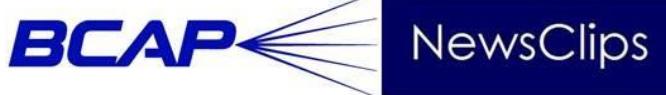


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July 27, 2020

LightReading
Verizon Fios, media units hit COVID-19 headwinds

At Amazon.com Inc.'s annual shareholder meeting in May, Chief Executive Jeff Bezos offered a familiar response when asked about scrutiny surrounding the company. "We want people to know the truth about Amazon and how we use our scale for good," he said before outlining company initiatives on climate, job creation and small business.

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review
Wealthy donors pour millions into fight over mail-in voting

That often-repeated message, and Mr. Bezos's tendency in public appearances and interviews to stick to folksy talking points about Amazon's rise, are set to be tested as never before when he makes his first-ever appearance before Congress on Wednesday. In recent years, the world's richest man has granted few extended interviews to journalists and has seldom faced the kind of adversarial questions he is likely to get from lawmakers on the House Antitrust Subcommittee. He is set to testify via videoconference alongside CEOs from Apple Inc., Google parent Alphabet Inc. and Facebook Inc.

New York Times
Big Tech Funds a Think Tank Pushing for Fewer Rules. For Big Tech.

Mr. Bezos, whose net worth has soared to almost \$180 billion, has ruled Amazon unchallenged since founding the company more than a quarter-century ago. He has a reputation for being unyielding when holding a strong belief or challenging what he considers to be poorly considered ideas. But he is also known for staying on message. Former Amazon executives say they expect Mr. Bezos to prepare carefully and to maintain discipline in sharing several messages that have come up frequently in the company's responses to scrutiny and criticism.

Washington Post
Media coverage of the 2016 campaign was disastrous.
Now's the last chance to get 2020 right.

One is that while Amazon accounts for a large volume of e-commerce sales, its overall size in U.S. retail is much smaller. Another is its "customer obsession," one of 14 principles long touted by Mr. Bezos and his team as an explanation for the company's competitive behavior. The crown jewel of his testimony "is very likely to be the consumer," said Guru Hariharan, who years ago helped build some of Amazon's seller services and now runs CommercelQ, which works with brands selling on Amazon. "He can argue that you don't want to enforce too many rules on an open market because you will end up hurting the consumer." A spokesman for Mr. Bezos declined to comment for this article.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Wolf administration announces additional funding for tech industry

Spotlight PA Gov. Tom Wolf will allow transparency bill to become law despite veto threat

Philadelphia Inquirer Biden is beating Trump big in Pennsylvania. Will anything change that?

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette House Dems vote to remove Confederate statues with an assist from Pa. Republicans

Philadelphia Inquirer An anti-Trump Republican group is courting 'soft' Trump supporters in Pennsylvania with \$1 million in ads

Critics have questioned whether some of Amazon's practices put its own interests ahead of that customer-first principle, and lawmakers have been scrutinizing the company's competitive behavior as part of a broader examination of large technology companies including Amazon since last year. Momentum grew for Mr. Bezos to testify after a Wall Street Journal article in April detailed the use of third-party seller data by company employees to help create competing Amazon-branded products.

Amazon, which launched an internal investigation because of the Journal story, has said it prohibits employees from using nonpublic, seller-specific data when determining which products to launch. On July 21, the company released a report written partially by its consumer chief, Jeff Wilke, that touts its investment into small businesses, saying it is spending more than \$30 billion to support small and medium-size sellers on its site. The report also says Amazon works with more than 2 million independent sellers, authors, content creators, developers and other businesses in the U.S.

Rep. David Cicilline (D., R.I.), chair of the House panel, said lawmakers over the past year have "heard some very disturbing testimony about the experiences of innovators and small businesses with Amazon." Asked whether he was satisfied with how Amazon has answered questions about its use of third-party seller data, Mr. Cicilline said simply: "No." "They are tremendous gatekeepers to a huge part of the economy," Mr. Cicilline said in an interview. "We want to look at in a very serious way the practices of Amazon."

Mr. Bezos's primary advisers for the hearing include top Amazon lawyer David Zapsky and Jay Carney, Amazon's public relations and policy chief and a former White House press secretary to President Barack Obama. Mr. Bezos's interview appearances are typically tied to company announcements or events, where interviewers avoid hot-button topics. One of his most recent interviews, for example, was held in conjunction with his visit to India in January, where he fielded friendly questions on stage from Amit Agarwal, head of Amazon's India operations. The interview broached favorite Bezos topics: Amazon's origin story and the company's pledge to eliminate its carbon footprint. His last lengthy interview with a journalist, a 2018 sit-down with Wired's Steven Levy, focused largely on his space company, Blue Origin.

Mr. Bezos often lets his subordinates defend Amazon. That includes executives such as Dave Clark, senior vice president of world-wide operations, and Mr. Carney, both of whom tweet out defenses of Amazon and appear on television interviews. Mr. Bezos typically relies on his senior public relations staff, close executives and his legal team when preparing for important public appearances, former senior staff members said. Like many other executives, Mr. Bezos typically rehearses with his senior team members on the kinds of questions he could face. With the hearing being held virtually, Mr. Bezos will be able to confront questions from a much more comfortable setting than typical for congressional hearings, they said. "He is someone who is very comfortable in his skin and knows what he believes and knows how he has built his company over time on very clear ideas and principles," said Scott Stanzel, a former director of communications at Amazon.

Amazon, whose share price has risen by more than 50% this year and has a market value of about \$1.5 trillion, has frequently disputed the notion that the company's business practices drown out competitors. As the company has grown into the nation's second-largest private employer and attracted more strident criticism, it has put much more emphasis on telling its own story. It began a blog in 2017 that focuses on telling stories about its company efforts and staff. The company also has been directing more of its advertising efforts recently to highlight its relationship with employees.

Once known as a private family man, Mr. Bezos in more recent years has thrust himself into the limelight, although he has continued to avoid extended press interviews. He uses his Instagram account to communicate

personal moments and messages. The account includes content about Amazon's efforts to protect its workers and its pledge to be a leader in climate change prevention, appearing alongside photos of him with world leaders and music stars. According to former advisers, Mr. Bezos also crafts his image through promotional videos, his senior executive team and public relations representatives.

Major labor unions which have had conflict with Amazon, such as the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, have been lobbying committee members to get their issues heard at the hearing. Amazon "has tremendous power to impact the supply of products in numerous categories at the expense of workers, sellers and consumers," said Michael Zucker, director of Change to Win, a federation of labor unions that has led efforts to pressure Amazon. "This power has been heightened during the pandemic, and it's a preview of the future that the online and general retail sectors are going to face if there is no law and regulation applied vigorously on Amazon." – **Wall Street Journal**

As coronavirus cases continue to rise in Pennsylvania, the state health department has received approval to spend nearly \$27 million to ramp up contact tracing efforts, warning of potentially dire consequences if it's unable to do so quickly. Contact tracing — the practice of locating people who have come in contact with individuals infected with COVID-19 and asking them to quarantine — is a key public health tool. Alongside wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and implementing widespread testing, experts say it's one of the best ways to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Now, the state is looking to outside companies for help with this critical work. Official documents show the health department has filed at least two emergency requests, using an expedited contracting process, to hire companies to assist with contact tracing. One proposed contract for \$25 million is with an Atlanta-based staffing agency to recruit, hire, and train up to 4,000 tracers in 90 days. The other, for nearly \$2 million, is with an Irish software company to launch a Bluetooth-enabled smartphone app that could notify users if they've been in close contact with an infected individual. Neither contract has been finalized yet, according to a department spokesperson. "At present, the spread of COVID-19 in the community is so overwhelming that the ability to track, trace, isolate, and test the individuals suspected to have the virus is impossible without the influx of additional staff and use of technology-assisted applications," the health department wrote in one of the requests for emergency funding.

Over the past 14 days, about one-third of Pennsylvania counties have seen a rise in cases. The state's seven-day average of new cases is double what it was last month, driven by infections in the western region. The concerning trend has prompted Gov. Tom Wolf and Secretary of Health Rachel Levine to impose tighter restrictions on bars, restaurants, and indoor gatherings, and require people to wear masks in public. With surges in the southern and western parts of the nation, they worry travel could bring more cases to the state if action is not taken swiftly.

As of Wednesday, there were 661 contact tracers across the state, the health department said. That includes state and county employees, as well as volunteers. Although the department has met its original goal of 625 tracers, spokesperson Nate Wardle said, "we know that we will need to continue to increase our capacity as we move toward the fall." But public health experts — much like the state's own emergency funding requests — say the time to ramp up contact tracing is now.

A tool built by George Washington University's Institute for Health Workforce Equity estimates Pennsylvania needs nearly 4,500 tracers based on its current case count. Other public health experts have cited 2,000 to 4,000 as the target. The main question, said Edward Salsberg, a senior researcher who helped build the George Washington University tool, is whether the state can

reach all contacts of new cases within 24 hours. By notifying people who may have contracted the virus within that timeframe and advising them to stay home, you limit the spread, Salsberg said.

On a day like Friday, when Pennsylvania announced [a recent high of 1,213 new cases](#) of COVID-19, that would mean contact tracers would have to call between 1,000 and 13,000 people, depending on how many contacts each infected individual had. The question is whether 661 tracers can reach that many people the next day, Salsberg said. Contact tracing has been a challenge for Pennsylvania throughout the pandemic. When the coronavirus first struck in March, the state's roughly 130 community health nurses led the charge. But a [Spotlight PA investigation](#) found that decades of budget cuts and court battles had left only a skeleton workforce, and the nurses were quickly overwhelmed by the deluge of coronavirus cases.

At the height of the pandemic, the nurses were forced to forgo calling contacts themselves and instead ask individuals who tested positive to pass on the information to others. Once cases began declining in late April, the nurses resumed these efforts, [alongside a patchwork system](#) of local health departments, hospital networks, and nonprofits. The state health department has been working to corral those efforts into six regional collaboratives, but as of mid-July, only three collaboratives have been formed. Now, with concerns about increasing case counts and the fear of a second wave in the fall, the department is looking to bolster its contact tracing systems further.

It has posted [12 job openings](#) for contact tracing field managers and community health nurses. And one of the emergency contract requests it filed suggests a plan to hire thousands more. The request is for a one-year contract with Insight Global, a staffing agency that launched a health-care division during the pandemic. The document specifies that the health department currently has resources to hire up to 1,000 staff, and "any staffing partner should be prepared to accommodate up to 4,000." Insight Global has experience with this type of work, the health department wrote in the funding request, citing the company's ability to hire 1,600 "resources" within 30 days for the state of New York.

Alongside the boost in personnel, Pennsylvania is also looking to supplement traditional contact tracing efforts with an app built by an outside company. Typically, this kind of technology relies on a large number of people downloading an app and consistently carrying their smartphones. A user is notified when they've been in close contact with someone who's self-identified as having COVID-19, though identifying information, like the infected person's name and location, is not revealed. Pennsylvania's proposed vendor, NearForm, has already built a contact tracing app and [implemented it successfully](#) in Ireland, a country with strict privacy regulations. The company has made the technology's [source code](#) publicly available, allowing outside engineers to vet the app for potential weaknesses, and [recently joined a new global technology initiative](#) to help public health agencies combat COVID-19.

Still, social factors could hinder any app's ability to provide meaningful information in Pennsylvania. When two users come into close contact, Bluetooth technology isn't able to discern whether they're both wearing masks or whether the contact was outdoors — factors that have been proven to reduce the risk of infection. Additionally, bottlenecks in lab capacity occurring around the country mean COVID-19 test results can take days or even weeks to come back. If users don't have up-to-date information on their results, the technology won't be effective.

And in Pennsylvania's political landscape, where the coronavirus has become a divisive debate, questions remain about whether enough people would be willing to download an app — and self-report honestly — for the technology to actually be useful. But experts say Pennsylvania currently has a critical opportunity to get a handle on cases. "Now that numbers are coming up and

we're reopening society, you want to stem this," Salsberg said. "This is how you keep your society open." — ***Spotlight PA***

The score in a game is more than just a record of who won and who lost. The score is a way to navigate through the game itself. It charts the progress from the first pitch to the last run. It lets a team know where it stands.

So why wasn't the state paying attention when [the Toronto Blue Jays](#) were looking to land in Pittsburgh for whatever remains of the 2020 baseball season? On Wednesday morning, there was some excitement in the Steel City as it looked like the Pirates would be sharing PNC Park with the Toronto team. The Blue Jays were looking for a U.S. base of operations after the Canadian government declined to let games be played at the Rogers Centre to keep Major League Baseball traffic on one side of the border.

It seemed like a home run. Not only would the City of Champions get back to some serious pro sports after a long coronavirus-induced drought, but it would be twice the teams. Hotels and other businesses around the ballpark, parched for revenue, were pleased. By Wednesday afternoon, the state Department of Health stepped in and the Toronto possibility was going, going, gone. So why did Pennsylvania have to ruin a good play? "In recent weeks, we have seen a significant increase in the number of covid-19 cases in Southwestern Pennsylvania," Secretary of Health Rachel Levine said in a statement. "To add travelers to this region for any reason, including for professional sports events, risks residents, visitors and members of both teams."

OK, sounds reasonable. That's why sports have been shut down for months, after all. But time out — what about the Pirates? They are still going to be playing at PNC Park. What exactly is the difference between the Toronto Blue Jays and the Cleveland Indians or the St. Louis Cardinals? Is it that Toronto is in another country? That seems like more of a downside for the Blue Jays as Ontario — geographically larger and more populated than Pennsylvania — has about one-third the covid-19 cases of the Keystone State.

Would an additional team based out of Pittsburgh increase the number of people? Yes. But as the games are being played without fans in the stands, the numbers don't seem like that big an issue. The state hasn't shut down interstate traffic or closed the airports. People still travel into and out of Pennsylvania every single day. And why wait until the decision was made to call the play foul? Why not let PNC Park officials know days earlier when news first broke that Pittsburgh might be the Jays' home away from home?

It all seems to come back to the state's tendency to make a move and then change course. Reacting to changing information is one thing, but that doesn't look like the case with the stadium. It looks more like no one was paying attention to the score until the game was over. Maybe the Wolf administration needs to keep an eye on the ball. — ***Pittsburgh Tribune-Review editorial***

