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Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's

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## **FINN PARTNERS BAGS DUBAI TRAVEL BIZ**

Finn Partners has landed a \$200K one-year contract to increase the number of US and Canadian visitors to Dubai. The contract with Dubai Corp. for Tourism and Commerce Marketing went into effect Oct. 13 and is extendable for another two years.



The firm is to adopt a “strategic approach on leisure tourism PR and communications for the USA, as well as reactive approach in the Canadian market as it pertains to media inquiries, aligned with Dubai Tourism’s Vision 2025 goals,” according to the pact.

It will maintain an “always-on” press office, organize two-to-three group fam trips of four or five journalists and develop targeted messages. The audiences are mid-to-affluent couples & friends, families with children 8 to 17 years of age, “stopovers” (religious and seniors) and ethnic groups (African-American/Canadian, Hispanic- American/Canadian, Asian-American/Canadian, South East Asian-American/Canadian).

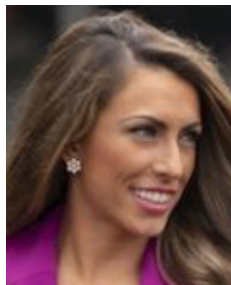
Virginia Sheridan, managing partner of North America travel leads Finn Partners’ eight-member team that reports to Issam Kazim (CEO of DCT&CM).

She is to be made available to the client, “when reasonably required, to assess the provision of the services and agree on best practices for the future application of the services” at no extra cost, according to the contract.

Finn Partners ranks No. 4 on O’Dwyer’s list of independent PR firms with fees of \$119.3M in 2019.

## **TRUMP’S COMMS DIRECTOR JUMPS SHIP**

Alyssa Farah, Donald Trump’s 31-year-old communications director, has called it quits. She plans to launch a PR firm focused on corporate and defense issues.



**Alyssa Farah**

Farah served as press secretary to VP Pence and press secretary at the Dept. of Defense before taking on the White House post in April.

*The Washington Post* noted that Farah is the only person to hold those three jobs in an administration and was the youngest press secretary at the DOD.

Her exit “amounts to a tacit acknowledgment that — despite his baseless and dangerous claims to the contrary — Trump lost the 2020 election, and much of his team is now pondering their post-White House future,” noted the Post.

In her resignation letter, Farah wrote that serving Team Trump was “an honor of a lifetime.”

## **PRINCE GEORGE’S CO. NEEDS COVID-19 PR**

Maryland’s Prince George’s County wants to hire a strategic communications firm with crisis PR experience to develop, execute and implement a COVID-19 messaging campaign.

The County has registered more than 41K confirmed COVID-19 cases and 917 deaths, according to the [Prince George’s COVID dashboard](#).

The desired firm will assess Prince George’s communications infrastructure to determine strengths and weaknesses of current messaging protocol, according to the RFP. It will then make recommendations for improvement in operations and/or systems.

It will forecast common scenarios and outcomes, identify potential risks associated with the PR effort, create “a hierarchy of information-sharing,” and sketch out responses to questions raised on social media during interviews and in press conferences.

The County plans to work with the firm through 2020 with an option to renew the relationship for another six months.

Responses are due Dec. 11. They must be submitted electronically to the [SPEED e-procurement platform](#).

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



## **ECUADOR ENLISTS GPG FOR PR SUPPORT**

Glover Park Group handles PR and media outreach to Ecuador’s Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investments and Fisheries as the South American nation takes heat for illegal fishing, largely by Chinese trawlers, in its waters which threatens endangered species and the marine ecosystem.

The WPP unit is working as a subcontractor to Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer, which has a \$900K advocacy and outreach contract with the Ministry and Ecuador’s DC embassy. A&P attorneys Raul Herrera and Tom Shannon are handling that push.

*The Economist* reported Nov. 21 that though Ecuador portrays itself as a victim of “illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing by Chinese trawlers near the Galapagos islands,” its vessels have also operated in protected areas, hauling up endangered species like sharks and sea turtles as by-catch.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has accused Ecuador’s fishing companies of violating international conservation agreements.

The EU, the No. 1 buyer of the country’s tuna, has threatened to cut off market access unless Ecuador curbs the illegal fishing activity.

Glover Park Group managing director Brett O’Brien and director Melissa Childs are working the Ecuadorean business.



## CURRENT GLOBAL PROMOTES ACCESSIBILITY

Current Global has launched its “Accessible by Design” initiative, ensuring that all content and campaigns will be designed to be inclusive of people of all abilities, such as those with sight, hearing, speech and cognitive impairments.



Current has developed a comprehensive set of guidelines and an accessibility toolkit, which has been rolled out to its global team. In 2021, the agency also plans to offer clients an “Accessible by Design” audit to determine the level of accessibility in an organization’s communication efforts and help them chart a path toward increased inclusion.

“Every day in our industry content is published that’s inaccessible to many, but it doesn’t have to be this way,” said Current Global co-CEO George Coleman. “Not only do we have a moral duty to change this, it makes clear commercial sense for our clients.”

## ATLANTA NEEDS WATER CONSERVATION PR

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District in Atlanta seeks a firm to handle messaging for its Clean Water Campaign and My Drop Counts conservation push.

The District serves 5M people in the 15-county region. It is looking for a partner to handle PR, social media marketing, video production, K-12 educational programming and measurement.

In addition to the clean water and conservation efforts, the District wants to maintain its effort to promote the Atlanta region’s water stewardship and an understanding of Georgia’s water story and history. It also wants to add virtual offerings to its communications push to remain relevant during the age of COVID-19.

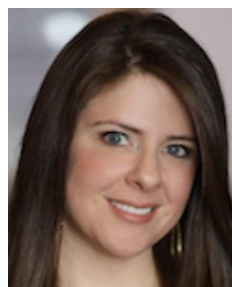
Responses are due Dec. 14. Send a digital PDF to Sarah Skinner at [sskinner@atlantaregional.org](mailto:sskinner@atlantaregional.org) and a hard copy with tracking number to: Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District; ATTN: Sarah Skinner; 229 Peachtree Street, NE; Suite 1000; Atlanta, GA 30303

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

## N6A PROMOTES MANCINELLI TO CEO

Daniela Mancinelli has been promoted to chief executive officer of North 6th Agency, effective January 2021. Mancinelli has served as chief operating officer since 2018.

She succeeds N6A founder Matt Rizzetta, who has been CEO since the firm launched in 2010, and will work alongside him to transition into her new role.



**Daniela Mancinelli**

Rizzetta will remain with the agency as executive chairman, supporting N6A on strategic opportunities and M&A. He will also focus on investments and community initiatives through North Sixth Group, a family office holding company that owns a controlling interest in N6A.

With Mancinelli as COO, N6A says it has seen average annual revenue growth of more than 25 percent.

John Hannaway, who joined the firm in 2015 and most recently served as chief of staff, will take over for Mancinelli in the COO position.

## ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

[FischTank PR](#) drives communications efforts for **SunHydrogen**, the developer of a technology to produce renewable hydrogen using sunlight and water. FischTank will work with the company to activate its Twitter and Facebook pages, utilizing both to serve as resources for renewable hydrogen and broader renewable energy news and information, as well as for sharing corporate announcements and materials. The agency will also focus on increasing SunHydrogen’s shareholder communications via press release and newsletter distribution.



[French/West/Vaughan](#) scoops up **Moravian Bake Shop** to promote the bakery’s grand opening in Winston-Salem, NC. As well as launching the new bakery, Moravian Bake Shop is opening two pop-up store locations for the holiday season. FWV will work to increase awareness of the brand, its history, products and retail locations as the company aims to lay the groundwork for expansion. FWV has kicked off its work on the account, with a focus on local media relations surrounding the pop-ups and launching the brand’s social media presence. The agency will also support the brand’s influencer marketing.

[EVINS Communications](#) wins **Bomber Ski**. In addition to leading media and public relations efforts for the company, EVINS is tasked with handling its social media initiatives. Bomber’s products are sold in the US, across Europe and online. The company says its products, which are individually handcrafted at a boutique factory outside Cossato, Italy, offer “an unrivaled devotion to handcrafted ski perfection.” Bomber joins EVINS’ portfolio of luxury lifestyle clients, which includes DUXIANA, Jet Linx Aviation and Selective Search.

[Trevelino/Keller](#) has added **Phytest**, a laboratory revenue cycle management partner, and **PRTCL**, a line of nutritional supplements created for women, to its client roster. The agency will support Phytest as it builds awareness and launches an updated website, highlighting new revenue cycle management services for laboratories. For PRTCL, Trevelino/Keller will work on the launch of the company’s collection of sports nutrition products.

[Vested](#) has been enlisted to support communications efforts for **EquiLend**, a provider of trading, post-trade, market data, clearing and regulatory services for the securities finance industry. Vested will work to raise EquiLend’s visibility globally through a robust media relations program which includes securing key placements across business and trade outlets. The agency will also conduct media, presentation and public speaking training to executives across EquiLend’s leadership, sales and product teams.



[Magrino](#) is representing **SelvaRey Rum**, a premium spirit brand co-owned by Seth and Marc Gold, Robert Herzig and recording artist Bruno Mars. Magrino will develop and support the campaign with media strategy and consultation on the brand’s social media and influencer initiatives. SelvaRey Rum has also unveiled new packaging and a global brand strategy to align with Mars’ vision of “Tropical Luxury, Wherever You Are.” Originally launched in 2014, SelvaRey is distilled on an estate in the jungles of Panama from sugarcane harvested onsite.

## EARNED + OWNED MEDIA LIFT TECH PR

To understand if owned media should be part of your PR efforts, answer the following question: Does the media cover every pitch, news release and positive story from your company or client?



Lou Hoffman

Even the glamour tech giants—think an Intel, an Amazon and the like—can't say yes to this question. Everyone wants greater media attention. Owned media—specifically, corporate blogging—offers a way to accentuate your earned media efforts and more.

For those who might be thinking that blogging's time has come and gone—or to borrow from the French: “blogging, it's so passé”—some historical context is in order.

### ***BusinessWeek* cover story**

Corporate blogging began to gain traction shortly after the dot-com meltdown 20 years ago. A 2005 *BusinessWeek* (no Bloomberg yet, still owned by McGraw Hill) cover story proclaimed, “Blogs Will Change Your Business.” The story couldn't have been clearer about the stakes with this onerous passage: “Look past the yakkers, hobbyists and political mobs. Your customers and rivals are figuring blogs out. Our advice: Catch up ... or catch you later.”

Still, tech companies perceived corporate blogging as a platform for fluff. Introducing a vegan option in the company cafeteria? Throw it up on the blog. The finance department uses Rubik's cubes as a team-building exercise. Write it up for the blog.

That changed in 2010 when [Google announced on its corporate blog](#) the decision to exit from the China market. Here was Google, one of the most influential companies in the tech sector, communicating a piece of news that would forever change its trajectory, and they chose a blog post. Not at a press event. Not in a news release. The action gave street cred to corporate blogging.

Yet, it wasn't that much later the media reported that companies were throwing in the towel on corporate blogging. A 2012 USA Today headline flatly stated: “More Companies Quit Blogging, Go with Facebook Instead.” Huh?

This is the danger of assigning headline writing to interns. Still, the intern didn't come up with the ludicrous premise that Facebook has replaced blogging as the new shiny thing for directly communicating with the outside world.

Fast forward to today, progressive PR teams—consultancy as well as in-house—are investing in owned media in a way that it becomes intertwined with traditional PR tactics. That's how you gain synergy and boost earned media.

Debating whether to call it blogging, in-house publishing or a derivative misses the point. Sending quality information—defining quality as educational, insightful, amusing or a combination—to your target audiences never goes out of style. I'm going to continue using the term “blogging” as a catch-all for any form of online publishing controlled by the company.

### **How does owned media increase earned media?**

Today's journalists view corporate blogs as a credible source to supplement and even drive their stories.

For proof of this game-changing dynamic, plug the phrase [said in a blog post] into the Google news engine. Conducting this search on Oct. 21 at 10:22 a.m. brought up TechCrunch, the *New York Times*, the *New York Post* and the *Washington Post* with stories that tapped blog posts from Vitable Health,

Google, Amazon and Microsoft.

The same search on the tech-focused publication, *The Verge*, again pulls up stories which leverage blog posts ranging from Starbucks to Western Digital, a B2B tech company that toils outside the bright lights.

How do you capitalize on this dynamic? How does your company/client become a virtual source with the objective of generating incremental media coverage?

The answer lies in thought leadership, the de rigueur linchpin for tech PR as the Internet continues to commoditize news announcements on products. Write blog posts that deliver fresh perspectives on industry issues, ideally those that already have a high profile in the media. This way, you can reach out to relevant journalists with a pointer to the blog post as they continue to explore the issue.

For example, we support Nokia's B2B business. In the early days of the pandemic when the Internet experienced a spike of usage, Nokia published several blog posts that quantified the amount of extra usage as well as provided a perspective on how the Internet was holding up and even the likelihood of “breaking.” This owned media morphed into earned media in *Wired*, Bloomberg and the list goes on.

Furthermore, by optimizing each post with on-page SEO, you increase the likelihood that journalists you didn't pitch will discover the post through their own online searches. You can find the perfect proof point in a story from *The Street* (May 26, 2018) on Tesla CEO Elon Musk's tweets damaging the company's reputation on Wall Street. Dive into the copy and you'll come across my commentary thanks to a blog post.

### **The qualities of a valuable source still apply**

Stepping back for a moment, consider what prompts a journalist to perceive a source as valuable. The source delivers a fresh point of view, often running counter to the conventional way of thinking. The source pushes the discourse into unexpected terrain. The source helps the journalist to view the issue in a different light.

The same high bar applies to owned media and publishing thought leadership posts. Unfortunately, many—especially those from B2B tech companies—treat corporate blogs like a sales channel with self-promotion trumping critical thinking. These same companies end up baffled that no one, much less journalists, pay attention to their content.

But if you do it right, beyond generating incremental media coverage, you're cultivating a digital pulpit that allows you to directly counter inaccurate information and even fight back if the situation calls for it. Which brings us back to Google.

In response to the Department of Justice filing an anti-trust lawsuit against Google in October, the company didn't distribute a news release or send out executives on a charm offensive. No doubt you've already jumped to the punch line. Google published a blog post headlined “[A Deeply Flawed Lawsuit That Would Do Nothing to Help Consumers](#),” outlining dot-connecting logic on why the DOJ is off base.

Here we are 10 years since Google communicated plans to exit China on its blog, and the company is using the same playbook. Did it work? While it's too early to know how the antitrust lawsuit will play out, the blog post has definitely inserted Google's voice into media stories.

Yet, you don't need to be of Google stature to parlay owned media into earned media. Just think like a journalist.

Lou Hoffman is CEO of the [Hoffman Agency](#), a tech-focused consultancy specializing in global campaigns. The firm operates offices in Asia, Europe and the U.S.

## **SEC CALLS OUT CHEESECAKE FACTORY**

The Securities and Exchange Commission has charged The Cheesecake Factory, which trades on the NASDAQ, with issuing material misstatements in its March 23 and April 2 press releases regarding the impact of COVID-19 on its business.



The March 23 release, which was distributed by Berk Communications, said Cheesecake was transitioning to an “off-premise model” (i.e., to-go and delivery) that was “enabling the company’s restaurants to operate sustainably at present under this current model.”

The SEC’s Dec. 4 [cease and desist](#) notice says by March 23, Cheesecake told potential investors that it had cash to support approximately 16 weeks of operations under the prevailing circumstances. Internal documents showed that Cheesecake was experiencing a negative cash flow rate of \$6 million per week.

The April 2 sales update press release again said, “the restaurants are operating sustainably at present under this [off-premise] model.”

The company has agreed to settle the SEC charges without admitting or denying any guilt and pay a fine of \$125K.

## **PRECISION RECRUITS NYT ALUM WYATT**

Ed Wyatt, a 20-year reporter for the *New York Times*, has joined DC-based Precision Strategies as director of communications. Most recently, Wyatt was communications director at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and senior VP at Sphere Consulting.



**Ed Wyatt**

At the NYT, Wyatt covered news from the worlds of business, finance, technology, politics, regulatory agencies, book publishing and Hollywood.

Wyatt’s “decades of experience as a reporter and strategist will elevate Precision’s ability to distill complex stories

into impactful campaigns and narratives for our clients,” said Precision co-founder Stephanie Cutter, who was deputy campaign manager for president Obama’s 2012 re-election bid and chief of staff for First Lady Michelle Obama.

Jen O’Malley Dillon, Joe Biden’s presidential campaign manager and designated White House deputy chief of staff, and Teddy Goff, digital director for Obama 2012, are Precision’s other co-founders.

## **NOOM HIRES FRANE AS VP-COMMUNICATIONS**

Noom, digital health company, has hired Emma Frane as VP of communications. Frane joins Noom from e-commerce company Casper, where she served as senior director, communications, overseeing both communications and PR. She was previously communications director at Kate Spade & Company and has also been an account supervisor at Edelman.



**Emma Frane**

Noom’s platform incorporates technology, data and human coaches to help users meet such health and wellness goals as weight management, diabetes management and stress reduction.

## **DOING MORE WITH LESS**

Not only do marketing professionals say they are doing more with less these days, they are also trying to do that on a playing field where the goalposts keep moving, according to a new survey released by technology and business research company The Analyst Syndicate and events company SINC.

Perhaps the biggest of the challenges that the 150 marketing pros surveyed face is the degree to which budgets overall are shrinking. On average, those budgets were down by 42 percent for the second half of 2020. Only two respondents said that their marketing budgets had gone down by less than 20 percent, and 119 said that their budgets had shrunk by 40 percent or more.

Few of those surveyed think that marketing budgets are going to recover any time soon, either. Only 13 respondents said that they expected budgets to start bounding back by the end of 2020, while 105 think it will take most of 2021, or even beyond, before any rebound is felt.

The move from live events to virtual ones is affecting how marketers are willing to allocate the budgets that remain. Only three respondents said that dinners and live roundtables are a priority in their budgets, with just 14 saying that trade-shows and conferences were a major focus. On the other side, 29 say they are prioritizing such digital assets as white papers or research, and 57 named digital marketing as the primary way they are spending their marketing dollars.

The study also does some speculating about when the effects of COVID may subside, bringing things back to a semblance of normality. That estimate provides for a one- to three-year wait for “pandemic freedom,” followed by a two- to four-year period of “budget recovery.”

But the study authors stress that just waiting things out is not the way to go. Incorporating the current uncertainty into budget requests and modifying those requests around new ideas and experimentation are two strategies they say could help marketers move into the best possible position as the business environment keeps on changing.

To see the full report, [click here](#).



## **WELLS FARGO VET MOLDAFSKY TO NIELSEN**

Jamie Moldafsky, who exited Wells Fargo in September as chief marketing officer, has joined Nielsen Holdings, the measurement and data analytics giant, as chief marketing and communications officer.

During her nine years at the west coast bank, Moldafsky handled global brand strategy, product marketing, media relations, research, events and sponsorships.

Earlier, she held key positions at American Express (VP-marketing), Charles Schwab (senior VP-marketing) and Whirlpool (GM-KitchenAid).

David Kenney, CEO of Nielsen, experts Moldafsky’s ability to “apply best in class marketing solutions, engage in thought leadership and deploy successful strategies for reputation management” will help the company accelerate partnerships within the industry.



**Jamie Moldafsky**

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM BIDEN IN TECH

Technology and its impact on all aspects of society will be a key priority for the new Biden Administration and the Congress. To begin, FCC Chairman Pai announced that he will leave the agency on January 20. The move will leave the FCC with a 2-1 Democratic majority on Inauguration Day unless Nathan Simington, whose confirmation is currently awaiting a Senate floor vote, is approved. Restoring the eliminated net neutrality rules, that prevented telecommunications companies from blocking or slowing internet traffic, will be a high priority for the Biden Administration. Those efforts are not likely to include attempts to regulate pricing.



**Michael Kempner**

We expect the new Administration to take a comprehensive look at the tech industry to make sure companies are acting responsibly, which will likely mean increased regulation. There is bipartisan agreement that regulations for big tech and a thorough review of federal privacy laws are needed.

President-elect Biden will favor stricter privacy rules and tougher controls on online misinformation. FCC Chairman Pai has said he will advance the Section 230 rulemaking, which removes liability protections for social media companies over the content they choose to host or decide not to host. Pai would need to work quickly to put something in place before he leaves on Inauguration Day.

We can expect the new Administration to immediately work to invalidate any rules that remove those protections. In Congress, House Energy and Commerce consumer protection subcommittee chair Jan Schakowsky announced that she will be introducing legislation to hold online platforms accountable for violations of their own terms of service in January. Additionally, the Senate Judiciary Committee is marking up legislation tomorrow that would limit platforms' abilities to edit posts and keep their immunity.

Addressing the digital divide, especially in light of COVID-19, will also be a high priority for Congress and the new Administration. President-elect Biden wants to extend broadband internet service to low-income and rural households. They also plan to expand investments in telemedicine and digital health. A bipartisan, bicameral group of policymakers has released a proposal for the next round of COVID-19 relief that included \$10 billion for broadband connectivity. The two top candidates to lead the FCC both want to ensure internet access for all and have called for larger subsidies to expand broadband access. A Biden Administration also plans to increase federal support for municipal broadband. The FCC will continue to work to allocate more frequencies for 5G use.

We expect the new Administration to work with industry to encourage innovation by strengthening public-private partnerships and making substantial investments in infrastructure. Innovation policy will likely focus more on addressing social policy goals.

Major immigration changes are expected with reforms to the H-1B visas system that will minimize restrictions, expand the number of available visas, and remove the limitations on the number of green cards the government issues yearly. Increased funding for federal research will also be a high priority. President-elect Biden has proposed a \$300 billion R&D investment program that would cover everything from

electric vehicle technology to lightweight materials to 5G and artificial intelligence.

The new Administration is expected to continue efforts to crack down against Chinese tech firms that pose a national security threat, but using a multilateral approach that would engage our European allies. President-elect Biden also plans to focus on addressing the lack of diversity in the technology industry workforce along with the biases that appear in AI systems.

Other areas where we anticipate the new Administration to be active include supporting Congress' efforts to reshape antitrust law, which governs how companies operate and compete. The Biden Administration is likely to pursue the DOJ antitrust suit against Google and possibly introduce more cases against Facebook and even Amazon and Apple for potential antitrust violations. Wireless company mergers will likely see more scrutiny, and the FCC could revisit the issue of barring broadband providers from exempting their own entertainment or media offerings from data caps. Additionally, we can expect the new Administration to look at worker reclassification and protections as they relate to the use of independent contractors by tech companies. As broadband expands, they will also look at improving collective bargaining agreements for contract workers and unions.

*Michael Kempner is founder and CEO of MWWRP.*

## ON THE MOVE

**Hill+Knowlton Strategies** puts senior VP **Will Stewart** in charge of the national public affairs + advocacy offering in Canada. Stewart, who joined H+K in March, previously held executive posts at several Canadian cannabis startups, including Tokyo Smoke, Harvest One Cannabis and CannaGlobal. From 2005 to 2018, he was managing principal at Toronto-based public strategy and communications firm Navigator.

**Penske Media Corp.** appoints **Brooke Jaffe** head of public affairs and communications, based in the company's Los Angeles office. Jaffe has been with PMC as a contributing editor since December 2019. She was previously women's fashion director at Bloomingdale's, where she also served as a company spokesperson. In her new post, Jaffe will direct corporate messaging, media communications, issue management, corporate responsibility, information dissemination and communications strategy across PMC's roster of brands.



**Brooke Jaffe**

Digital marketing agency **Response Media** brings on **Martin Fleischmann** as its first chief client officer. Fleischmann comes to Response from management consultancy Ascension Growth + Innovation Strategies where he served as partner, strategic marketing. At Response, Fleischmann will lead the client account teams' sales creation services for existing major brand clients, and recruit more brands looking to improve their customer acquisition results.

**AxiCom** (part of the BCW group) has brought on **Steve Kerns** as executive vice president and managing director of North America, a newly created position. Kerns was most recently general manager and senior vice president of WE Communications San Francisco. He previously held executive positions at Text100, Edelman and Fleishman-Hillard. At AxiCom, Kerns will focus on the agency's growth in North America as well as working to enhance client services.

## COMMENTARY

**Of the many bad days of the Trump administration, Dec. 2 stands out.** On that day, the US recorded a record 2,804 COVID-19 deaths, and hospitalizations topped the 100K mark for the first time.

As the nation reeled from COVID-19, the master of self-pity wandered aimlessly through his alternate reality. He recorded a 46-minute lie-jammed video in which he recounted every conspiracy theory and crackpot idea about why he lost the election by more than seven million voters.

Meanwhile, doctors across the nation battled a growing skepticism about the danger posed by the virus, which hampers their valiant efforts to contain the pandemic.

That doubt about COVID-19 is the crowning achievement of the president's term in office.

From the beginning, he positioned COVID-19 as "fake news" and something that would mysteriously just disappear.

He cast doubt on the merits of wearing a mask, ridiculed the counsel of scientists on his coronavirus task force and participated in campaign rallies that put the lives of members of the audience at risk just to satisfy his craving for attention.

In the fact-based world of Dec. 2, Dr. Robert Redfield, head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, warned that the nation's public health system is on the brink of collapse due to the strain of COVID-19.

Back to Trump fantasyland, the president whined that going through the Mueller investigation was like "living in hell." Poor Donald.

Until the widespread availability of the COVID-19 vaccine, we will all be living in hell thanks to the botched handling of the virus and the ensuing spread of misinformation about the pandemic by Trump.

There are still 44 days left for him to create more havoc.

**As off-the-wall White House science advisor Scott Atlas sails into the sunset,** Trump's position as his administration's No. 1 purveyor of disinformation is safe.

Atlas, a neuroradiologist without any training in infectious diseases, blasted the need for masks and lockdowns as ways to stop the spread the COVID-19. He also dismissed the testing of asymptomatic people.

He was rebuked by Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease specialist, and Deborah Brix, coordinator of the White House coronavirus task force.

Stanford University, where Atlas holds a post at its Hoover Institution think tank, issued a statement that his views "are inconsistent with the university's approach in response to the pandemic."

That didn't stop Atlas.

In his Dec. 1 resignation letter, he stayed true to his misinformation ways, writing: "I always relied on the latest science and evidence, without political considerations or influence."

He noted that while some disagreed with his recommendations, "It is the free exchange of ideas that lead to scientific truths, which are the foundations of any civilized society."

Humbled by COVID-19, the US heartily agrees that it is vital to safeguard science in order to beat the pandemic. That is why we are so happy to see Atlas hit the road.

As Atlas mercifully fades from public consciousness, Trump reigns supreme in the misinformation game.

[The Cornell Alliance for Science](#) found media mentions of Trump regarding COVID-19 made up by far the largest share of the misinformation market. Trump mentions comprised 37.9 percent of the misinformation conversation from Jan. 1 to May 26.

**What a breath of fresh air.** More than 40 companies have pledged to work with President Biden and Congress to "enact ambitious, durable, bipartisan climate solutions."

General Motors, Dow, Walmart, Ford Motor, Carrier Corp., Dupont, Goldman Sachs, Unilever, Citicorp and Edison International are among the companies that signed a Dec. 2 letter sent to the Biden transition team in support of climate action.

While Trump yanked the US out of the Paris Agreement, a significant chunk of Corporate America wants back into the climate club.

The corporations aren't starry-eyed tree-huggers. They say environmental progress requires strong sustained leadership from Washington that harnesses market forces, mobilizes investment and innovation, and provides the certainty needed to plan for the long term.

Kudos to the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions for organizing the letter. It now has the responsibility to help put those corporate words into action.

**Swag-less Christmas season.** The first "Season Without Swag" campaign raised more than \$340K in donations earmarked for nonprofit groups from advertising, marketing and media companies. Social impact platform Grisly organized the seven-week push, which wrapped up Dec. 1.

It asked companies to redirect holiday gift budgets to nonprofits and causes in need. An estimated \$25B is spent in North America for promotional swag.

Hearst Magazines, Fox, Yelp and TiVo were among the dozens of companies to ditch swag in favor of donations to groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Feeding America, American Red Cross, Empty Stocking Fund, UNICEF and American Cancer Society.

The Season Without Swag fell short of its \$1M goal. It will do better next year in post-pandemic America.

**Bah, Humbug...** Thirty-five percent of working Americans want to can office Christmas parties this year, according to Piplsay research organization.

Those attending a holiday gathering, promise to wear a mask as much as possible (26 percent) and to maintain social distance (25 percent).

About four in ten (39 percent) of Americans plan to spend Christmas only with members of their immediate family. New Year's Eve doesn't look too festive either, as 61 percent plan to spend the night at home.

Happy COVID-19 Holidays!

—Kevin McCauley

