CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS OF THE US GOVERNMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

ED SHELLEBY

OFFICE U.S. SENATOR TINA SMITH

MINNESOTA

KEY PARTS OF THE US GOVERNMENT AS IT RELATES TO COVID

(WE'RE A LITTLE WEIRD)

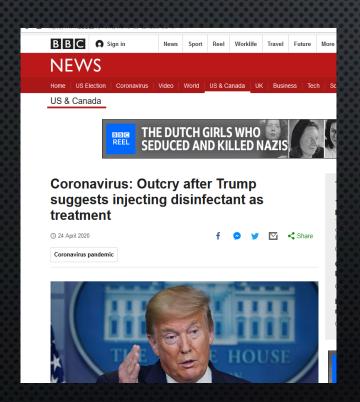
- THE PRESIDENT AND HIS ADMINISTRATION
- Congress
 - SENATE (2 SENATORS ELECTED FROM EACH OF THE 50 STATES)
 - House of Representatives (435 total, based on a state's population)
- GOVERNORS (ONE FROM EACH STATE)

CHALLENGE 1:

THE US GOVERNMENT HAS FAILED TO CREATE A COHESIVE NATIONAL STRATEGY (OR MESSAGE) ON HOW TO ADDRESS THE PANDEMIC

CONSIDERABLE MISINFORMATION

(SOMETIMES FROM THE PRESIDENT OR OTHER GOV'T OFFICIALS)



The drug hydroxychloroquine is displayed at the Rock Canyon Pharmacy in Provo, Utah

Drug cocktail touted by Trump to treat coronavirus increases chance of death by 27%, study shows

'No need for further studies' into unproven Covid-19 treatment supported by US president, researchers say

| @wood vincent | Tuesday 01 September 2020 17:49





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A GOP chairwoman in Arizona, who is also a doctor, was temporarily limited on Twitter after she shared a viral coronavirus misinformation video

Sarah Al-Arshani Jul 20 2020 2:33 AM

Arizona GOP senate candidate Kelli Ward, with husband Michael Ward and other family members by her side, concedes the primary in a speech to supporters at an election night event on August 28, 2018 in Scottsdale, Arizona. Photo by Raip

Arizona Republican Party Chairwoman's Twitter account was

C3.ai transforms Aerospace & Defense.

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WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE WAYS WE USED TO COMMUNICATE?

- MOST GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS MOVED TO TELEWORK; GOVERNMENT HAS NOT FULLY CONVENED IN SIX MONTHS
- ELECTED OFFICIALS NO LONGER INTERACT WITH REPORTERS ON A DAILY BASIS, ALL OF WHOM PREVIOUSLY WORKED IN THE SAME OFFICE BUILDINGS, INCLUDING THE CAPITOL
- Fewer Hearings, Press Conferences, and Speeches--all keys ways to communicate

GONE ARE THE DAYS OF THIS

(MAYBE FOR A LONG TIME...)

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

(ALL ARE REAL PHOTOS THAT I DIDN'T TAKE BUT WITNESSED!)





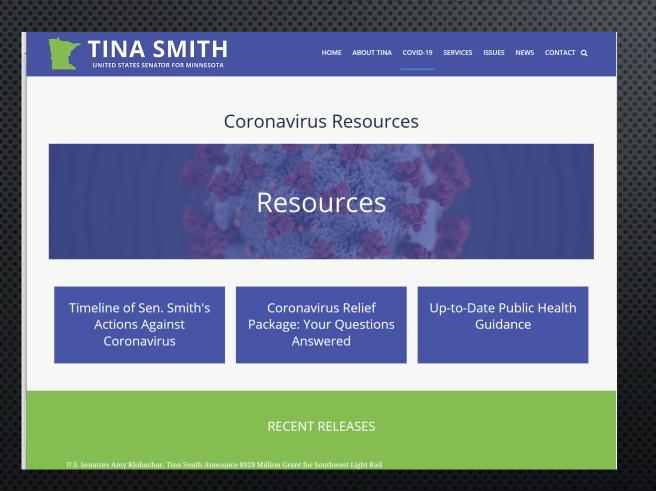


GOVERNMENT HAS MOVED TO ALMOST ALL DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

- FIRST, UPDATES TO EXISTING TOOLS
 - Government websites saw enormous spikes in traffic in the Spring—people were confused and looking for reliable information—low hanging fruit!
 - FIRST, FOR FACTS ABOUT COVID, TESTING, ETC.
 - SECOND, TO UNDERSTAND WHAT ECONOMIC SUPPORT THEY QUALIFIED FOR (THE GOVERNMENT PASSED A \$2.2 TRILLION BILL IN MARCH TO HELP THE COUNTRY RECOVER)
 - Successful: Overhauling websites to be fully COVID-centric—Make yourself a resource people find reliable and frequently updated
 - That includes not only information about the virus and its spread, but about health insurance information, unemployment assistance, and other government programs

OUR OFFICE, AS AN EXAMPLE

US SENATOR TINA SMITH'S WEBSITE



Coronavirus Relief Package: Your Questions Answered

Coronavirus Relief Package: Your Questions Answered

On March 27, Congress passed and the President signed into law a \$2 trillion package that will send assistance to Minnesota families, workers and small businesses to address the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. It also significantly bolstered the ability of hospitals and health care workers to deal with the coming surge in need for health care services. Here's how it will help.

| How much will Minnesotans receive in Stimulus payments? | + |
|--|---|
| How will Minnesotans get their payments? | + |
| How does the new law help people who have been laid off due to the pandemic? | + |
| How does this law help struggling small businesses? | + |
| What supports are included for hospitals and health systems? | + |
| Will this law help states, local governments, and Tribal governments? | + |
| Will it help schools in Minnesota? | + |
| Do I still have to pay back my student loans? | + |
| | |

SOCIAL MEDIA: A GREAT TOOL.

SOMETIMES.

- FACEBOOK, TWITTER, INSTAGRAM, ETC.
 - Helpful tools to disseminate information BUT...
 - LOTS AND LOTS AND LOTS OF MISINFORMATION, WITH LITTLE POLICING OF ACCURACY
- SO HOW DO YOU COMBAT?
 - FOCUS ON PROMOTING INFORMATION FROM NON-POLITICAL AND TRUSTED SOURCES
 (ESPECIALLY WHEN THE PUBLIC DOESN'T CONSIDER YOUR OFFICE AS ONE OF THEM...)
 - AND PARTNER WITH A (SOMEWHAT) TRUSTED SOURCE TO GET THE MESSAGE OUT!

WHAT'S WORKED WELL

- What the government accomplished
 - Information updated daily on the website: reliable sources ONLY!
 - Thorough vetting process from policy staff
 - BUT STILL VERY QUICK UPDATES—PEOPLE CRAVING UP-TO-DATE CONTENT
 - QUALIFIED INFORMATION WHEN NECESSARY (LIKE IF DETAILS WERE STILL DEVELOPING—SAY THAT)
 - CLEAR AND SIMPLE WAYS TO CONTACT ELECTED OFFICIALS WITH QUESTIONS, INCLUDING FOR PEOPLE HAVING TROUBLE WITH DEALING WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE GOVERNMENT
 - LINKS TO RELIABLE GOVERNMENT RESOURCES, BOTH NATIONAL AND STATE, FOR ADDITIONAL INFO.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK!

- REAL-TIME, REACTIONARY SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSES
 - FRENDLY REMINDER: Social media (Twitter especially) is not representative of the American public or the Democratic party

From the New York Times, in partnership with an organization called the Hidden Tribes Project: "views of Democrats on social media often bear little resemblance to those of the wider Democratic electorate."

Identify themselves as moderates or conservatives

29% of Democrats on social media 53% of other Democrats

Say political correctness is a problem in the U.S.

48% of Democrats on social media 70% of other Democrats

Say they don't follow the news much

27% of Democrats on social media 59% of other Democrat

Social media is important, but not the sole or primary metric you should use to gauge public opinion

CHALLENGE 2:

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC DOES NOT TRUST ELECTED OFFICIALS

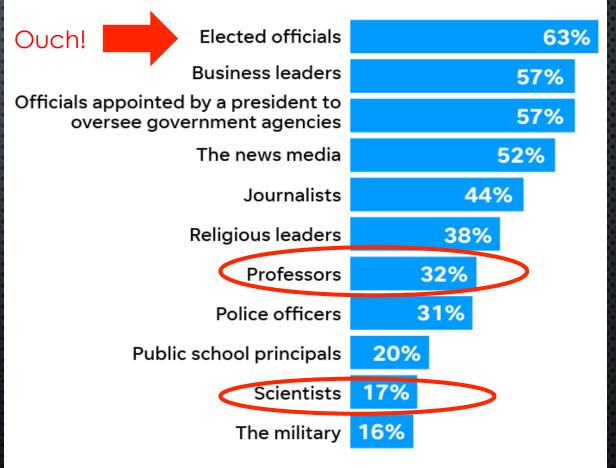
- THEY REALLY THINK POLITICIANS ARE ALL LIARS.
- YIKES.

THE PUBLIC DOES NOT TRUST ELECTED OFFICIALS

(AND THIS IS PRE-COVID!)

Where trust is worst

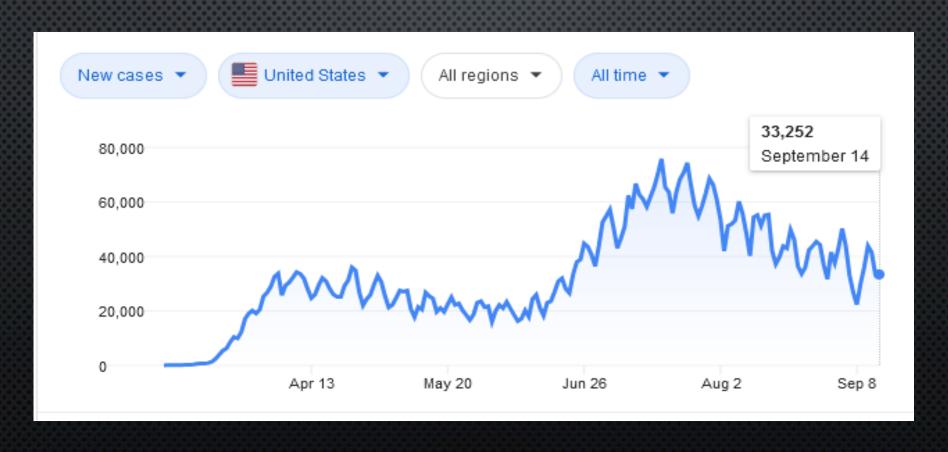
Americans who reported 'not too much" or no confidence at all in the following groups of people to act in the best interests of the public:



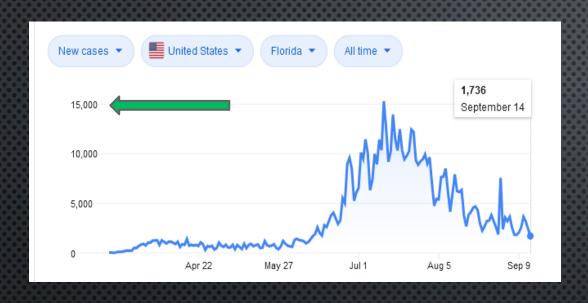
SOURCE Pew Research Center survey of 10,618 US adults, Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018

THAT MISTRUST HAS CONTRIBUTED TO WHERE THE US IS NOW: A STORY IN THREE GRAPHS

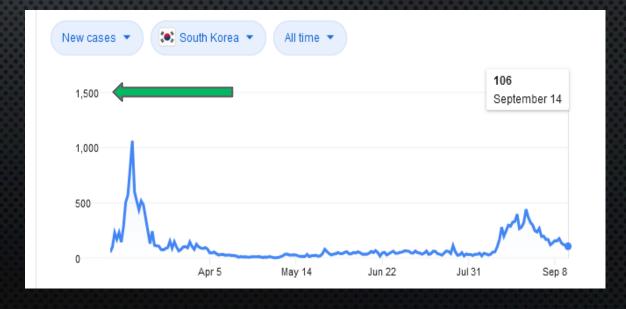
- GRAPH 1: THE US WITH 6.6M CASES, 195K DEATHS
 - ABOUT 20 PERCENT OF BOTH, DESPITE BEING ABOUT 4 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION



SOUTH KOREA VS. THE U.S. STATE OF FLORIDA



- The American State of Florida vs. South Korea (which publicly reported its first case as the same day as the US)
 - About double the population; fewer cases in South Korea during the pandemic than in Florida's worst day



SO WHO(M)* DOES THE PUBLIC TRUST?

- SADLY, NOT A WHOLE OF PEOPLLE...
- FIND RELIABLE SOURCES (WHICH IS DIFFICULT)
 - FIND OUT WHO THE PUBLIC LISTENS TO AND PARTNER WITH THEM
 - PROFESSORS
 - PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS
 - Anyone who wasn't elected to office
- Have others join you for virtual press conferences with the media, for telephone townhalls with consituents
 - Serve as a resource and a conduit
- REPITION
 - Say the same thing over and over and over

ONESTIONSSS