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MINNESOTA SEEKS PITCHES FOR TRAVEL PR

Explore Minnesota Tourism is seeking PR proposals for its \$200K budget to increase the number of leisure travelers to the North Star State.

Tourism is a \$16B industry that employs 273K Minnesotans and generates \$1B in sales tax revenues.

EMT is looking for a firm that will develop a robust media relations strategy that will earn positive coverage of Minnesota travel in national and regional (Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa, Illinois and Nebraska) consumer media outlets. The desired firm will provide leadership in the areas of crisis communications, tourism stakeholder engagement and diversity & inclusion.

It will identify new opportunities, media trends, consumer interests, niche markets and content to further EMT's marketing objectives.

The work on the one-year contract will begin Oct. 15, with an option to extend the pact for an additional four years.

Responses are due Oct. 2 and must be sent electronically via Minnesota's SWIFT supplier portal at <https://mn.gov/supplier>.

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

INFINITE GLOBAL SNAGS KERRIGAN

PR veteran Ken Kerrigan, who did ten-year stints at Weber Shandwick and Ernst & Young, has joined legal, professional services and crisis shop Infinite Global.

At the Interpublic unit, Kerrigan led its corporate reputation and brand practice, while as E&Y's director of Americas communications he helped the firm navigate the Enron accounting scandal.



Ken Kerrigan

Kerrigan also held posts at Hill & Knowlton (managing director-corporate and financial media relations) and is the author of "Our Future in Public Relations: A Cautionary Tale in Three Parts."

Jamie Diafera, IG CEO, called Kerrigan a well-respected veteran of the communications industry. "As a corporate communications faculty member at New York University and the author

of a book on public relations, he embraces the idea of being a lifelong student while also developing the next generation of PR professionals," he added.

Kerrigan will work with clients on media relations strategy, issues management and stakeholder engagement.

SARD VERBINNEN GOBBLES UP OAKHILL

Sard Verbinen & Co. has acquired Oakhill Communications, the London-based strategic communications, PA/crisis shop that serves FTSE companies, non-profits and high net worth individuals.

Oakhill founders Craig Leviton and Lee Petar are now SVC managing directors and co-heads of the UK PA group

Leviton has more than 25 years of PA/corporate communications experience. In 1998, he joined LLM Communications, which was sold to Financial Dynamics in 2005. In 2009, he launched Heathcroft Communications, which he sold to Teneo in 2013. He established Oakhill with Petar in 2015.

Petar began his more than 20-year PR career at LSA before working at BSMG and Weber Shandwick. He co-founded Tetra Strategy in 2007 and then teamed with Leviton to establish Oakhill.

"Craig and Lee have distinguished themselves with intelligent counsel, deep relationships with clients, and the ability to execute on complex assignments," George Sard and Paul Verbinen said in a statement.

SVC PA has more than 30 staffers under the leadership of Bruce Haynes, who said many of his US and Asia-based clients have been looking for representation in Britain.



AIG'S DANDRIDGE NAMED CCO AT BOEING

Boeing has named Ed Dandridge the company's senior vice president and chief communications officer, effective Sept. 28.

Dandridge comes to Boeing from AIG, where he was global chief marketing and communications officer, AIG General Insurance. He succeeds Greg Smith, who has been Boeing's interim chief communications officer since July, taking over for Niel Golightly, who stepped down after it was revealed that he wrote an article three decades ago opposing women's service in the military.

In his new role, Dandridge will oversee all aspects of Boeing's communications.

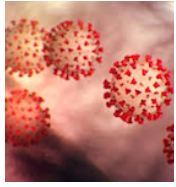
"I know Ed will continue to build on our unwavering commitment to engaging our associates and stakeholders with transparency as we confront these challenging times as an industry and company," said Boeing president and CEO David Calhoun.



Ed Dandridge

WOMEN, PARENTS FEEL COVID-19 STRESS

Women and parents are feeling the greatest emotional strain after six months of COVID-19 lockdowns, according to new research from Finn Partners.



The research, conducted by Civis Analytics, showed that women reported higher levels of anxiety (56 percent vs. 43 percent for men), sadness (36 percent vs. 27 percent for men) and fear (29 percent vs. 24 percent for men).

Parents with children under 18 are about evenly split between those who say that their family relationships are improving and those who say these relationships are worsening. However, their relationships with nearly everyone else aren't doing as well, with 21 percent saying that their friendships are suffering, as opposed to 16 percent who say they are getting better.

Overall, half (50 percent) of respondents say that their level of anxiety has increased, while 32 percent report more sadness, about one out of four (27 percent) are experiencing more fear and 25 percent say they are feeling more anger.

But the changes brought about by the pandemic aren't all negative. Almost four out of ten respondents (38 percent) say they're spending more time outdoors with family and friends, and 44 percent of parents with kids 18 and under in the house report feeling more connected to their social networks.

The effects of working from home don't loom nearly as large as one might think. Only five percent of respondents chose it from a list of 10 options as the one having the greatest negative impact on their emotions.

"Still, it does appear from these results that parents, in particular, may be forced into finding positive ways of adapting, perhaps leading to healthier long-term changes," says Dr. Catherine Belling, associate professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

KEKST CNC CLOSES OUT CENTURY 21 STORES

Kekst CNC handles Century 21 Stores, which bills itself as a New York icon and pioneer of off-price retail, as it files for Chapter 11 and plans to close its 13 stores due to a dispute with its insurance companies.

Century 21 Co-CEO Raymond Gindi claims insurers failed to pay \$175M under policies to protect against losses due to business interruption, such as shutdowns triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.



"While insurance money helped us to rebuild after suffering the devastating impact of 9/11, we now have no viable alternative but to begin the closure of our beloved family business because our insurers,

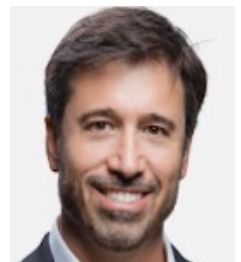
to whom we have paid significant premiums every year for protection against unforeseen circumstances like we are experiencing today, have turned their backs on us at this most critical time," said Gindi in a statement.

Noting that retailers across the country have suffered due to COVID-19, Gindi said had Century 21 "received any meaningful portion of the insurance proceeds, we would have been able to save thousands of jobs and weather the storm, in hopes of another incredible recovery."

Kekst CNC's Sherri Toub and Wendi Kopsick handle the Century 21 business.

ON THE MOVE

BCW has brought on **Martin Montoya** as president, Latin America, effective Sept. 14. Montoya joins BCW from Cheil Brazil, where he was chief operating officer. He was previously CEO of Edelman Brazil and has served as president of WMcCann in São Paulo. Based in Brazil, Montoya will be responsible for growth across 13 offices in the region, with a focus on strengthening the region's integrated offerings. He replaces Jim Joseph, who left BCW in August to join McCann Health.



Martin Montoya

APCO Worldwide has named **Brian Keeter** senior director in the office of executive chairman Margery Kraus.

Keeter joins APCO from Auburn University, where he was executive director of public affairs. He previously served as the associate administrator for public affairs at the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration. Based in Washington, Keeter will provide expertise and strategic counsel to APCO clients, focusing initially on transportation and infrastructure, higher education and international engagement.

The Chemours Company, which was founded in July 2015 as a spin-off from DuPont, has promoted **Alvenia Scarborough** to senior vice president, corporate communications and chief brand officer, effective Oct. 1. Scarborough is currently senior director, corporate communications at the company. She will assume her new position from Erich S. Parker, who is retiring. Before coming to Chemours, Scarborough was a senior marketing communications consultant at UPS. She will join the Chemours executive team and will lead the company's communications strategy.



Alvenia Scarborough

The **Interactive Advertising Bureau** has appointed **David Cohen**, its current president, chief executive officer, effective Sept. 15. He succeeds Randall Rothenberg, who became CEO of IAB in January 2007. Rothenberg will remain at IAB as executive chair through 2022. In addition to serving as CEO of IAB, Cohen will head IAB Tech Lab, the organization's separate, affiliated, global trade association devoted to the development of industry technical standards.

Brunswick Group has promoted **Laura Buchanan**, a partner in its London office, to chief client officer. Buchanan, who began her career as a journalist at the BBC, has been with Brunswick for 17 years. The agency has also named Courtney Chang Dorman, a partner in San Francisco, chief business officer. Dorman joined Brunswick in April 2019 from the law firm Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, where she was global chief operating officer.

Omnicom Public Relations Group has named **Soon Mee Kim** chief diversity, equity & inclusion officer, a newly created position. Kim joins OPRG after 14 years at Porter Novelli, where she was most recently executive vice president and global diversity, equity and inclusion leader. In her new post, she will be responsible for working with OPRG agency leaders to develop policies, practices and programs that advance diversity, equity and inclusion internally, along with client and external initiatives.

THE PROBLEM WITH MASKS

Is there a problem with masks in this country? It sometimes seems so. While the majority of Americans say they support wearing masks during the COVID-19 pandemic, legions of others aren't so sure:



**Sandra Harbrecht
Ratchford**

- They're for wimps.
- They cause other health problems.
- The pandemic is a hoax.
- Wearing a mask makes a political statement.

New York Times opinion writer [Charlie Warzel](#) says in a recent column that "trust in science seems increasingly fragile. That trust is endangered by what many public health experts I spoke with described as a messaging crisis."

While we don't share all of Warzel's conclusions in the article, we do agree with him on one thing: Masks aren't the real problem. The problem is we haven't got the messages or the messengers right.

No one set of messages works for all people, no matter what the issue is. Individuals and groups have their own experiences, prejudices and life situations. The rural experience is different from the urban one. A person who knows somebody with COVID-19 will have a different view from someone who doesn't. And receptiveness to behavior change will vary according to who they trust and believe. One of the most controversial aspects of coronavirus communications currently is who should be considered a credible messenger.

Messaging on masks has been fraught from the beginning. The situation was so new and so much was unknown that even the experts — the medical community — sent mixed signals about whether wearing a mask could "flatten the curve." Now that multiple studies have shown masks help stop the spread of the virus, the messaging has become more consistent. But the damage has been done.

Additionally, there has been no uniform voice on the subject, with each state, business and community often deciding for itself whether or when to suggest or mandate masks.

Our role models and credible spokespersons have also been a mixed bag. For every famous person urging us to wear masks, it seems there's another who tells us we have no obligation to and refuses to wear one him- or herself.

Changing behaviors isn't easy. While prevailing COVID-19 messages seem to appeal to the greater good, human beings want to know "what's in it for me?" Perhaps that's where the lines have become blurred. It took years to persuade Americans to wear seatbelts, first through a concerted advertising campaign (remember Vince and Larry, the dummies torn to bits in head-on crashes?) and laws mandating them.

There are lessons here that we can learn as business leaders. Changing behavior requires us first to know our audiences and empathize with them — what motivates them and what barriers to change they face. It requires us to present consistent messages that consider humans' tendency to resist change. And it requires credible messengers and role models, which almost every business has.

We will never get buy-in from 100% of our audiences, whether the goal is mask-wearing or support for organizational change. But understanding and acting on the pillars of persuasion will get us far enough — almost every time.

Sandra Harbrecht Ratchford is President and CEO of Paul Werth Associates in Columbus, OH.

LIVINGSTON REPS CHURCH TIED TO COVID

The Livingston Group is working for San Francisco Zion Church, which is an independent church associated with the South Korean religious sect linked to the spread of COVID-19.

South Korea in February traced the outbreak there to the Shinecheonji Church of Christ as more than 5,000 of its members were infected, which then represented nearly 40 percent of all cases in the country.

Many followers of the Church, which South Korean lawmakers call a cult, went into hiding to avoid any attempts at contact tracing.

South Korea arrested Lee Man-hee, the 88-year-old leader of Shincheonji, in August on charges of "murder by willful negligence," embezzling and holding unapproved religious events.

Shincheonji supporters claim the government of South Korea is using it as a scapegoat to cover up its mismanagement of the pandemic. "As a new and growing denomination, Shincheonji has become prey to misrepresentation and discrimination," Ki Lee, a spokesperson for the SF Zion Church, told *O'Dwyer's*.

Former Louisiana Republican Congressman and Speaker-elect Bob Livingston launched TLG in 1999.

It is lobbying US officials about the "persecution and undue treatment" of assorted churches in South Korea and the US and the implications on the privacy rights of Americans.

The firm's six-month contract went into effect Aug. 17 and is worth \$8,500 per-month. The pact may be approved for an additional six months upon mutual agreement by both parties.



HILL+KNOWLTON RECRUITS DIVERSITY DUO

Hill+Knowlton Strategies has named Azuree Montoute-Lewis as global head of diversity, equity and inclusion and Bridgette O'Neal as its US DE&I chief.

Montoute-Lewis joins WPP on Sept. 15 from Fitch Ratings, where she set up its DE&I unit and expanded the talent management function.

Earlier she did an almost ten-year stint at Citicorp in talent & diversity positions, overseeing the Black Heritage Affinity Group, executive development and assessment, talent reviews and succession management functions.

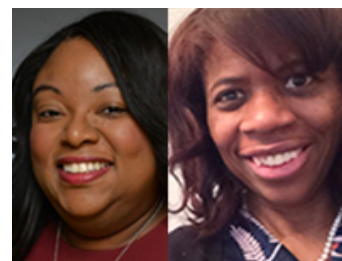
Montoute-Lewis also worked at Dun & Bradstreet and JPMorgan Chase. At H&K, she reports to CEO AnnaMaria DeSalva.

O'Neal, who has more than 25 years of brand advertising, multicultural marketing and DE&I experience, was most recently at Interpublic Group.

At IPG, she handled the launch of its Business Resources Group, including the Asian Heritage Group, Black Employee Network, IPGLGT, SOMOS and the Women's Leadership Network.

Prior to IPG, she ran marketing programs at *Ebony* and *Jet*, Time Inc. and Marriott International.

O'Neal reports to H+K global president Richard Millar.



**Azuree Montoute-Lewis (left),
Bridgette O'Neal**

TENEO REPS FIRM OF RUSSIAN OLIGARCH

Teneo Strategy is slated to receive a \$150K monthly retainer from LetterOne Investment Holdings, the Luxembourg-based firm co-founded by Russian billionaire Mikhail



Mikhail Fridman

Fridman. The assignment to provide strategic counsel and stakeholder outreach to LetterOne and its board members began Sept. 1.

Teneo's engagement letter calls for scheduling media interviews, assisting with media briefings and coordinating stakeholder relations. It will not act as a political consultant.

Senior managing directors Paul Gallagher, former head of Burson-Marsteller's US crisis practice, and

Kathleen Lacey, one-time executive VP for influencer engagement at Edelman, head the five-member LetterOne team.

Forbes estimates Fridman, who controls the Alfa Group, Russian's biggest financial and industrial investment firm, is worth \$15B. A member of the US Treasury's "oligarchs watch-list," according to Reuters, he was never hit with sanctions.

MERCURIO STARS IN MPA'S PR PUSH

John Mercurio, a veteran of Burson-Marsteller, Purple Strategies and CNN, will join the Motion Picture Assn. on Sept. 28 as senior VP-corporate communications.

Based in DC, he will oversee media relations, digital media and events and report to Emily Lenzner, executive VP-global communications & PA, for the group.

Mercurio, a journalist by training served as political director at CNN, where he managed the network's reporting on US politics and government and provided on-air analysis.

His PR posts have included senior director at B-M's PR & crisis practice and managing director at Purple Strategies. Most recently, he was global head of global communications & marketing at INATBA, the organization formed by the European Commission to advise governments, businesses and institutions on blockchain regulations.

MD COLLEGE SEEKS MARKETING SERVICES

Prince George's Community College, a public community college in Largo, Maryland, is seeking proposals from firms specializing in digital marketing and advertisement placement services.

Prince George's Community College Communications and Marketing Department is looking for a firm to help it build awareness, promote enrollment and drive event attendance through digital campaigns with a targeted emphasis on the D.C. metro region.



Work includes strategizing, planning, developing and executing digital marketing advertising campaigns and media placement and buying services.

Terms of the contract commence in late September and run through June 2021, with the option of four one-year renewals at PGCC's discretion. Budget for the work shouldn't exceed \$245,000.

Responses are due by 10 a.m. (EST) on September 17.

Questions should be directed to director Beth Vu Kirk, kirkbv@pgcc.edu, by 10:00 a.m. (EST) on September 4.

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

GANNETT NAMES GUPTA CMO

Gannett has hired board member Mayur Gupta as chief marketing & strategy officer for the job of transforming the media company to a subscription-led content business.

Gupta has content marketing experience at disruptive start-ups like Spotify and Freshly and consumer packaged goods companies like Kimberly Clark, where he was global head of omni-channel experiences and platforms.

At Gannett, he is charged with connecting data, technology and storytelling to deliver original content through apps, audio, video, live events and emerging technologies to its audience of nearly 175 million in the U.S. and U.K.

CEO Michael Reed said that Gupta's "experience building content driven subscription models and his ability to execute on a vision and strategy with speed and agility align well with our goals for this role."

Upon joining Gannett, Gupta step down from the company's board.



Mayur Gupta

MEDIA MANEUVERS

Former Fox News and NBC anchor **Megyn Kelly** has launched Devil May Care Media, a self-funded venture which will produce content including podcasts and shows discussing news, current events, legal and cultural issues. Its first production is "The Megyn Kelly Show," a podcast debuting at the end of September. A release from the company says that it is intended to give Kelly "a new platform for connecting directly with her audience without the constraints or political agendas of other media outlets." Kelly was released from her NBC News contract in 2019, receiving a payout estimated at between \$25 and \$30 million.



Megyn Kelly

Meredith Corp. is proposing a change to its charter that could pave the way for the company to split up its magazine holdings and TV stations into two separate businesses, according to a report in the *Des Moines Register*. Meredith's board of directors has approved the charter amendment, which will be voted on by investors at a Nov. 11 meeting. The company says that while a breakup of the divisions is not necessarily in the cards, it wants to ensure a "tax-efficient separation" in the event that it does take place. Meredith acquired Time Inc. in 2017, and it currently owns publications including *People*, *Real Simple* and *Better Homes and Gardens*, as well as 17 TV stations.

Hearst Magazines has named Asad Syrkett editor in chief of *Elle Decor*, effective Sept. 14. He succeeds Whitney Robinson, who stepped down in April. Syrkett comes to the magazine from Hem Design Studio, where was business development lead. Before that, he was deputy editor at real estate and urban design web site Curbed and has held editorial positions at *Architectural Digest* and *Architectural Record*. Former Hearst Magazines president Troy Young resigned in July after employees spoke out about what they called a racist and sexist work environment at the company.

AMERICANS SKEPTICAL OF MEDIA

Americans' skepticism toward media institutions overshadows any confidence they have in today's news industry, but most say their trust in the news could someday be won over, according to a new report from the Pew Research Center.

The report, which examined Americans' trust in news organizations as well as what these organizations can do to regain the public's confidence, found that Americans tend to express far more negative than positive views about the news media's role in society.



Pew Research Center

are too critical of the country (35 percent).

Americans appear to take particular issue with news organizations' perceived transparency. More than half (60 percent) believe news outlets do an insufficient job disclosing potential conflicts of interest, how they choose and find sources (57 percent), whether a story is an opinion piece or factual reporting (55 percent) or how a story is produced (51 percent). Respondents especially believe news organizations do an insufficient job explaining to the public how they're funded (72 percent).

Respondents also held strong views regarding why they think mistakes often make their way into news stories. While more than half blame careless reporting (55 percent) or today's accelerated pace for breaking news (53 percent) as the reason significant mistakes appear in news coverage, more than two-thirds (69 percent) believe news organizations deliberately try to cover up those mistakes and nearly half (48 percent) feel media outlets aren't transparent when a correction has been made to a report. Nearly half of those polled (44 percent) believe reporting errors are borne out of a desire to willfully mislead the public.

As usual, partisanship appears to be behind at least some of this sentiment: 60 percent of respondents who identified as Republican or Republican-leaning think mistakes make their way into news stories due to a deliberate desire to mislead audiences, compared to only 32 percent of Democrats or Democrat-leaning respondents who feel this way.

The report suggests that Americans' attitudes toward the media may be at least tangentially related to a perceived lack of connection with the coverage media outlets provide. While more than half of those surveyed (55 percent) feel it's important for audiences to have personal connections with their news sources, an even larger number (57 percent) believe their news outlets don't particularly value them or understand people like them (59 percent). Perhaps as a result, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) claim they don't feel particularly loyal to any of the outlets from which they get their news.

Finally, the report discovered that Americans believe that maintaining some level of skepticism toward the news media is healthy, as roughly two-thirds (63 percent) claimed that a public skeptical of the media makes for a better society. Three-quarters (75 percent) maintained that it's possible that the current level of confidence they have in the news media could someday improve.

Pew's findings were based on a survey of more than 10,300 U.S. adults conducted between February and March.

NORTH DAKOTA WANTS TO FILL PR FIRM POOL

North Dakota is creating a pool of marketing communications firms to support various media campaigns for state, local and tribal governments.

The purpose of the vendor pool is to identify firms interested in working with the Peace Garden State and establish services and capabilities to expedite the process for procuring marketing communications needs, according to its RFP.

Budgets will be set based on the scope and reach of planned PR campaigns.

A PR partner may be asked to develop a media and market plan that includes proposed creative concepts, outreach strategies, target markets, data and justification for the planned approach, a timeline that reflects the proposed implementation of media and marketing, and key performance indicators or other measurements of success.

The firm could be tasked with management of North Dakota's Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube accounts with responsibility for posting daily content, images and tracking posts.

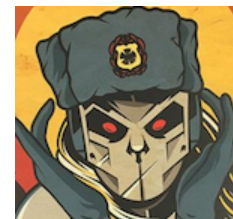
Proposals are due Sept. 16 at North Dakota's portal at <https://www.nd.gov/omb/vendor>.

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



NEWS OF FIRMS

SKDKnickerbocker, which advises the Joe Biden presidential campaign, says it warded off attacks by Russian-state hackers. Microsoft alerted SKDKnicker's Washington office of the attacks launched by the same group that broke into the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton and leaked her emails. The "Fancy Bear" hacking group is controlled by Russia's military intelligence. Stagwell Group owns SKDKnicker.



APCO Worldwide is turning Nov. 3 into a "Day On" for employees to not only cast their ballots, but continue to advocate for progress beyond Election Day. APCO president, North America Kelly Williamson calls the day "a chance to exercise our civic duty and to be a part of something greater than ourselves—keeping our democracy resilient." The firm is a signatory of "Time to Vote"—a nonpartisan, business-led initiative to help ensure employees across America don't have to choose between voting and earning a paycheck. It has also launched its "adVOcaTE" campaign, which encourages eligible APCO employees—and their friends, family, acquaintances and connections—to register to vote.

MWWPR is leading communications for the **New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund**, including public relations and digital marketing support, on a pro bono basis. A nonprofit organization hosted by the Community Foundation of New Jersey, the fund works to fight the medical, social, and economic impact of COVID-19 on organizations that provide essential services on the pandemic's front line. One-hundred percent of donations are used to meet four challenges facing the state of New Jersey in the face of the COVID-19 crisis: stopping the spread, supporting the healthcare and frontline community, providing help to the vulnerable, and rebuilding the communities impacted.

COMMENTARY



President Trump, our doting national father, was so worried that his 330M children would get nervous and anxious about COVID-19 that he decided to spin a fairy tale about the big bad virus just vanishing into thin air. Bless his heart.

The tweeter-in-chief was aware of the seriousness of the COVID-19 threat right from the beginning, according to “Rage,” the new book by *Washington Post* journalist Bob Woodward.

Trump opted to lie to the American people by continually downplaying the threat and promising that it would just disappear when the weather got warmer.

He told Bob Woodward on Feb. 7 that the virus was “more deadly than even more strenuous flu.” But Trump minimized the threat in his public statements about COVID-19.

On his Feb. 25 trip to India, he called COVID-19 a problem that was going to go away and which he predicted “within a couple of days is going down to close to zero cases.”

The president on March 19 told Woodward that he misled the American people because he didn’t want to create a panic.

During the April 3 coronavirus task force meeting, Trump said COVID-19 is going away, but two days later, he told Woodward: “It’s a horrible thing. It’s unbelievable.”

Woodward conducted a series of interviews with Trump from December 5, 2019 to July 21, and the president consented to having the sessions recorded.

Though the recordings clearly show that Trump deceived the public about COVID-19, in the fantasy world of Trump-Land, that is not lying to the public.

White House shill Kayleigh McEnany said on Sept. 9: “This president does what leaders do, good leaders. The President has never lied to the American public on COVID.”

Listen to the tapes, Kayleigh.

More than 190K Americans are dead from COVID-19. How many of them would be alive today, had the president come clean about the threat posed from the virus? How many those dead didn’t take the virus seriously because of Trump’s apparent lack of concern about COVID-19?

Trump failed to defend the American people. He gambled that the US could wall itself off from the pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis came at an inconvenient time for Trump. The initial reports of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China, were bracketed by the House impeachment of Trump on Dec. 18 and Senate acquittal on Feb. 5.

On the political and self-preservation front, a healthcare emergency was the last thing that the president needed.

Instead of rallying the nation to fight the spread of COVID-19, Trump tried to wish it away. He lost that gamble and America is still paying a horrible price.

Disney and Apple part ways on human rights in China.

Disney faces criticism over filming part of its live-action remake of “Mulan” in Xinjiang, where China’s government has detained Uighur Muslims in mass internment camps.

The company thanks eight different government entities in Xinjiang for their assistance in putting together the film, according to the *New York Times*.

“Every big company in America needs to think about whether business is helping the Chinese government oppress the Uighur people,” said DC-based Uighur activist Tahir Imin.

Disney has the choice of cashing in on China’s booming box office that is soon expected to pass that of the US or working to promote human rights.

Apple, which has long been criticized for caving to censorship demands from China’s government, has now published a policy respecting “freedom of information and expression.”

The document claims Apple is “committed to respecting the human rights of everyone whose lives we touch—including our employees, suppliers, contractors and customers.”

The *Financial Times* noted the document tries to walk a fine line between maintaining rights while conceding that Apple “is required to comply with local laws in authoritarian countries.”

The test will come when China demands that Apple ban apps that help users evade censorship and surveillance.

Disney and Apple are high-profile global companies. The world watches and will emulate their human rights performance in China.

Blame it on “crisis mismanagement” is the lame excuse cooked up by French luxury goods maker LVMH, which is trying to bail out of its \$16B takeover of Tiffany & Co. *Sacre bleu!*

The truth: LVMH is attempting to squash the acquisition on the orders of the French government as part of its trade war with the US.

That didn’t stop LVMH from issuing a press release on Sept. 10 with the headline: “LVMH intends to file a lawsuit against Tiffany as a result of crisis mismanagement.” Say what? The company argues that Tiffany is now damaged goods because its management botched the COVID-19 crisis.

LVMH’s board claims to have examined Tiffany’s first-half results (\$32.7M net loss vs. \$261.6M year-ago profit on a 37 percent sales decline to \$1.3B) and determined they were “significantly inferior to those of comparable brands of the LVMH Group.” Those haughty French.

That led LVMH to “challenge the handling of the crisis” by Tiffany’s management and view the lackluster results as a “material adverse effect” on Tiffany’s business.

The French say Tiffany “did not follow an ordinary course of business, notably in distributing substantial dividends when the company was loss-making and that the operation and organization of this company are not substantially intact.”

For its part, Tiffany is suing LVMH and refutes suggestions that it can dodge the deal by claiming it has undergone a material adverse effect “or that the transaction is in some way inconsistent with its patriotic duties as a French corporation.” Tune in La Marseillaise.

The mudslinging battle between two of the world’s top luxury companies certainly is an entertaining diversion in the midst of a global pandemic.

—Kevin McCauley