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KC WANTS COVID OUTREACH TO HISPANICS

The Kansas City Health Dept. is looking for a firm to run a grassroots COVID-19 vaccination educational campaign aimed at its Hispanic community.

KCHD's PR partner "should expect scientific review, quickly changing information and should understand that the work they do can keep the city safe, open and healthy," according to the RFP.

The firm will conduct focus groups and listening sessions with members of the Hispanic community and then devise culturally appropriate outreach.

The one-year effort is budgeted at \$120K.

Responses, due Aug. 5, go via mail or email to: City of Kansas City Health Dept.; William Snook; 2400 Troost Ave., Ste 4400; Kansas City, MO 64108; bill.snook@kemo.org.

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

VARGAS TO DRIVE GM GLOBAL PUBLIC POLICY

General Motors has hired Omar Vargas, who was senior VP & chief government affairs officer at 3M Co, for the VP and head of global public policy spot, effective Aug. 1.



Omar Vargas

Vargas held a variety of government affairs positions at 3M since joining the company in 2017.

Earlier, he was senior counsel and executive director of government relations at Praxair; senior director for global policy & government policy at PepsiCo; and deputy director at the Justice Dept.'s office of intergovernmental affairs and public liaison.

RACEPOINT REPS CHINA'S ALIBABA GROUP

Racepoint Global is providing video and PR services to Alibaba Group, the Chinese e-commerce giant.

China's crackdown on its high-tech sector and the COVID-19 pandemic have hurt Alibaba's shares, which trade on the New York Stock Exchange. They are down about 25 percent to \$195.

Racepoint, which began representing Alibaba on March 22, has received a payment of \$30K for its effort. It has Allison DeLeo and Risha Tyagi working the business.

Racepoint also works for another Chinese giant, Huawei Technologies, which has been sanctioned by the US Government for alleged spying activity. The firm collected \$1.4M from Huawei during the six-month period ended April 30.

FTI ENJOYS 19.2% SURGE IN Q2 PR REVENUES

FTI Consulting reported that its PR operation grew 19.2 percent to \$67.8M during the second quarter.

Mark McCall, head of the strategic communications unit, said his group had "a really strong performance coming on the heels of a solid start of the year."



Mark McCall

Stratcom revenues advanced 18.6 percent to \$128.3M during the first half.

McCall told *O'Dwyer's* the solid financials resulted from "sticking to our strategy" and focusing on fast-growing segments such as cybersecurity; environmental, social, and corporate governance; business transformation; and highly regulated industries (healthcare and energy).

The unit is investing in people as "revenue-generating headcount" as of June 30 grew to 771 from 761 a year ago.

Capitol Hill veteran Russ Kelley has joined the government affairs practice within the stratcom group. Kelley was counsel to the House committee on transportation & infrastructure and worked on the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act. He also was communications specialist for Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle.

McCall is "cautiously optimistic" about the remainder of 2021, though he noted that the emergence of the Delta variant is a "reminder that we are still not out of the woods" on the COVID-19 pandemic.

MDC SHAREHOLDERS BLESS STAGWELL DEAL

Shareholders of MDC Partners approved the merger with Stagwell Media during their special meeting on July 26.

The combined company will be called Stagwell Inc. and trade on the NASDAQ after the transaction is completed.

Mark Penn, MDC CEO and Stagwell Group managing director, thanked shareholders for recognizing the merger "as a unique opportunity to create a new marketing machine that can transform the industry and create enhanced opportunities for growth and value."



Mark Penn

Stagwell Inc. will house [Alison+Partners](#), [Hunter](#), [KWT Global](#), [Sloane & Co](#) and [SKD-Knickerbocker](#).

J&J'S DOWNING TAKES MERCK CCO POST

Cristal Downing, who was VP-communications & PA at Johnson & Johnson's medical devices division, will join Merck Aug. 16 as chief communications and PA officer, a new post.



Cristal Downing

Earlier at J&J, Downing was VP-global finance communications, where she helped develop and implement PA and strategies to support the CFO and CEO.

She also co-led the "Our Race to Health Equity" platform, which is J&J's racial & social push.

During her more than 20-year career, Downing served as corporate communications director at ITT, marketing consultant at Wells Fargo, first VP-strategic planning at JPMorgan Chase and

director at American Express Technologies.

Merck CEO Rob Davis called Downing "a transformational leader with a well-established track record."

USAID'S PROSPER AFRICA SEEKS WEB HELP

The US Agency for International Development wants bids to provide strategic advisory support, development and maintenance for its Prosper Africa website.

Prosper Africa, which has input from 17 US governmental agencies, helps American and African businesses and investors identify partners, advance opportunities and close deals to further bilateral trade and investments. It needs a firm to design and develop a new website tied to communications strategy and legacy analytics to advance its mission.

The web work is worth \$100K to \$150K. Though the selected firm will communicate with various federal agencies, staff is not required to have a DC-area presence.

Proposals are due August 9. They go to INVEST_Procurement@dai.com, copying Katherine.Tilahun@dai.com and Carly.Gorelick@dai.com. Put your organization's name in the subject line following "Submission under RFP INVEST—091: PAES Website Strategy and Design."

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

IPG DXTRA'S TALBOT SHIFTS TO MSL

Lisa Talbot, who was chief strategy officer for IPG DXTRA's health unit, has joined MSL US as chief client officer, a new post at the Publicis Groupe unit.

Based in New York, she will report to CEO Diana Littman and oversee the firm's practice leads.

"Lisa is an extraordinary business partner, with a truly unique ability to create growth by elevating from the inside out and inspiring from the outside in," said Littman. "Her passion for and understanding of the importance of influence and how it impacts marketing will bring immense returns to our agency and work."



Lisa Talbot

Talbot played a key role in the launch of IPG DXTRA, a collection of 27 agencies, and earlier led business development at Omnicom's Marina Maher Communications unit and headed US healthcare at Burson-Marsteller's Cohn & Wolfe operation.

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

FINN Partners lands **Galataport Istanbul**, a new social, cultural and leisure neighborhood anchoring the waterfront in Istanbul's Karaköy district. Led by FINN Partners' Virginia Sheridan, managing partner for Travel + Lifestyle, North America and travel division senior partner Haldun Dincetin, the agency will deliver a comprehensive communications strategy for consumer and trade audiences including media relations, trade show representation, strategic partnerships and thought leadership. According to Galataport Istanbul, FINN Partners was selected based on its experience in the cruise industry, art and culture and lifestyle public relations, as well as its established knowledge of Turkey and Istanbul.



Forward Media is working **Tailwind Air's** new nonstop seaplane service from New York to Boston. Tailwind says that its service will cut travel times between the two cities from 40 to 60 percent. The flights, which are to start operations on Aug. 3, will take off from Manhattan's New York Skyport on East 23 Street, landing in Boston Harbor approximately 75 minutes later. Tailwind says that in addition to reducing aggravation for travelers, the new service will "open up half-day business trips."

AutoCom Associates earns US PR duties for **Drive TLV**, a connector of investors and Israeli high-tech companies. Based in Tel Aviv, Drive works with startups, assists them with strategic business-plan guidance and helps them form partnerships with investors and industry-leading mobility companies, including automakers and insurance firms. It plans to make its programs available to startups in the US and Europe in the near future.

Colangelo & Partners toasts **Botter S.p.A.**, Italy's largest private wine producer in terms of revenue, as the company launches its first-ever integrated communications program in the US. The agency will be responsible for developing and executing a comprehensive communications strategy targeted to key media, trade members, consumer stakeholders and industry influencers. It will focus on engaging new and current consumers through strategic media relations, events, partnerships, and social media.

Falls & Co. picks up **American Greetings'** digital business unit, AGInteractive. Falls & Co. will leverage its expertise in media relations, advertising, social media, and influencer marketing to enhance brand awareness of the company's SmashUps as a refreshed brand and product line. SmashUps are ecards that users can personalize by choosing options in a series of drop-down menus. The company's lineup of SmashUps include celebrity collaborations with Dolly Parton, Shaquille O'Neal and William Shatner.



Fox Communications checks in at **Raffles Hotels & Resorts**, part of the Accor Group. The agency's work for Raffles will focus on such press engagement strategies as daily press office support, news amplification and event management. Fox Communications will also support the global launch activity of upcoming properties including Raffles Udaipur, India and Raffles The Palm in Dubai later this year, as well as Raffles Boston Back Bay Hotel & Residences and Raffles London at the OWO, both slated to debut in 2022.

THE BEST AND WORST CEO COMMUNICATORS

In July, as Jeff Bezos and his three stalwart space co-travelers drifted to a soft landing in the desert from 66 miles up, Bloomberg reporters on the scene in Van Horn, Texas, pondered the question on everyone's mind.



Fraser Seitel

"I wonder," said the lead anchor, "who will be the first person out of the capsule?"

"My bet," said her co-anchor, "is that the Amazon founder says 'ladies first' and invites female aviation pioneer Mary Wallace 'Wally' Funk to be first off."

Wrong. When the hatch door opened, out stepped the \$200 billion man. In purposely choosing to precede all others off the space vessel, the outgoing

Amazon CEO was tacitly communicating that he, above all others, was responsible for this particular "leap."

Such communication—strong, confident, self-assured—is required of a CEO or any executive, who is also a "leader."

Here are three key communications requisites and the grades today's so-called "leaders" would merit.

Leadership communications require courage.

Leaders must stand for something and have the chutzpah to tell people what they stand for. They must convey the courage to offer solutions that may not please everyone.

For example, Bezos' flight was criticized by conservatives and liberals alike as a spectacular waste of money, a billionaire's flight of fancy that served little earthly purpose.

But the Amazon impresario never relented, explaining thoughtfully at his post-flight news conference how this was the first step in a journey that would help yield answers to the earth's climate change crisis—demonstrating a sense of commitment rarely found among easy-to-hate billionaires.

Compare that with fellow billionaire Mark Zuckerberg, who appears wooden, rehearsed and unconvincing in his public appearances. With the Facebook CEO, the words may be there, but the courage of commitment isn't. Thus in terms of communications leadership: Bezos = B; Zuckerberg = C-.

Leadership communications require knowledge.

Even a leader who communicates courageously must have the knowledge to back up his or her words. Most people aren't that stupid; they can tell if you're a phony.

A true leader will speak from knowledge and use their words to incite desired action.

Biden Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is a sterling example. She speaks plainly; she's from Brooklyn; she's everybody's favorite grandma. But when Janet Yellen talks "economics," people listen ... and follow.

Yellen's colleague Homeland Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas is her polar opposite. Mayorkas has the unenviable task of controlling the flow of immigrants into the U.S. But in testimony before Congress, Mayorkas has just made things worse, mostly echoing platitudes, tip-toeing past loaded words like "crisis," and mostly declaring how hard he and his staff work. The point: Yellen is respected, Mayorkas is doubted.

Then consider New Jersey Senator Cory Booker and South Carolina Congressman James Clyburn. The former speaks to be noticed, while the latter speaks to get things done.

Booker's dramatic televised performance at the Kavanaugh hearings, which had virtually no impact on the outcome, nonetheless earned him reverence in progressive circles and millions in campaign contributions.

Clyburn, although in Congress for three decades, is much less "available" to the media and picks his public shots carefully. Guess who carries more influence in Washington?

Ergo, in terms of communications leadership: Yellen = A; Clyburn = A; Mayorkas = D; Booker = D.

Leadership communications require humanity.

A communications leader must also persuade through moral leadership. No amount of courage or knowledge will be enough to convince most people to follow without a concomitant sense of humanity.

The NFL's Bill Belichick and the NBA's Greg Popovich, for example, are legendary coaches, who by most accounts have friends and give freely to charity. But both are also arrogant, self-important bullies. As a consequence, as good as they are as coaches, those who aren't fans of their teams despise the demonic duo. Correctly.

Finally, in terms of humanity, there's the recent ranking of 44 ex-Presidents by 142 historians. Barack Obama was ranked 10. Donald Trump was ranked 41. Obama may have been short on legislative accomplishments, but he was long on empathy and moral leadership. Trump was America's most influential leader in decades, but morally tone-deaf, often uninformed, a serial fibber and an incontrovertible bully.

Communications leadership translation: Obama = B+; Belichick = D; Popovich = D; Trump = F.

Fraser P. Seitel has been a communications consultant, author and teacher for 40 years. He is author of the Pearson text "The Practice of Public Relations," now in its 14th edition, and co-author of "Rethinking Reputation" and "Idea Wise." He may be reached directly at yusake@aol.com.

STOP SALE OF SURVEILLANCE TECH, SAYS HRW

Human Rights Watch has called for governments to suspend the trade of surveillance technology until a regulatory framework to protect the rights of individuals/groups is in place.

That demand follows a report that Pegasus spyware developed by Israel-based NSO Group was used to track journalists and activists.

Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based journalism non-profit, and Amnesty International released their Pegasus Report report July 19, which found that NSO's software licensed to countries to track terrorists and criminals was also used to eavesdrop on reporters, business executives and human rights groups.

NSO, which was represented by SKDKnickerbocker unit until late 2019, flatly denies the Pegasus Project's findings.

Deborah Brown, senior digital rights researcher at HRW, said "companies need to be held accountable for human rights violations they facilitated by selling their software to governments likely to abuse it."

In the aftermath of the Pegasus Report release, House Democrats called for the Biden administration to put NSO Group on an export control list.

[New Jersey's Tom Malinowski, California's Katie Porter and Anna Eschoo and Texas' Joaquin Castro said in a statement](#) that selling spyware to authoritarian governments and expecting they would use it responsibly is like "selling guns to the mafia and believing they will be used for target practice."

Anita Dunn, senior advisor to Biden and founding member of SKDK, is returning this month to the New York firm, which is part of Mark Penn's Stagwell Group.



BRUNSWICK GROUP FIRES UP WEBER'S IPO

Brunswick Group handles media for Weber Inc., outdoor grill maker, that expects to raise \$800M via an initial public offering valued at more than \$8B.

Founded nearly 70 years ago by George Stephen, inventor of the outdoor grill, Weber controls 23 percent of the US market and 24 percent of the global business, according to Frost & Sullivan.



It is the No. 1 player in the US, Germany, Australia, Canada and France.

The Palatine, IL-based company reported a 212.6 percent net income surge to \$73.8M during the six-month period ended March 31 on a 61.4 percent sales jump.

In its S-1 filing, Weber notes the "COVID-19 environment has encouraged consumers to cook at home and enjoy the benefits of outdoor grilling, creating increased demand for our grills and accessories, and we expect to continue to benefit from these trends even after the pandemic recedes."

Brunswick Group's Ash Spiegelberg and Patricia Graue handle Weber.

TWITTER SIGNS IBM, ABMAC VET SIMS

Twitter recruits Kelly Sims, a veteran of IBM and Abernathy MacGregor, as VP of global communications.

Sims was previously global head of communications at tech company Stripe, where she oversaw all public affairs, internal and external communications, brand work, social media and media relations.



Kelly Sims

Before coming to Stripe, she was senior VP at AbMac and was part of the team that launched IBM's Watson as well as leading global communications for such IBM initiatives as cloud computing and Web 2.0.

Brandon Borrmann exited the VP global communications post in June.

Twitter reported a 74 percent jump in Q2 revenues to \$1.1B. It earned \$66M during the period compared to a \$1.4B year-earlier loss.

ADDISON (TX) WANTS PR BUZZ

Addison, a town of 16K people on the northern edge of Dallas, is looking for a PR firm to promote its projects and events. The 4.4- sq.-mile locale features more than 180 restaurants, 22 hotels and 12M sq. ft of office space geared to serving Dallas area residents and visitors.

Addison pitches itself as having the perfect blend of the diversity of a big city with the ambiance of a small town, according to its RFP. It is looking for a partner to promote events such as Taste Addison, Addison After Dark, Kaboom Town and Addison Oktoberfest.

The selected firm will be expected to work seamlessly with Addison's public communications director, special events head, advertising agency and sponsors of the various projects.

Responses to the RFP are due Aug. 6.

Send the original proposal, three hard copies and a PDF version on a memory stick in an envelope labeled "RFP#21-135 Public Relations Services" to: Town of Addison; Purchasing Division; 5350 Belt Line Road; Dallas, TX 75254

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

LOCAL TV PROS SAY ZOOM IS HERE TO STAY

Zoom's influence isn't going away, not even in a post-COVID marketplace, according to a new report from D S Simon Media.

More than 85 percent of the local TV reporters and producers who took part in the firm's "[Future of Local TV Interviews](#)" study said that they will continue to use Zoom for interviews with brand spokespeople after the pandemic.

That reliance on Zoom is part of an overall trend toward remote, on-location interviews. When asked where they would interview brand spokespeople, 93 percent said they would be willing to conduct interviews with brand and non-profit spokespeople in their homes, offices or on location.

One of the big pluses of on-location interviews: authenticity. Eighty-five percent of the TV producers surveyed said they felt on-location interviews came across as more authentic.

"By an overwhelming margin, stations plan to continue to use Zoom and other similar tools to conduct interviews for their shows with brand and non-profit spokesperson after the pandemic ends," said D S Simon CEO Doug Simon.



INVARIANT'S LEE TAKES FTA HELM

Penny Lee, who headed the PA practice at Invariant, the DC-based strategic communications and government relations shop, has taken the helm of the Financial Technology Assn.

The FTA says it is committed to shaping the future of tech-centered financial services through a modern, consumer-centric regulatory framework.

Lee has more than 20 years of private and public experience gained as chief strategy officer at 1776, senior advisor/president at Venn Strategies, and senior advisor to former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.



Penny Lee

FTA board member Bruce Johnson said Lee's "demonstrated passion for promoting inclusive technological innovation and her deep experience building coalitions have uniquely positioned her to lead this association."

Lee is the first CEO of FTA, an organization that includes members such as Afterpay, Betterment, Brex, Figure, Klarna, Plaid, Wise and Zest AI.

TURNER LANDS EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

[TURNER](#) signs on to handle media relations efforts for the Empire State Building. In conjunction with the building's 90th anniversary in 2021, TURNER will work to expand brand awareness across a variety of channels and platforms.

A \$165 million redevelopment of the Empire State Building Observatory was completed in December 2019, which included 10,000 square feet of museum galleries. In addition, the Empire State Building's deep energy retrofit has decreased its carbon emissions by 40 percent and has been replicated in more than 50 U.S. buildings.

"There are icons—and then there's the Empire State Building, which towers above them all," said TURNER Vice President Adél Grobler. "As an agency with a longtime presence in NYC, we are thrilled to represent the World's Most Famous Building."

KEKST CNC BOOKS RIDE ON SWVL'S SPAC

Kekst CNC is handling Dubai-based Swvl mass transit ride start-up as it goes public via a merger with Queen's Gambit Growth Capital, an all-female-led SPAC. The \$1.5B deal will result in shares of Swvl Holdings Corp. trading on the NASDAQ.

Swvl operates in ten cities across Africa, Middle East and Asia, where mass transit reliability is poor. Its technology is used to detect the most efficient routes for customers heading to work or school.

Swvl CEO Mostafa Kandil notes that deficient mass transit systems result in congestion, increased pollution and reduced rider productivity. His company's goal is "to empower all people to go where they want to, when they want to, and to feel comfortable doing it."

Swvl expects to expand to Europe, North and South America by 2025.

The Kekst CNC team includes Daniel Yunger, Nicholas Capuano, David Gill, Hallie Wolff, Emma Cloyd, Emma Prens-Vasilakis and JM Shekian.

Publicis Groupe owns Kekst CNC.

LOPEZ TAKES PA POST AT CONSTELLATION

Liz Lopez has been named VP-public affairs at Constellation Brands, the \$8.4B alcohol and cannabis company via its nearly 40 percent stake in Canada's Canopy Growth.



Liz Lopez

She will be responsible for the Victor, NY-based company's federal, state and global interests as well as dealing with issues related to US policies regarding cannabis matters.

Lopez joins Constellation from the YMCA, where she served as in-house counsel and senior director for economic development. Earlier, she was managing director at Nexus Consulting and executive VP-public policy at the Opportunity Finance Network.

Constellation markets Corona, Modelo, Pacifico (beers), Robert Mondavi, Kim Crawford, Meiomi (wines) and SVEDKA Vodka, Casa Noble Tequila and High West Whiskey.

ELECTRIFY AMERICA PLUGS INTO WAXMAN

Waxman Strategies, the firm of former California Congressman Henry Waxman, has signed on to provide DC outreach for Electrify America.

The Reston, VA-based company, part of Volkswagen Group, is the largest operator of charging stations in the US.

On July 10, Electrify announced its "boost plan" to more than double its charging stations to 1,800-plus and over 10,000 individual chargers by 2025.

The boost plan expands Electrify's commitment to invest more than \$2B over the next decade to zero-emission vehicle infrastructure, education and access across the US.

Giovanni Palazzo, CEO of Electrify and former head of Volkswagen's e-mobility unit, said the addition of the charging stations and the ability to service all models of EVs on the market will power his firm's effort to advance the growth of the zero-emissions vehicle market.

Waxman Strategies has managing director Micheal Goo, a Congressional staffer to Waxman, and environmental practice leader Carl Leighty overseeing the Electrify America business.

ON THE MOVE

Hootsuite, which provides social media management solutions, brings on **Maggie Lower** as chief marketing officer. Lower joins Hootsuite from Cision, where she also held the CMO post. She has also served as senior vice president/CMO at staffing and recruiting company TrueBlue, head of global marketing at Aon, and a senior vp at Bank of America. At Hootsuite, Lower will oversee the brand's overall global strategy, demand generation, communications and events.



Maggie Lower

PRR, a women- and employee-owned integrated communications agency, hires MSL vet **Greg Eppich** as senior director of creative and marketing. At MSL, Eppich was a senior vice president. As part of PRR's senior leadership team, he will lead a team of social marketing, creative, digital marketing and behavior change specialists across a portfolio of public and private sector clients.

The Alkaline Water Company hires **Tom Hutchison** as chief marketing officer. Hutchison was previously vice president of marketing and customer engagement at Sprouts Farmers Market. He has also led global shopper and retail customer insights and analytics for Brown-Forman, the beverage company that owns Jack Daniel's, Woodford Reserve, Herreradura and Sonoma-Cutrer. Hutchison is charged with developing and implementing marketing strategies for the company in collaboration with Shaquille O'Neal, who serves on its board of advisors and as celebrity brand ambassador.

Bayer adds **Denise Vitola** to its communications team as vice president of brand integration, PR, social and influencer for consumer health. Vitola was previously founder and CEO of communications consultancy Vitola Strategies, where she led internal communications and brand PR for Bayer Consumer Health North America. Before that, she was managing director at Makovsky and North America practice director, consumer, at MSLGROUP. At Bayer, Vitola will be responsible for leading strategy for integrated brand PR, social media and influencer marketing for all Consumer Health U.S. brands.

Two Nil Holdings, a global marketing services network focused on servicing direct-to-consumer brands, appoints **Michael Lyons** as chief investment officer, as well as managing director of Juice Media, the network's investment arm. Lyons previously worked at Casual Precision, where he partnered with Two Nil to activate clients across OTT/CTV opportunities. Before that, he co-founded Bliss Point Media and also led TV and streaming sales efforts for such companies as AOL, Adapt.tv and A&E Networks. In his new role, Lyons will oversee all activation and investment efforts for TNH's clients, while leading Juice Media.



Michael Lyons

San Francisco-based **VSC** promotes **Anne Sophie Hurst**, **Eric Gonzalez** and **Maggie Philbin** to partner. Hurst has been with the VSC since 2018, most recently serving as head of people and operations. Gonzalez was previously general manager of the agency's New York office. Philbin has been with VSC since 2014, most recently serving as a senior vice president.

COMMENTARY

A reincarnated Howard Beale of “Network” fame would say, “People are mad as hell about the amount of misinformation circulating on social media about COVID-19 vaccines and they are not going to take it anymore.”



Amy Klobuchar

They demand that social media companies be held accountable for their actions.

A Morning Consult poll released July 29 bears that out. It found that 63 percent of US adults support a federal bill to hold social media companies responsible for pushing fake news about the vaccines and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Democratic Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM) introduced such a measure on July 22 called the “Health Misinformation Act.”

It would strip the Section 230 liability shield of the Communications Decency Act from digital platforms that promote misinformation tied to an existing public health emergency, as declared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Though the measure, which lacks a single Republican sponsor, has zero chance of becoming law, it serves as a warning shot to social media companies. They better get their acts together on misinformation.

The Morning Consult poll found that only 25 percent believe social media does a good/excellent job on curbing anti-vaccine content. More than six-in-ten (62 percent) Americans give the companies a fair/poor rating.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been good news for the Robinhood stock trading platform that has just gone public. The stock opened at \$38 on July 29 and closed down 8.4 percent at \$34.82. Shareholders may be in for a heck of a ride.

Robinhood’s Securities and Exchange filing, which includes 75 pages of “risk factors,” says the company has enjoyed “substantial growth” in its customer base since the onset of the pandemic.

Corporate shutdowns, travel restrictions, stay-at-home orders and quarantines were music to Robinhood’s ears.

Robinhood is “uncertain whether these trends and behavioral shifts will continue as reopening measures continue, and we may not be able to maintain the customer base we gained.”

The company will also miss those federal stimulus checks sent to its customers.

Robinhood also frets about the threat posed by negative publicity, since it views its brand and reputation as two of its most important assets.

“Our reputation, brand and ability to build trust with existing and new customers may be adversely affected by complaints and negative publicity about us, our platform and customers that utilize our platform or our competitors’ platforms, even if factually incorrect or based on isolated incidents,” according to the S-1.

Robinhood should invest in a couple of savvy financial and crisis firms.

If you want something done in Washington, DC, you go to Tony Podesta,” boasts podesta.com.

China’s Huawei Technologies, which is battling US sanctions, apparently agrees. It reportedly hired Podesta, whose firm imploded in 2017 as it was caught in the federal investigation of former president Trump’s ties to Russia.

The media, though, have always had a soft spot in their hearts for Tony.

He was dubbed one of DC’s “50 heavy lifters” (*Financial Times*), “one of Washington’s biggest players” (*New York Times*), “Washington super lobbyist” (*Bloomberg Businessweek*), “The Lobbyist” (*Newsweek*) and “a king of K Street” (*Politico*).

Can the now 77-year-old Podesta regain his crown? Don’t bet against it.

Ditch the PR guy, says a coalition of journalism groups in a letter to Alondra Nelson and Jane Lubchenco, deputy directors of the White House’s office of science and technology policy.

The Coalition says its members’ efforts to get honest and timely answers from government agencies are “intentionally hindered” by the ham-fisted media policy of the Biden administration.

The Government hinders the media by “barring government scientists, issue specialists and other government employees from communicating directly with reporters and even refusing to allow interviews of such scientists or specialists even with oversight by a public information officer.”

They would like to see the elimination of restrictions on employees speaking to reporters without notification of authorities; allowing credentialed journalists to enter, without escort, any area of federal facilities where most employees are allowed; and establishing a standard policy that when reporters voluntarily contact public information offices, they are allowed to speak to the people they request.

The Coalition of 25 groups includes the Society of Professional Journalists, Radio Television Digital News Assn., National Newspaper Assn., National Writers Union, Tully Center for Free Speech and Society of Environmental Journalism.

The PR halo earned by the pharmaceutical industry for its masterful performance in developing vaccines for COVID-19 is in serious jeopardy.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that Big Pharma is leading the effort to kill the 15 percent global corporate tax agreement ironed out by 130 countries. The 15 percent tax rate is a major priority of the Biden administration.

A New York University analysis of taxes paid by drug companies found that Pfizer paid a 5.8 percent effective tax rate over the past decade. Johnson & Johnson paid a rate of 10.8 percent in 2020.

The drug companies say those tax breaks help bankroll research that leads to breakthroughs such as the COVID-19 shot.

An all-out effort to thwart the global effort to create a more equitable tax system will squander the PR goodwill earned by Big Pharma for its COVID-19 efforts. —Kevin McCauley