

NEWS **EXCLUSIVE**

The Post's FB traffic tanked after WH aide's false claim of 'churning out articles every day about people dying' from COVID vax

By **Steven Nelson**

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WASHINGTON — The Post's **traffic from Facebook** plunged by more than 50% in early 2021 after White House aide Rob Flaherty falsely accused America's favorite tabloid of "churning out articles every day about people dying" from COVID-19 vaccines.

The suppression drive from the Biden White House came just five months after social media networks — including Facebook and Twitter — censored The Post's coverage of Joe Biden's links to his son Hunter's business dealings in China and Ukraine that cited files on Hunter's abandoned laptop. The companies later **expressed regret** for doing so.

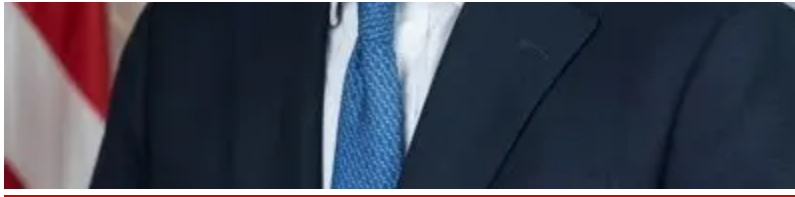
"I'm curious — NY Post churning out articles every day about people dying. What is supposed to happen to that from policy perspective?" **Flaherty told three Facebook officials** on March 26, 2021, according to phone call notes published Thursday by House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan (R-Ohio).

Flaherty, who left the White House in June after more than two years as director of digital strategy, pressed: "Does that article get a reduction, labels?"

A Facebook official replied: "Let's go back to remove (outright misinfo), reduce (not benign, more sensationalism, eg claim vaccines create miscarriages, indirect discouragement), inform — levers are contingent on content type, who posted it."

"We look at removing from recommendations, explorer, we want to take all this content out of that," the Facebook rep added. "What we're prioritizing in feed — want to make sure that anything we suspect is hitting skepticism, harmful topically but we can't remove, we reduce."





Rob Flaherty falsely accused America's favorite tabloid of "churning out articles every day about people dying" from COVID-19 vaccines.

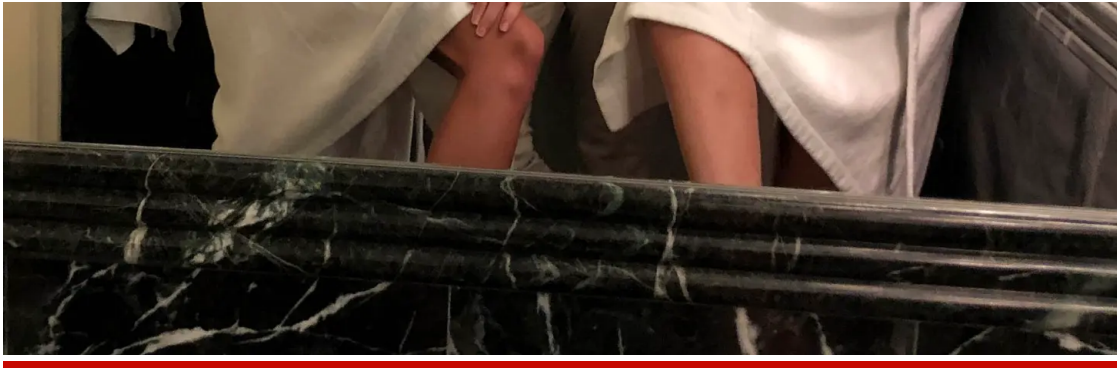
Flaherty pressed: "The question I have, if you're applying these methodologies, where is it still breaking through? And to whom? If it's still there, where is next whack a mole?"

A Facebook official replied, "We're getting better at detecting (human, natural language processing) discouragement. We find COVID posts, then we identify posts that are explicit discouragement, or this is bullying for choosing to get vaccinated. What's hard right now, we haven't completed full detection path. We need to close gaps, that's what we're doing."

One Facebook employee pleaded: "[We're] trying to get to fastest real solution v managing symptoms." But Flaherty responded that "intellectually my bias is to kick people off."

The Post's top stories on the day of Flaherty's complaint included an article on former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Robert Redfield **stating his belief that COVID-19 leaked from a lab in Wuhan, China — a conclusion that has since been backed by parts of the US government.**





Andy Stone, the Facebook official who announced the site was limiting spread of the Hunter Biden bombshell, said: “Like many publishers, the New York Post saw a decline in referral traffic from Facebook after the inauguration in 2021.”

The Redfield story was the top COVID-19-focused article on the day of Flaherty’s complaint — and The Post’s fifth-most-read story that day. The most read vaccine-focused article, and the 10th most read story on the website, [carried Dr. Anthony Fauci’s explanation](#) of breakthrough cases among vaccine takers.

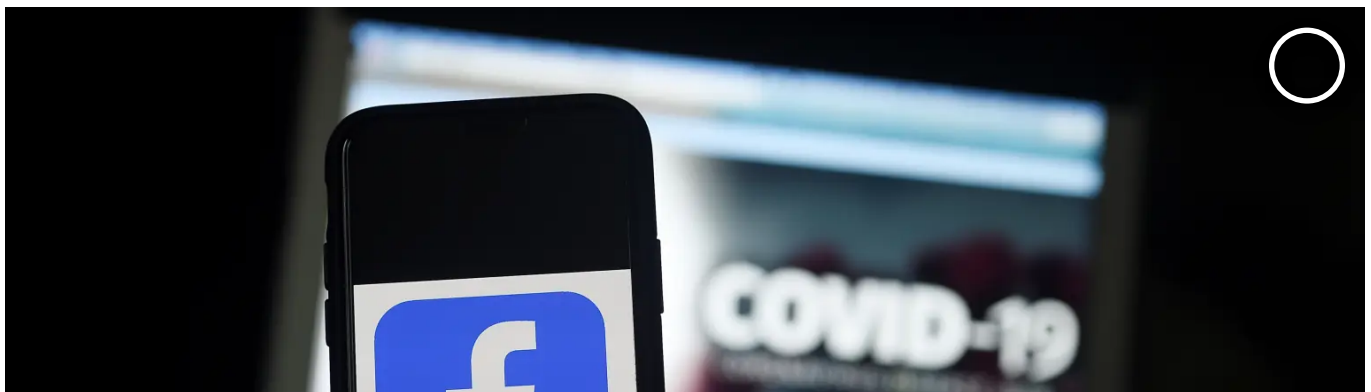
The Post’s third-most-read article that day [covered President Biden’s reliance on notes](#) during his first presidential press conference the day prior. The front page bore the headline “GLAZED AND CONFUSED” alongside a photo of the president.

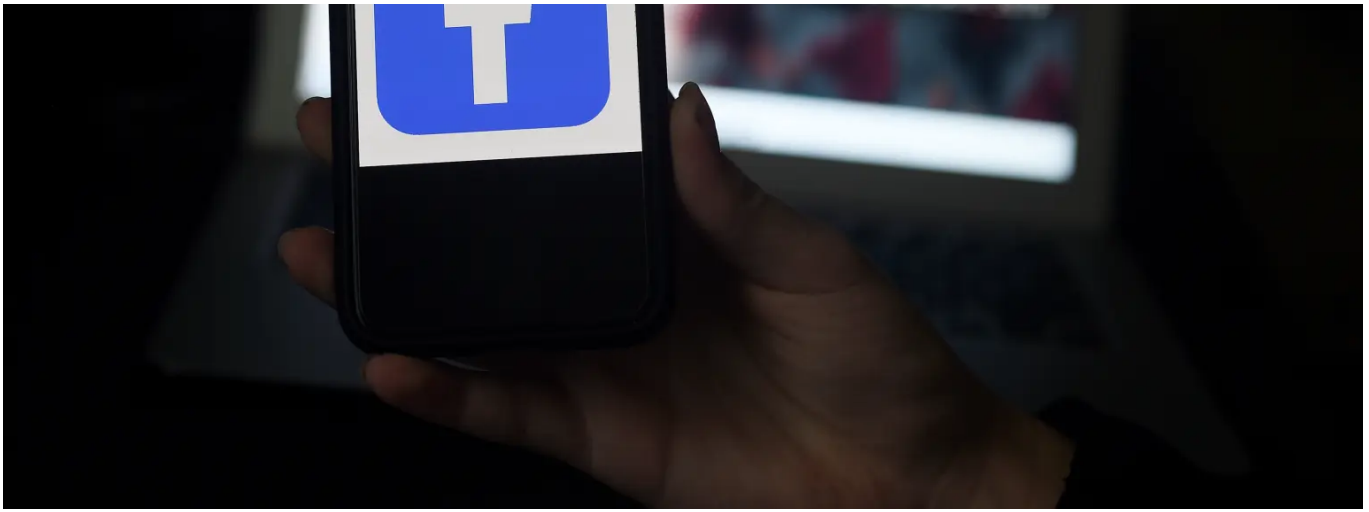
Online article clicks coming from Facebook to Post articles fell by 51.6% from February 2021 — the month before Flaherty’s claim — through April 2021. In the same period of time, The Post’s overall article traffic increased by 8%.

The Post’s Facebook-originating readership withered further in May and June 2021 and remained abnormally low in July — coinciding with intense White House pressure on social media to police alleged COVID-19 misinformation, with President Biden claiming Facebook was [“killing people.”](#)

By fall 2021, The Post’s Facebook traffic had rebounded to normal levels.

Facebook is the world’s largest social network and a major referral source for media outlets, giving it the power to shape public consumption of news, including about national politics.





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The White House did not respond to The Post's request for comment. Andy Stone, the Facebook official who announced the site was limiting spread of the Hunter Biden bombshell in October 2020, said Friday evening: "Like many publishers, the New York Post saw a decline in referral traffic from Facebook after the inauguration in 2021."

Contrary to Flaherty's claim that The Post was "every day" writing about COVID-19 vaccines causing people to die, a review of articles by Post librarians found just three examples of coverage of possible COVID-19 vaccine-linked fatalities — each of the three from that January.



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Two pertained to **deaths reported in Norway** and one reported on a **death in California** shortly after people took the vaccines.

The reported deaths were covered by many other leading news outlets. For example, the cases in Norway, which occurred among frail elderly patients, also were reported **by CNN** and **Reuters**. Norway's health authorities were the source of the news.

The **Los Angeles Times** and **San Francisco Chronicle** joined The Post in reporting on the

California death after it was identified by local officials.

The Post is the **fifth-most-read** news website in the United States and covers a variety of national and international news stories.

When COVID-19 vaccines became increasingly available — and controversial — throughout 2021, the newspaper ran a front-page editorial calling on reluctant Americans to take the shots.

What do you think? Be the first to comment.

“**The Post Says: Get Vaxxed!**” the front page of the April 21, 2021, print edition said.

When it became clear that a large chunk of the US population would not consent to vaccination, a follow-up editorial in July urged: “Get vaxxed, already, so we can all get back to normal.”

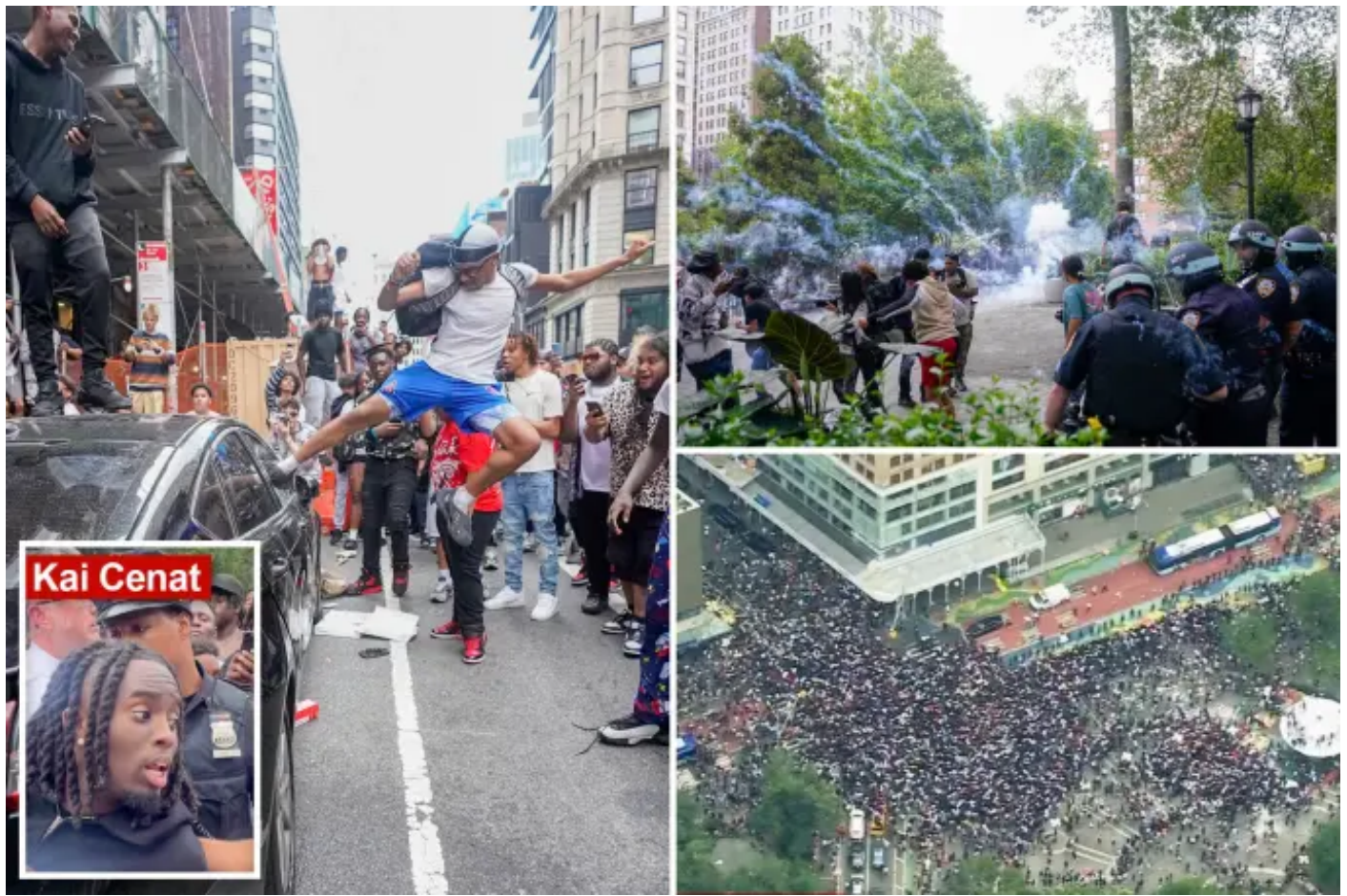
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NEW YORK POST

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