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# O'Dwyer's

The Inside News of Public Relations  
& Marketing Communications [odwyerpr.com](http://odwyerpr.com)

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## MWW GROUP SETTLES PPP CASE

[MWW Group](#) has settled a federal suit alleging that it violated the False Claims Act by taking a second loan of \$2M from the Paycheck Protection Program to which it was not entitled because it was registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.



The PR firm said its former CFO was unaware that a 2021 change in the law made it ineligible for the second loan.

It also notes that due to the ambiguity of the FARA statute, it is in question whether MWW was

actually required to file the FARA report during these periods and if it was, in fact, ineligible for the loan.

MWW said it voluntarily agreed to reimburse the Small Business Administration the equivalent of the loan to avoid any appearance of impropriety whatsoever. The firm's insurance carrier will pay a chunk of that outlay.

Under the settlement MWW will pay the US \$2.29M, plus interest. A whistleblower, unaffiliated with MWW or the government, will receive \$229K as part of the US recovery.

The Justice Dept. noted that MWW fully cooperated with its investigation and the resolution of the matter.

Congress created the PPP in March 2020 as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

## ONTARIO'S ELECTRICITY PROVIDER NEEDS PR

The Independent Electricity System Operator, which provides electrical power to Ontario's 14.8M people, seeks a partner to handle its corporate communications.



Based in Toronto, IESO engages with customers, employees, media, elected officials, trade & business associations, indigenous communities and the general public.

The hired firm will handle strategic communications planning & execution; media outreach; spokesperson training; content development; research; and event planning, management and facilitation.

Proposals are due December 15 at the [merx electronic portal](#).

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

## O'DWYER'S TO DEBUT RANKING OF PA FIRMS

O'Dwyer's 2024 rankings of the [top PR firms by net fee income](#) based on 2023 data will feature a new separate ranking for agencies specializing in public affairs, which O'Dwyer's defines as work done for a client to affect legislation on either the federal, state or local level.

Previously, public affairs fees was combined with the "environmental/sustainability" specialty ranking.

"We're answering the call of many firms interested in showcasing their increasing volume of public affairs counseling across multiple client sectors," publisher John O'Dwyer said.

Show your expertise in areas such as [healthcare](#), [technology](#), [finance](#), [environmental](#), [professional services](#) and [purpose/CSR](#), to name a few of the now 21 specialties tracked. Only O'Dwyer's does such rankings, which are usually at or near the top in Google searches for those specialties.

Rankings are also tabulated by 15 cities and regions, including [New York](#), [San Francisco](#), [Chicago](#) and [Washington, D.C.](#) Regional rankings showcase firms in the [west](#), [south-east](#) and [midwest](#).

A total of 148 firms took part in last year's rankings.

### Rankings Rules

PR firms have distinctive financials—at least half of income is used for staff pay. Therefore, O'Dwyer's requires the top page of the latest corporate income tax return and W-3 to verify legitimate PR firms rather than ad agencies or other types of businesses. The ranking measures counseling and media contact services, not advertising or production expenses.

"Even if the tax return is on a cash basis and financials on accrual, we like to see the return as an added check that a CPA has been used," O'Dwyer stressed.

Net fee income by location and specialties should have been accumulated all year, by month and presented to a CPA.

The CPA firm should have minimal work to do, just a top-side review. Ranking instructions disclaim responsibility for the numbers by the CPA firm.

"PR firms looking to reach out to prospects who visit O'Dwyer's website every day to research outside PR counsel should consider joining the rankings," O'Dwyer said.

Deadline to submit is Mon., Mar. 11, 2024.

[Rank Your Firm with O'Dwyer's—Instructions \(PDF\)](#)



## **LLYC CUTS TIES WITH ALLEGED CUBAN SPY**

LLYC has cut ties with Manuel Rocha, the 73-year-old former American diplomat who has been charged with spying for Cuba.



**Manuel Rocha**

He had been working as a senior international business advisor at LLYC at the time of his Dec. 4 arrest but is no longer associated with the firm according to a statement from LLYC.

Rocha joined LLYC in September of this year. LLYC noted that he served as a senior advisor, not at the executive level, focusing on business development matters.

Though the allegations against Rocha are unrelated to his involvement with the firm, LLYC “will collaborate fully with the authorities if required, providing any information deemed necessary.”

Rocha served as US ambassador to Bolivia from 2000 to 2002 and worked in the US interests section in Cuba during the 1990s. He also held posts in the Dominican Republic, Italy, Argentina, Mexico and Argentina.

The US is LLYC’s No. 3 market, trailing Spain and Mexico.

## **EDELMAN HANDLES COP28 MEDIA FOR MASDAR**

Edelman has picked up an additional \$500K worth of work to provide COP28 press office support for Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company-Masdar.



**MASDAR**

Masdar bills itself as the United Arab Emirates’ global clean energy powerhouse across renewables and green hydrogen.

Edelman’s 25-day agreement calls for a dozen staffers stationed at the Dubai COP28 site and an additional 13 employees across the firm’s network working on a “follow the sun” basis. The climate conference began Nov. 30 and ends Dec. 12.

Sultan Al Jaber, who chairs Masdar and leads Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, presides over COP28.

In the three-month period leading up to COP28, Masdar worked with Teneo on communications counsel and strategy development. That so-called global CEO advisory hauled in \$1.6M for prepping Masdar for COP28.

## **TRAILRUNNER INTERNATIONAL ADDS BUSH**

Trailrunner International has recruited Amanda Bush, attorney and wife of former Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush, as managing director in its Austin office.



**Amanda Bush**

She co-founded Pine Cove Capital strategic advisory in July 2022 with her husband, the son of former Florida governor Jeb Bush.

Bush serves as of counsel at Austin law firm Jackson Walker, where since 2003 she has handed commercial litigation, intellectual property, media and First Amendment issues.

Jim Hughes, Trailrunner CEO, cited Bush’s “deep network and extensive experience in litigation that will help us continue to grow this core part of our business.”

## **NEWS OF FIRMS**

**BerlinRosen** Holdings, backed by O2 Investment Partners, makes an investment in content, data and analytics company Message Lab, as well as forming a partnership with the company and its founder and CEO Ben Worthen. The acquisition marks BerlinRosen’s sixth major investment in 18 months. Message Lab combines journalism, editorial experiences and content intelligence to help organizations forge meaningful relationships with their target audiences. It has worked with brands including Google, ServiceNow, SoftBank and the Gates Foundation.



**Kite Hill PR**, a woman-owned PR and B2B communications agency, opens applications for its 2024 Tech For Good program. Launched in March 2022, the program focuses on providing a chosen business with pro bono PR services and the fundamental building blocks necessary to deliver an effective earned PR program. The company is accepting applications from U.S. or UK-based technology startups of any category that are BIPOC/woman/LGBTQIA+-led and have closed a seed or Series A fundraising round. Qualifying companies can apply for the program via [the submission form on Kite Hill PR’s website](#) until Jan. 12 at 11:50 p.m. EST.

**Sensis**, a minority-owned marketing agency, unveils SensisConnect, a transportation marketing group. SensisConnect replaces Sharp & Company, a communications consultancy acquired by Sensis in February, which has expertise helping transportation organizations connect with their stakeholders and the public. The practice’s research-based approach is meant to develop community-tailored communications built on behavior change best practices, delivered across all digital and physical touchpoints.

### **M&C Saatchi Sport & Entertainment North America**

spins off its influencer marketing division into M&C Saatchi FABRIC, which will specialize in deploying community-forward, creator-powered and scalable campaigns that feature brands, celebrities and individual creators. The new unit will also offer social media strategy, strategic innovations and bespoke influencer marketing measurement and evaluation.



**DCI Group**, a Washington, DC-based PR and public affairs firm, opens a Florida office in Tallahassee. The new office will be led by Juan “J.C.” Flores, who was most recently a vice president in AT&T’s Latin American and EMEA external affairs office. Flores has also worked as an operative in the Florida Republican party and a special assistant to then-Speaker of the Florida House Marco Rubio.

**Oaktree Solutions**, a public affairs strategy firm, takes an equity stake in Los Angeles-based **Artist International Group Holdings**, which specializes in identifying, funding, and developing consumer product and media enterprises in partnership with celebrity talent. AIGH president Eric Bland will continue his leadership role alongside CEO David Ungler, and will now also serve as managing director of Oaktree’s new Sports and Entertainment practice.

## **INCREMENTAL IS FUNDAMENTAL**

Many of us are in occupations where innovation and creativity are essential. But an unnecessary divide exists between the valuation of sweeping changes and incremental advances.



**Paul Oestreicher**

We should not need to choose—this isn't a case of mutual exclusivity. Of course, we need big ideas and bold moves. Sure, throw the bomb for a touchdown, swing for the fences. But small things, measured steps, can be important and inventive, too.

Upsides to any method or process cannot be guaranteed, of course. It's important to acknowledge that incrementalism can fail us or derail us, just as big ideas can. One of the most notable examples is the nearly hundred-year span from the signing of the Declaration of Independence to the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (and then another hundred to the 1964 Civil Rights Act). And while Lincoln deserves high praise for his role, we need to remember it took him a couple of decades to fully embrace freedom and citizenship for Black people.

Fortunately, his vast and open mind let in powerful, righteous voices like Frederick Douglass. It's notable that Douglass wanted rapid change with the "brave march of a storming party" but came to grips with the "slow progress of a cautious siege."

Modern political leaders seem to be catching on to incrementalism but for the wrong reasons. While they often campaign on platforms of big ideas, political rivalries, limited resources, and the complexity of most problems squeeze progress into watered-down initiatives.

Politicians are also helping to accelerate our ever-shrinking attention spans. Ideas are being crushed into attention-seeking social media posts. There is a lack of interest, will or ability to explain complex ideas and to inspire wider acceptance. Ideological pandering is replacing idea generation.

Preparation requires good communication, using messages that combine both rational and emotional elements. There are too many leaders, though, who get it terribly wrong. Deciding to make a change is often done without thought as to how the change will be communicated. They confuse change communication with checking off a couple of boxes.

John Kotter had it right in his book, "Leading Change." Condensing and paraphrasing some of his eight incremental steps, leaders need to establish the need for change, gather and empower advocates, articulate a vision for what awaits, communicate up and down the organization, define the roles people will have and the processes needed for future success, and demonstrate wins along the way.

It's great to have big ideas, it's OK to be impatient, we should embrace change. At the same time, we need to be thinking strategically and develop a plan about what needs to be accomplished, over what timeline, and with what resources. Civil rights activist Alice Wine had wise words: "Keep your eyes on the prize."

*Paul Oestreicher is a trusted advisor and mentor known for strategic communications, thought leadership development, crisis and reputation management, and third-party relationship building. You can follow him on Threads @pauloestreicher.*

## **BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF ED WANTS PR HELP**

The Bridgeport Board of Education is taking bids from firms experienced in serving public school districts that can provide PR, crisis communications and marketing support services.

Ranked as Connecticut's second largest school system, the Bridgeport School District serves about 20K students. It ranks lowest among the Nutmeg State's school systems on the economic scale.

The RFP's scope of work covers internal/external communications; risk assessment, mitigation & consultation services; reputation management; crisis training & response; social media; event planning; and program marketing to build enrollment.

The Board will engage the selected firm on an as-needed basis. It plans to offer a one-year contract, beginning on or about Jan. 15. There will be four one-year option years.

Proposals are due Dec. 14. Send the original, three copies and a flash drive to: Department of Public Purchases; City of Bridgeport; Margaret E. Morton Government Center; 999 Broad Street; Bridgeport, CT 06604

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



## **LONGACRE REPS PELTZ'S RUN AT DISNEY**

Longacre Square Partners handles Ancora Holdings, an investor in Walt Disney Co., as it urges fellow shareholders to urge the board to compromise with Nelson Peltz's Trian Fund Management. Peltz wants to shake up Disney's board by adding shareholder or investor-designated representatives to it.

In its "Fellow Shareholders" letter, Ancora says a board revamp is necessary "following an extended period of absentminded governance, ineffective succession planning, polarizing actions and sustained value destruction."

Ancora also attacked what it called a "self-serving publicity stunt" from Blackwells Capital, which has expressed concern that "Trian's campaign prioritizes Mr. Peltz's ego over what is best for all Disney shareholders."

Longacre Square Partners' Charlotte Kiaie and Olivia McCann handle Ancora, while Blackwells Capital uses Gagnier Communications' Dan Gagnier.



## **BRUNSWICK GROUP RECRUITS COOKE**

Brunswick Group has hired Steve Cooke, senior partner at Slaughter and May, London-based multinational law firm, as a partner. He will join the "critical issues" firm on May 1.

Cooke has been at S&M for more than 40 years and headed its mergers & acquisitions unit from 2001 to 2016.

He has handled clients such as ARM, Cadbury, Centrica, Diageo and British Airways/International Airlines Group.

Cooke has worked with Brunswick since it launched in London in 1987. In his new post, he will counsel clients on M&A, crisis, disputes and litigation.

Cooke is the author of "Takeovers," "The Morning of Our Lives," and "Journey Without Maps."



**Steve Cooke**

## **BPD ACQUIRES REVIVE**

Revive, which became part of Weber Shandwick in 2016, has been formally acquired by BPD, a health system marketing services company headquartered in Boca Raton, FL. The sale was first announced in October.

**revive**



BPD and Revive will continue to operate as independent brands in the market. Revive CEO Chris Bevolo will stay on as president of Revive, and the rest of the Revive leadership team will remain in place.

BPD, a portfolio company of WindRose Health Investors, provides services including market-opportunity sizing and analysis, marketing strategy, branding, talent acquisition and retention, service line differentiation, service line promotion, precision marketing and end-to-end data analytics to client roster that includes more than 250 hospitals.

“The combination of BPD and Revive will allow us to bring the most experienced and forward-thinking team in the industry to bear in helping brands reimagine their roles, reinvent their businesses and transform their impact on health in the U.S.,” said Bevolo.

## **SKDK ROLLS OUT 10/7 PROJECT**

New York’s SKDK is handling the 10/7 Project backed by five Jewish organizations as a centralized communications operation designed to promote continued US support for Israel and counter misinformation about the Israel/Hamas war.

**THE 10/7 PROJECT**

The 10/7 Project says it will ensure more “complete and accurate information” about the Israeli and Hamas war in real time for US policymakers and the American public.

American Jewish Committee, Jewish Federations of North America, ADL (the Anti-Defamation League), American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations set up the 10/7 Project.

The goal of the 10/7 Project is to be a timely source of trusted information and to combat false narratives perpetuated by Hamas terrorists who were responsible for the slaughter of 1,200 innocent Israeli civilians, added Deutch.

## **YUKON SEEKS TOURISM PR FIRM**

Canada’s Yukon territory wants to hire a firm to provide media, influencer and PR services to promote its tourism marketing plan.

Yukon, which has a population of 45K people, welcomed 490K visitors in pre-pandemic 2019.



The Department of Tourism and Culture’s marketing unit plans to issue a three-year contract, effective April 1. Historically, the Department has budgeted about \$11.5M for three-year outreach.

The selected firm will target the North American market with the possibility of overseas expansion.

It will be required to travel to Whitehorse, Yukon’s capital, no more than three times a year.

Responses are due Dec. 18 at Yukon’s [electronic portal](#). [Read the RFP \(PDF\)](#).

## **ON THE MOVE**

**Walker Sands** names **Andrew Cross** and **Dave Parro** as co-CEOs, succeeding outgoing CEO Mike Santoro, who will remain on the Walker Sands board of directors. Cross has been with the agency since 2011, most recently serving as president. As co-CEO, he manages the agency’s billable teams including creative, content, demand generation, strategy and insights, public relations and client services. Parro joined Walker Sands in 2012 and was most recently chief operating officer.



**Andrew Cross, Dave Parro**

He will continue to oversee the agency’s corporate functions including finance, talent, operations, IT and sales and marketing.

**Narrative Strategies** hires **Avery Monsees** as a director. Monsees was most recently senior advisor for public affairs at the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. She was previously press secretary for Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) and a legislative aide for the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. The agency has also brought on Jack Turman, who was previously a Capitol Hill producer and reporter for CBS News, as strategic communications manager, and Evelyn Humphrey, who most recently worked in the office of Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), as operations manager.

**The National Association of Realtors** appoints **Suzanne Bouhia** as chief marketing and communications officer, effective Dec. 11. Bouhia most recently served as chief communications officer for the Americas at EY. She previously led communications and marketing for two of EY’s US regions and was Americas internal communications and people engagement leader. Before that, Bouhia was national director of marketing and communications for Reznick Group, now CohnReznick. At NAR, she will lead the marketing and communications group to set its vision, strategy and long-term management approach for communications, branding and marketing.

**Fidelis Insurance Holdings Limited** appoints Miranda Hunter as head of investor relations. Hunter most recently served as head of investor relations at AXIS Capital Holdings Limited. She was previously VP of operations and strategic development at Aeolus Capital Management Ltd. and VP, head of investor relations at Validus Group. In her new role, Hunter will be responsible for leading Fidelis Insurance Group’s engagement with the investment community, reporting to Fidelis Insurance Group CEO Dan Burrows.

**HanesBrands** hires **Richard Mcleod** as VP, chief marketing officer for its Champion athletic apparel brand. Mcleod joins Champion from Canada Goose, where he was SVP of brand, responsible for brand evolution, growth and performance. He has also held senior marketing positions at Foot Locker, LVMH and Pernod Ricard. At Champion, Mcleod will be responsible for driving Champion’s global brand strategy and omni-channel brand positioning.



**Richard Mcleod**

## **EDELMAN TABS OGILVY'S AZZI FOR KSA SPOT**

Edelman is bringing on Elie Azzi as general manager for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, effective in January.



**Elie Azzi**

Azzi joins the firm from Ogilvy, where he served as head of public relations in Riyadh and before that in Beirut. He has also held senior positions with Havas and Porter Novelli. Azzi brings a track record in government advisory, leadership, and team building to the firm.

Edelman KSA has also hired Sarah Alarrak, who most recently worked at KSA's Ministry of Sport, to work on growing Edelman's

client base in KSA. Alarrak has also held positions at the G20 Saudi Secretariat, where she managed the woman and youth agenda; and the University of Chicago, based in Riyadh, developing the communications strategy for the KSA market.

## **YORKTOWN VOUCHES FOR UKRAINE NUKE BIZ**

Yorktown Solutions has been working to restore and maintain a positive image of the Ukrainian nuclear energy industry under a one-year \$960K agreement.

The firm has been raising awareness of the specific and evolving risks emanating from Russia's occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which is the largest nuke facility in Europe.



Reuters reported on Dec. 2 that Zaporizhzhia lost power after the last transmission line to Ukraine-controlled territory was disrupted, but the connection was repaired.

Yorktown is working under an agreement with the union that represents employees at Energoatom, the Ukrainian government entity that oversees nuclear facilities.

Daniel Vajdich, Yorktown's president, has worked on the presidential campaigns of Republicans Ted Cruz, Scott Walker and Mitt Romney.

## **VERIZON RECRUITS PELOTON, TWITTER ALUM**

Verizon snags Peloton Interactive chief marketing officer Leslie Berland as its new CMO, effective Jan. 9. Berland succeeds Diego Scotti, who left Verizon earlier this year.

Before joining Peloton in January, Berland was CMO at Twitter from 2016 to 2022, also serving as chief people officer from 2017 to 2021. She previously served as EVP of global advertising, marketing and digital partnerships at American Express.



**Leslie Berland**

At Verizon, Berland will lead all aspects of the company's global brand and marketing strategy, including marketing activation and creative, marketing effectiveness, consumer insights, media and strategic partnerships.

"She brings a combination of creativity and business acumen that will help steer and scale our marketing strategy while capitaliz-

ing on our next phase of growth," said Verizon chairman and CEO Hans Vestberg.

## **TEXAS TOURISM TARGETS CANADA**

Texas plans to hire a firm to provide tourism PR and marketing services in Canada.

"The campaign shall create a responsible, accurate and positive image of Texas, while effectively marketing and promoting the state as a premier travel destination in Canada," according to the RFP.



The selected firm will monitor editorial calendars of Canadian media outlets and proactively pitch story ideas via phone, email or in-person meetings.

Texas requires that the winning firm has a physical office in Canada, preferably in Toronto.

It plans to issue a contract with a Jan. 12 start date through Aug. 31. There will be options to renew for up to three one-year periods.

Responses are due Dec. 15. They must be mailed to: Office of the Governor; Financial Services Division; Attention: Purchasing; P.O. Box 12878; Austin, Texas 78711-2878

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

## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

**Red Door Interactive** signs on to lead awareness efforts for **California Grown**, an organization launched in 2001 by a collection of farmers, ranchers and agricultural marketers as a way to harness the pride many Californians felt towards products grown in the state. The agency will support California Grown's campaign strategy, creative execution and paid media management, promoting 470 California-grown products.

**The Decker/Royal Agency** lands tour operator Unforgettable Travel and luxury small ship cruise company Cruise Croatia. Decker/Royal has signed on to provide strategic planning including message development, media relations and thought leadership for both clients. Decker/Royal's roster also includes US clients Lindblad Expeditions, Beaches Resorts and Holland America Line, as well as UK clients Tourism Fiji and Insight Vacations.

**Walt & Company** wins **Galorath**, which provides cost, scheduling, and should-cost estimation solutions and consulting services. The agency will operate as an extension of the Galorath marketing team, developing and implementing strategic communications to drive brand recognition, manage new service offering launches and ongoing company news announcements, and drive thought leadership and customer success initiatives.



**Kleber & Associates** lands Sauder Building Products, a division of Sauder Woodworking. K&A will manage public relations, content strategy, influencer engagement, social media and new product introductions, along with creating regional and national events for Sauder Cabinetry, which specializes in a range of built to order cabinetry for the residential and commercial building industry.

**The Devon Group** picks up **ETC**, part of the Arc Network, a B2B events, data and media organization. The agency will support ETC as it works to bring the HR Technology Conference & Exposition, scheduled for April 24-26, 2024 at the Bellagio in Las Vegas; and the HR Technology Conference Europe, which will be held at RAI Amsterdam from May 2-3, 2024, to new audiences.

# COMMENTARY



**Sultan Al Jaber**

**We are shocked.** Sultan Al Jaber, who runs Abu Dhabi's national oil company when he is not presiding over COP28, said the phaseout of fossil fuels would require the world to go back to living in caves.

Al Jaber then denied the remark, which was caught on video during a November panel discussion called "She Changes Climate" that featured Ireland's former president

Mary Robinson, who is the Al Gore of the Emerald Isle.

How did Al Jaber wind up as the front man for COP28, which has turned out to be a Woodstock for oil and gas lobbyists?

One might guess that Majid Jafar, who heads the UAE's Crescent Petroleum, didn't want the gig.

He said: "Blaming the producers of oil and gas for climate change is like blaming farmers for obesity. It's our societal consumption that is the issue."

The handwriting was on the wall for Al Jaber last May. US Senators Elizabeth Warren, Richard Blumenthal, Peter Welch and Jeff Merkley joined more than 100 European politicians who urged United Nations secretary general Antonio Guterres to replace Al Jaber as head of the climate conference.

"The decision to name as president of COP28 the chief executive of one of the world's largest oil and gas companies—a company that has recently announced plans to add 7.6 billion barrels of oil to its production in the coming years, representing the fifth-largest increase in the world—risks undermining the negotiations," stated the letter.

The Union of Concerned Scientists has decried Big Oil's PR campaign to put the COP28 focus on emissions reductions rather than the phaseout of fossil fuels.

Kathy Mulvey, accountability director at the UoCS' climate & energy program, says the world needs a clear international commitment to a fast, fair and funded phaseout of fossil fuels.

That commitment may come at a future COP, assuming the conference survives Big Oil's hijacking of the mess in the desert.

**Blaming poor Old Joe...** Democrats are begging the White House to ditch the Bidenomics brand because it is a meaningless term for voters across the country. Its association with the 81-year-old president is another turn-off.

Only 32 percent of people approve of Biden's management of the economy, despite robust consumer spending, low unemployment, falling inflation and higher wages.

The White House press shop sees the president's problem as one of poor messaging—but Biden faces a bigger problem than lousy messaging.

The People's Policy Project think tank believes the roll-back of the COVID-19 welfare state is the reason people are bummed out about the economy.

That rollback eliminated free school meals, pared the nutrition assistance program, ended the \$300 monthly child

credit, suspended student loan payments, put evictions on hold, and booted 11M people off Medicaid.

And those 2020 and 2021 stimulus checks sure were popular. The government doled out \$800B in stimulus money in what has to be one of the most popular federal programs ever.

That's all gone and Biden unfairly gets the blame. Once he guided the US out of the recession, he set up his own downfall as the COVID welfare state came to an end.

People say they are cranky about the economy but what they are really moaning about is the loss of those sweet federal bailouts.

**"No matter the odds, or personal cost, we did the right thing,"** wrote ousted House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in his *Wall Street Journal* piece announcing that he is quitting Congress at the end of the year. Wrong!

Why wait, Kev? You lost any modicum of respect in Congress after shamefully groveling before the lunatic fringe of the Republican Party to win the prize of Speaker of the House.

And how did that turn out? Matt Gaetz and the gang threw you to the curb, after they made your life miserable each day of the nine months that you had the gavel.

*New York Times* columnist Michelle Cottle credits McCarthy for being a "top-notch schmoozer and formidable fund-raiser," which helped him climb up the political ladder.

And then she delivered this zinger: "The man's fundamental hollowness clung to him like poop on a shoe, prompting many of his more ideological compatriots to distrust him."

McCarthy became a toady for Donald Trump, who mockingly referred to him at "My Kevin."

Liz Cheney calls McCarthy "a pathetic figure" who always chose to do the wrong thing when doing the right thing could have made all the difference.

McCarthy is going back to California, where he plans to "recruit our country's best and brightest to run for elected office."

The exiting Congressman just doesn't get how politically toxic he really is. He'd have a much happier life opening up his old sandwich shop and shooting the breeze with customers.

**Telling it like it is.** Remember back in the early days of the Trump administration when the media were hesitant to call Donald Trump's lies for what they were, lies.

Well, that has certainly changed as the media are full of stories about Trump's plan to become a dictator and unleash the Justice Dept. in pursuit of his perceived enemies.

National treasure Dan Rather is cheering the media on. He believes America doesn't want what Trump is promising.

"The more America understands the possibility of that grim prospect, the less of a chance that we will find ourselves confronting it," blogged the former CBS newsman. "We should not minimize the threat, but we should also recognize that it can be defeated — and in a convincing way that would strengthen our nation after a dangerous era."

Rather, 92, writes the "Steady" blog. —Kevin McCauley