for economic development services," according to its RFP.

The EDD seeks communications and marketing services and initiatives to increase public awareness and engagement related to programs and services provided to developers and opportunities to the community.



The desired PR partner also will tackle Grand Rapids' congestion and parking-capacity issues, driven by a doubling of the downtown population during the past 20 years and the rise in employment.

The budget for the one-year contract is \$100K. There is an option for an additional one-year renewal.

Responses are due Oct. 16. Send the original, six copies and an electronic version on a flash drive to:

City of Grand Rapids, Purchasing Department; 300 Monroe Ave. NW, 7th Floor; Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

The sealed package must be marked with "RFP #961-53-16, Communications & Marketing Services."

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

## **W2O LAUNCHES PATIENT ACTIVATION UNIT**

W2O has launched Hū, which bills itself as the first-of-its-kind patient activation organization.



Hū aims at people's unwillingness to participate in clinical trials, which threatens the development of vaccines, therapeutic and medical device breakthroughs.

The willingness to take part in clinical trials has plunged from 85 percent to 49 percent during the past year, according to CenterWatch.

Hū wants to spur a new era of patient activism and engagement via the use of data, behavioral, economic and decision science, W2O's announcement said.

"The consumerization of healthcare and the changes in attitude accelerated by COVID-19 demand that we take meaningful action to amplify the patient voice as a driver of R&D success," said April Lewis, executive VP and GM of Hū.

She said Hū is not bound to the way things have been done and is "free to reimagine the potential of clinical trials and bring them to life in ways that will reshape how we think about, organize and conduct them."

W2O is [O'Dwyer's No. 1 ranked independent healthcare PR firm](#) with fees of \$218.9M in 2019.

## **EDELMAN RECRUITS DIGITAL PRO GEE**

Edelman has hired Chris Gee as managing director of digital for its US corporate & advisory services group.

He's responsible for the integration of digital expertise into the corporate affairs team and will guide clients as they reposition their companies and deal with crisis, diversity, inclusion and equity issues.



**Chris Gee**

Gee has held top digital jobs at Finsbury (managing director & digital strategy head for North America), Burson-Marsteller (head of digital strategy & content for US corporate/financial practice), RFBinder (chief digital officer) and Teneo (managing director, social media & digital strategy).

Jim O'Leary, Edelman's global corporate practice chair, said Gee's "knowledge of the digital ecosystem and Comms-Tech will be invaluable to our clients."

Edelman is [O'Dwyer's top ranked independent PR firm](#) with 2019 fees of \$892M.

## **BRUNSWICK BOOKS WILLIAM HILL**

Brunswick Group handles William Hill as the British bookmaker receives takeover offers from Apollo Global Management and Caesars Entertainment.

The operator of about 1,600 betting shops in the UK announced Sept. 25 that it is discussing the proposals but warns there is no certainty that any deal would take place.

William Hill has targeted the US, which generates about eight percent of its revenues, as a major growth market.

Since the Supreme Court legalized sports betting in 2018, 14 states have established regulated betting.

William Hill already is exclusive sports betting operator for Caesars Entertainment and has digital content deals with ESPN and CBS Sports.

Brunswick's Andrew Porter, Fiona Micallef-Eyraud, Craig Breheny and Chris Buscombe handle William Hill.

## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

Nickerson lands **Finegold Alexander Architects**, a pioneer in the adaptive use movement in project sectors ranging from national landmark and civic buildings, to development, K-12 and higher education, and cultural institutions. Nickerson will handle all media relations and interactions for the design collective. It will also conduct overall communications strategy planning, which involves a review of their share of voice for their design sectors and how this impacts their online presence. FAA is known for integrating projects seamlessly into physical, cultural and environmental contexts. Nickerson has offices in Boston, Miami, New York and Los Angeles.

**FrazierHeiby** adds **Crunch Time Apple Growers**, a New York state-based cooperative of 151 growers. The agency will support retailer and consumer marketing efforts for SnapDragon and RubyFrost apples. Its efforts will encompass retailer relations, media relations/PR, influencer relations, social/digital campaigns, trade shows and consumer events. "FrazierHeiby has key expertise in our industry," said Joel Crist of Crist Bros. Orchards Inc. and Crunch Time Apple Growers board chair. "That, paired with its track record of helping organizations solve complex business challenges, made FrazierHeiby the right choice to help us build and manage the SnapDragon and RubyFrost brands."



**Magrino Agency** scoops up **Sur La Table**, a retail chain that sells high-end kitchen products. The agency is working with the brand's marketing team to develop a strategy that continues to position Sur La Table as the go-to for all kitchenware needs, building on its legacy of providing cooking enthusiasts with unique products and culinary classes. Sur La Table's product line includes tools, bakeware, cookware, cutlery, electronics, linens and table items, glassware and bar items, gourmet food items and outdoor supplies. With over 650,000 students, its cooking classes are expanding at a rate of 19 percent annually.

**Back Bay Communications** lands **Goji**, a UK-based tech company that provides an investment platform connecting alternative investment managers with high net worth investors globally. BackBay will help Goji develop and deploy an integrated public relations, thought leadership content development and social media programs to build brand awareness of Goji and its technology solutions among private equity, private real estate and wealth management firms and high net worth individuals.



**Uproar PR** adds **Rendever**, which provides virtual reality services to seniors. The agency will conduct an integrated public relations campaign focused on boosting brand awareness for the company as a whole as well as building thought leadership profiles for its executive team. Leveraging its relationships with national, technology and VR-specific reporters, Uproar PR will also bring attention to Rendever's critical programs that were developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rendever says its VR services help seniors combat social isolation through shared experiences that include participating in bucket-list adventures, revisiting meaningful places and staying engaged with family members through personal photos and videos.

## **THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRAND**

No matter the origins of “purpose” or “cause” in marketing and strategy, the last decade has witnessed a profusion of books on the subject, and the rise of a whole industry of consultants who specialize in purpose or cause marketing.

Several studies have been published to prove, or claim to prove, that consumers are more likely to buy brands that espouse a noble purpose or support a good cause.

But the truth is, few if any brands have conducted carefully controlled experiments to determine if a purpose or cause actually provides any brand lift (i.e., an increase in sales over time, compared to the same brand marketed without a purpose or cause).



**Jerry W. Thomas**

Moreover, most brands adopting some purpose or cause have not even conducted the most basic of research to determine if a purpose or cause has a reasonable chance of boosting sales of their brands. If companies are dead-set on having a brand purpose or cause, there are research steps that can help them make good decisions.

The first question is: what purposes or causes should we consider for our brand?

If we are not so sure about a purpose or cause, or uncertain about what purposes align with our business, it might be helpful to answer these questions:

- What does our brand mean to users and non-users?
- What types of purposes or causes might fit, or go with, our brand?
- If a purpose or cause seems to go with the brand, what is the rationale, the story?
- Can the purpose or cause be linked to our brand in some powerful and memorable way?
- Are there charities that align with our purpose or cause who might be potential partners?

Typically, in-depth interviews are the recommended research technique to do this initial investigation.

After this initial qualitative investigation is completed and the interviews are analyzed, the outcome would be a number of possible purposes or causes for our brand, along with a basic understanding of how each could be linked to (or aligned with) the brand in some meaningful way.

These possibilities would be developed into purpose or cause concepts (similar to rough print ads), so that we can scientifically evaluate them.

The next step would be comprehensive concept tests. There would be three identical (or matched) samples, carefully balanced on geography, demographics, and usage of our product category.

If the decision is to move ahead, a final research step recommended is to test the new purpose or cause in a limited geographic area.

Again, we have a control and a test research design. Advertising and promotional spending levels would be identical across the control and test markets. We would track brand awareness, ad awareness, trial, repeat purchase, brand share, actual sales, distribution levels, etc., across all of the markets.

The test markets are recommended as the final “acid” test. To advertise a purpose or cause message usually takes some media weight (i.e., ad spending) away from the brand’s traditional positioning and messages. Test markets are the best way to evaluate the effects of this shift in ad spending.

The addition of a purpose or cause to a brand’s marketing is a major decision with long-term financial implications. There are many variables at play and it’s difficult to accurately measure the potential impacts of a purpose or cause. A careful, test-as-you-go approach is recommended.

Do good—but be cautious.

*Jerry W. Thomas is president and chief executive of Dallas/Fort Worth-based Decision Analyst Inc., one of the nation’s oldest and largest privately owned marketing research and analytical consulting firms.*

## **BCW WINS ‘OLYMPIC CAPITAL’**

BCW picked up Swiss state of Vaud and city of Lausanne (together known as the Olympic Capital) in the development of a new sporting-event strategy. In light of such current events at the global health situation, BCW will work with the area’s authorities as they align their development objectives with international events to increase impact for the local communities.



The Olympic Capital has hosted many major international sporting events, including the 2020 Winter Youth Olympic Games, which was held in Lausanne in January. “We now need a fresh look on how events can best impact our city and our people, in a way that is aligned with our social, economic and sustainability objectives,” said Patrice Iseli, Head of Sport at the City of Lausanne.

## **EVENTS**

ICR hosts Oct. 8 virtual boot camp from IPO Edge that will examine the preparation process for a new IPO listing. “IPOs, SPACs and Direct Listings,” which gets underway at noon EDT, will consist of two panel discussions, followed by a live question-and-answer session. Topics to be discussed include: internal planning and readiness considerations, raising new capital in a direct listing, and considerations for going public during election season. Speakers will include ICR Capital managing director Greg McDowell and co-head of capital markets Steve Parish. To register, [click here](#).



**The Institute for Public Relations** slates the second in its series of three virtual conferences addressing the “Future of Comms” for Oct. 8 from noon to 4 p.m. The conference will examine such subjects as behavioral science in PR, leading through transformation, why there are so few African American men in the PR profession and the future of the agency. Speakers include Hotwire global CEO Barbara Bates and Edelman financial services sector global chair Deidre Campbell. For information about the event, [click here](#).

**ICON 2020**, PRSA’s digital gathering of thought leaders, industry experts and partners in communication, public relations and marketing, is set for Oct. 26-29. The virtual event will include interactive sessions, social events and opportunities to connect with colleagues. Keynote speakers will include historian and author Jon Meacham (Oct. 26), DiversityInc Media CEOCarolynn Johnson (Oct. 27), Wilson Center Disinformation Fellow Nina Jankowicz (Oct. 28) and science writer and author Laurie Garrett (Oct. 29). In addition, the ICON 2020 Expo Hall, a fully interactive exhibit hall, will be open through the event. For more information or to register, [click here](#).

## **IPG SELLS WEBER SHANDWICK IRELAND**

Interpublic is selling Weber Shandwick's Ireland operations to local management.

Siobhán Molloy, managing director of the business in Ireland, will take over the Dublin-based operation, while Ross Williamson is acquiring the Belfast office in Northern Ireland.



**Siobhán Molloy**

"Operating as an independent agency will provide us with additional opportunities and agility to develop our business in this market while remaining as the Irish partner to the international Weber Shandwick network, which has served us well for the last 20 years," said Molloy.

Weber Shandwick Ireland serves clients such as Amazon Prime, Nestle, Irish Hotels Federation, Ardmere and Ericsson.

It launched in 1989 as Financial & Corporate Communications and became part of Weber Shandwick in 2000.

## **MAKOVSKY'S PRENCIPE TO RAFFETTO HERMAN**

Loretta Prencipe, a veteran of the energy and sustainability units of [Makovsky](#) and Qorvis MSLGroup, has joined [Raffetto Herman Strategic Communications](#) in Washington.



**Loretta Prencipe**

She exited Makovsky this month as practice leader of its energy, manufacturing & sustainability unit and DC office head. At Qorvis, Prencipe was VP in its manufacturing, advanced materials, energy, environment & sustainability group.

Prencipe also worked as director of communications at SunEdison solar power outfit and editor-in-chief at the Dept. of Energy's EnergyEmpowers.

John Raffetto said Prencipe brings "a diversified view of the innovation economy, and the high stakes communications challenges that come with it, to the job" and will help clients as they "navigate fierce competition, public policy scrutiny, and reputational crises."

## **SVC REPS AMERICAN EQUITY IN TAKEOVER BID**

Sard Verbinen & Co. represents American Equity Investment Life Holding Co. as the insurer receives a \$3B takeover offer from Massachusetts Mutual Life and Athene Holding Ltd.



The *Wall Street Journal* notes that American Equity's annuities and retirement income products are popular among conservative investors.

The deal would be the latest move in the consolidation of the insurance industry.

American Equity's board is reviewing the unsolicited bid and will determine if it represents the best interests of shareholders.

MassMutual, which would own an 80 percent stake in American Equity, promises to keep the management of the West Des Moines-based company intact.

Sard Verbinen's George Sard, Jared Levy and Jamie Tully handle American Equity.

## **COVID-19 UPENDS AGENCY BUSINESS MODELS**

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy financial toll on companies and has dramatically altered the operations and business models of those that remain.

A survey of executives by Chicago-based digital marketing shop Digital Third Coast shows that marketing and advertising agencies haven't been exempt from this phenomenon.

DTC's survey, which asked executives about their agency's experience since the start of the pandemic and how their business has been impacted as a result, found that nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of agencies polled were forced to make financial changes because of COVID-19.

Additionally, more than two-thirds (68 percent) said COVID-19 has altered how their company operates as well.

Three-quarters (75 percent) of executives polled said the pandemic has forced their agency to change their service offerings in some way. Among them, nearly half (48 percent) said they've amended their current service offerings, while nearly a third (29 percent) said they now offer new services in light of COVID-19.

DTC's survey polled 30 marketing and advertising agency executives between August and September.

## **KP PROMOS EARTHQUAKE WARNING SYSTEM**

KP Public Affairs is handling the launch of California's "Don't Get Caught Off Guard" campaign to educate people about the Golden State's earthquake warning system.

The Sacramento firm is in charge of PR, third party outreach and education, social media, and virtual event management. Partner Patrick George, a 15-year veteran of Burson-Marsteller, spearheads the effort.

KP is a subcontractor to Pulsar, which is lead agency on the account and in charge of advertising and creative.

The Don't Get Caught Off Guard push directs Californians to free tools and resources such as the smartphone MyShake app, Android earthquake alerts, government wireless emergency alerts and the earthquake.ca.gov site.

There is planned outreach to business, civic groups, faith-based organizations, social services agencies and charities to deliver messages to staff, employees, followers and clients.

The Great California ShakeOut and International ShakeOut Day is slated for Oct. 16. More than 10.8M Californians participated in last year's shakeout programming.



## **SUNDANCE'S MONROE NAMED PENSKE CMO**

Sundance Institute chief marketing officer Mike Monroe is heading to Penske Media Corporation, where he will serve as chief marketing officer and head of PMC Studios, the television and video partnership arm of the company.

Before coming to Sundance last year, Monroe was VP of marketing for *The Atlantic* and head of its in-house studio, Atlantic Re:think. He previously held marketing and content leadership roles at *Forbes* and Condé Nast.

In his new position, Monroe will lead the development of PMC Studios, integrated marketing & creative services, account management and communications for the Portfolio Sales team working in conjunction with PMC's brands, which include *Rolling Stone*, *Variety*, *Deadline*, *ARTnews* and *WWD*. He will be based in PMC's Los Angeles office.

## **HEALTHCARE PR: WHAT'S THE NEW NORMAL?**

Having been around the block a while, our agency has seen industry sectors boom and bust. And, in turn, some of the public relations professionals that serve those industries have succumbed to the vagaries of economic upheaval.

But at LCI, we had a plan. We implemented what we thought was a recession-proof strategy after the last Great Recession: concentrate on healthcare. The theory was, people will always need healthcare, and with a sizeable Boomer generation getting older—and ready to retire—it would be a growing industry sector.



**David Landis**

And then COVID hit—and changed everything. That old adage comes to mind: “The only thing constant in life is change.”

So, what’s the “new normal” in healthcare PR? Let’s take a look at what happened to the industry and how it impacted the PR sector. We all assumed that healthcare providers—and their PR professionals—would be even more needed, especially during times of crises and, above all, during pandemics. Instead, it turned out to be a mixed bag.

Why? Because the U.S. healthcare system is set up so that the economic generators for healthcare organizations—mostly elective surgeries—were completely interrupted because of the pandemic. And the snowball effect was that healthcare systems that needed to be there for us during a pandemic had even fewer resources to handle the pandemic.

To survive, healthcare systems are looking for unique ways to ride the financial vagaries, such as forging new partnerships with insurers to pave the way. In our market, Cigna and Dignity Healthcare just announced a new agreement between the two entities that will allow Dignity’s hospitals, outpatient surgery centers and medical groups to be in-network providers for Cigna members.

There’s a silver lining in all this. While traditional, big healthcare providers have faced undue financial challenges, healthcare startups are riding a new—and positive—wave.

According to Tara Bannow, reporter with Modern Healthcare (July, 2020), the “pandemic has spurred a flood of venture capital funding to healthcare startups. Venture capital funding in healthcare intensified in the first half of 2020 as COVID-19 made virtual care and similar technologies indispensable.”

“We’ve seen decades of progress in 12 to 14 weeks,” said Unity Stoakes, President and Co-Founder of the healthcare startup incubator StartUp Health.

“Global venture capital funding for digital health and health innovation,” continued Bannow, “totaled \$9.1 billion in the first half of the year, up from \$7.7 billion during the same period in 2019, according to a second-quarter report from StartUp Health. And 2019 was itself a banner year for startup funding. (Many of) the types of companies that attracted funding are both directly and indirectly related to the pandemic.”

For us at LCI, this upheaval is just another pivot. We’ve seen firsthand that many healthcare and biopharma startups here in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley got funded before the pandemic hit; they still have money to spend and recognize the value of PR. For instance, we helped launch Frontier

Medicines, a bio-pharma startup funded by a \$67 million Series A financing round last June. Despite the pandemic, we also just signed another startup healthcare client in August.

Other areas of PR opportunity are the wellness businesses springing up during COVID. Market research firm Technavio has been monitoring the health and wellness market and says that it’s “poised to grow by \$1299.84 billion during 2020-2024.” These businesses require and need PR, too.

On another front, many healthcare businesses are re-jiggering to help people weather this pandemic. Our client Centre for Neuro Skills helps patients rehabilitate through traumatic or acquired brain injury. But lately, doctors have noticed that patients have had health consequences after recovering from COVID. These consequences include brain injury and cognitive impairments—which require rehabilitation. Helping clients like this navigate communications through changing COVID waters is yet another way PR pros can help.

So, the transformations to the healthcare industry aren’t bad news for public relations; it’s just change. And isn’t that something at which PR pros excel?

*David Landis is President and CEO of San Francisco-based Landis Communications Inc. (LCI), which this year celebrates 30 years in business. Email David at [david@landispr.com](mailto:david@landispr.com).*

## **ON THE MOVE**

**Weber Shandwick** has named **Brian Offutt** chief workforce innovation & operations officer, a newly created position. Offutt previously served as managing director, people and process at strategic advisory and business development firm MediaLink, where he also led the formation of its talent practice. From 2013 to 2016, he was chief operating officer for Combs Enterprises, with operational oversight across Sean “Diddy” Combs’ brands. In his new post, Offutt will collaborate with leaders across the firm’s human resources, talent acquisition, client services and diversity, equity & inclusion groups – including chief employee experience officer Abby Gold and senior vice president, diversity & inclusion Judith Harrison.



**Brian Offutt**

Challenger bank **Dave** has named former Airbnb CMO **Jonathan Mildenhall** as chief marketing officer. Mildenhall will continue to serve as chairman of brand consultancy TwentyFirstCenturyBrand, which he co-founded after leaving Airbnb in 2018. Before joining Airbnb, Mildenhall was senior vice president of marketing and design at The Coca-Cola Company. In his newly created role, Mildenhall will lead all growth and brand marketing initiatives as well as working with the product team to further Dave’s development as a financial app.

**The Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory** has selected **Jacqueline Bucher** to head up its communications office. Bucher comes to her new post from marketing firm Mind2Media, which she founded in addition to serving as president. She was previously vice president and head of communications at Roche Molecular Solutions. Founded in 1967, Fermilab is supported by the Department of Energy’s Office of Science and is the single largest supporter of basic research in the physical sciences in the United States.

## COMMENTARY



**COVID-19-stricken Donald Trump's exit** from Walter Reed National Military Center for an Oct. 4 “drive-by” of supporters to allow him to bask in their adoration was a publicity stunt gone so very wrong.

It also was reckless.

Shattering all guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calling for Covid-19 patients to isolate themselves for 10 days after the symptoms first appear, Trump showed a callous disregard for the health of the entourage forced to accompany him on the presidential ego trip.

Members of Trump's Secret Service detail must now go into quarantine for 14 days—all for a five-minute ride in which the president waded feebly to his loyal fans. He looked like a version of England's late Queen Mum.

Dr. James Phillips, an attending physician at Walter Reed, worries that the Secret Service agents might get sick or die all for political theater. “This is insanity,” he tweeted.

He noted that the presidential SUV is not only bulletproof, but hermetically sealed against chemical attack. “The risk of COVID19 transmission inside is as high as it gets outside of medical procedures. The irresponsibility is astounding. My thoughts are with the Secret Service forced to play.”

Trump's thoughts are always on himself.

**Before embarking on his “surprise visit”** to his supporters, the president took a shot at the scientific community that has warned of the threat from COVID-19 since January.

“I learned a lot about COVID. I learned it by really going to school. This is the real school. This isn't the ‘let's read the book’ school. And I get it. And I understand it,” he tweeted.

If he understood it, he wouldn't have put others at risk. What “real school” is Trump talking about? Trump University?

The ghosts of the 210K Americans who died from COVID-19 while the president minimized the threat, could tell Trump a thing or two about the virus.

**Master of Misinformation...** Trump is the largest driver of misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic, according to [a study by the Cornell Alliance for Science](#).

The study evaluated 38M articles in the English-language media and found that 1.1M of them disseminated, amplified or reported misinformation about the virus.

“Miracle cures” ranks as the most popular topic in the COVID-19 “infodemic.” Trump powered the miracle cures category by playing up unproven treatments such as hydroxy-chloroquine and swallowing disinfectants to cure coronavirus.

The Alliance found the No. 2 topic of misinformation was that the pandemic was created to advance “a new world order/deep state.” That was followed by a hoax pushed by the Democratic party and a bioweapon concocted and released by a Chinese laboratory in Wuhan.

Trump continues to contribute to the infodemic by claiming that a vaccine for the virus will be here rather quickly, perhaps ahead of the Nov. 3 presidential elections.

**Business leaders flunk Trump** on his handling of COVID-19. More than half (55 percent) of business leaders attending the Yale School of Management's CEO caucus gave president Trump an “F” for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Twelve percent graded him a “D,” nine percent a “B” and six percent an “A,” according to a snap poll conducted by professor Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, senior associate dean for leadership studies, on Sept. 23.

Eighty-four percent of the attendees at the Chief Executive Leadership Institute's event said Trump's response to the pandemic hurt their businesses. The business leaders plan to express their dissatisfaction with Trump at the polls, as 77 percent of them plan to vote for Joe Biden.

**University of Chicago takes top honors** in the first [college free speech rankings](#) developed by RealClear Education and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.

The rankings are based on interviews with 20K students at 55 schools across the nation. They measure openness to discuss challenging topics; tolerance for allowing controversial speakers on campus; self-expression; administrative support, which is the students' perception about whether their college protects or punishes free speech; and FIRE's speech code rating which gauges college policies on how they protect or restrict free speech.

The University of Chicago, which has one of the most liberal student bodies of any school on the list, is noted for championing free expression. It released The Chicago Statement in 2015, which states:

“[I]t is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”

Kansas State University ranks No. 2 on the list, followed by Texas A&M, UCLA, Arizona State, University of Virginia, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Brown University and University of Arizona.

The bottom five schools are Oklahoma State, Syracuse University, Dartmouth College, Louisiana State University and DePauw University.

**Hats off to Federal Aviation Administration administrator Steve Dickson**, who conducted his own test flight of a Boeing 737 Max on Sept. 30. That plane has been grounded for more than 18 months following crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia.

Dickson, a former Delta Air Lines pilot, had to complete new training procedures and do a practice run on a 737 simulator before taking to the air. “I like what I saw on the flight,” he said, adding that more work has to be done before the FAA re-certifies the 737 Max.

Dickson, who took over the FAA last fall, has promised throughout that he wasn't going to sign off on the plane until he flew it and was satisfied that he would put his own family on it without a second thought.

In flying the 737 Max, Dickson put his own life on the line. He talked the talk and walked the walk. —Kevin McCauley