

**EP.74 - Stu Solomon FINAL**

**Narrator:** You're listening to *BioTalk* with Rich Bendis, the only podcast focused on the BioHealth Capital Region. Each episode, we'll talk to leaders in the industry to break down the biggest topics happening today in BioHealth.

**Rich Bendis:** Hi, this is Rich Bendis, your host for *BioTalk*. And as we continue our search for emerging and existing leaders within the BioHealth Capital Region, the talk about new topics, old topics and what's going to happen in 2021, we have something very interesting to talk about today, something that most of the *BioTalk* listeners have never heard about before. And we have an excellent guest. His name is Stu Solomon. He's the president and CEO of Connected DMV, which is something we all need right now, greater connectivity but properly spaced with a mask, right, Stu? And Stu is going to talk to us about a number of initiatives, his background, how he's evolved into this non-profit world which I have been living in for a number of years, and something that is very relevant to this COVID-19 pandemic that we're all confronted with today.

0:01:14 So, Stu, welcome to *BioTalk* today.

**Stu Solomon:** Hey thanks, Rich. It's great to be with you, and it's great to have a chance here to chat with the BioHealth community at large. So appreciate you having me.

**Rich Bendis:** Well, we're all looking forward to what you have to say and enlighten us on ways that we can proactively deal with this pandemic in the future or another pandemic that may emerge. But before we get into that, let's introduce you to our listeners. And why don't you give a little background profile on Stu Solomon and how you've risen through industry and migrated over to Connected DMV today?

**Stu Solomon:** Super. So, Rich, I come out of the corporate world. I went to school and started right out of school with a company now known as Accenture.

0:02:01 I spent 31 years there. Fantastic firm. I think one of the world's great delivery organizations. And in my 31 years there--I retired a few years ago and spent those last 20 years or so based in the Washington area. And while in Washington, I had the great privilege of running the Washington office. At the time I left, we were about 6,200 professionals or so in greater Washington across lots of different practice areas. Obviously, a

large federal presence here. But in my history, I've always been a practitioner. So always serving clients irrespective of whatever management positions might be in place. Most of my career was spent in critical infrastructure-related areas. Did a lot of work in the power sector and ran our global power business for about three years and then retired. And when I retired, I went from one day to the next, right into the non-profit world.

**Rich Bendis:** So you failed at retirement.

**Stu Solomon:** I failed miserably at retirement.

0:03:01 But always knew that when retirement came, I was looking for an opportunity to do something where we can give back. And the DMV reach here in greater Washington I think has got some tremendous opportunity, some potential in front of us, and hopefully, we can talk about a few of those things today.

**Rich Bendis:** Sure. And then you talk about you went right into the non-profit worlds. People don't go into a new world without thinking about it, knowing something about it, or having some vision for what they'd like to do there. So what prompted you to go from the private sector into the non-profit sector?

**Stu Solomon:** So in my last ten years or so at Accenture, and I was running the greater Washington office, in that role, I participated on a whole bunch of non-profit boards. Great orgs like the Board of Trade and the Federal City Council, the Economic Club, KIPP DC's board, Junior Achievement, books like that and just got to know the region a whole lot better by participating in those really good organizations.

0:04:02 But one of the things that jumped out at me in doing that was that a lot of the association organizations in greater Washington are fantastic conveners. They do great policy work, they do a really good job of helping people build their networks and kind of getting people together. But what jumped out at me is that the region as a whole really doesn't have a mechanism that they can actually deliver results. And having spent my entire career in delivery, that kind of jumped out at me. And so I knew that when it was appropriate to retire, that it would be good to invest some time in helping the region to think about delivery. How do we actually get things done? How do we take it from talking, and convening,

and policy, and kind of the front end of work and enable it to flow all the way through til you have a working operation of whatever was at hand? And so that's really what led me.

0:05:00 My time in the non-profit world serving on boards really led me to look at that gap and say, "How do we help close that gap for the good of the region?"

**Rich Bendis:** And I like how people come up with brands and names, so tell me about the name Connected DMV, and how did that evolve?

**Stu Solomon:** Well, with Connected DMV, really, we--when this started, Jack McDougle was the new CEO at the Board of Trade. He had just come on to lead the organization, and he was leading a Smart City initiative. So we came alongside him basically in that and created this public, private academic collaboration. So with the Board of Trade and their industry friends, we went over to a couple of other organizations, the Council of Governments, the Consortium of Universities Metro, and then we built a liaison relationship with the Department of Defense through their Joint Force Headquarters in the National Capital Region. So we put together a collaboration between those five organizations, and in doing so, had the great privilege of working with the Board of Trade, inside the Board of Trade.

0:06:07 Not officially on their staff but alongside them. And so we created this Smart Region movement under Jack McDougle, and then we looked at the opportunity to say, "Well, really, what we need to do is connect Washington. It's not just about Smart Region. We need to connect on a social basis, we need to connect kind of on a full-scale regional basis if we're to achieve closer to our potential here for greater Washington."

**Rich Bendis:** Well, that's interesting because I remember Jack, when he became the new CEO, reached out to BioHealth Innovation and me when he was doing the Smart Region initiative. I actually sat down and met with him. And I don't--did we meet at that time, Stu?

**Stu Solomon:** That's the first time we met. You came down to the Board of Trade offices there, and we sat in their big conference room. And I was blown away with your community. And because it was the first time that I really got a good glimpse, a close glimpse at how rich the ecosystem, this BioHealth ecosystem actually was.

0:07:04                   And I'll tell you, as a practitioner in Washington and around not being in the life sciences space, it was something that I was generally aware of. But you kind of brought it to life in that one meeting there downtown at the Board of Trade. And look where we are now.

**Rich Bendis:**           How about that? Well, we'll tell all the listeners where we are now, and we're going to build slowly to get to that. But one of the funny things is that BioHealth Innovation was somewhat formed in the same way. When I came to look at the BioHealth Capital Region, or DMV, as you refer to it, back in 2010 and '11, first thing I did was to do a gap analysis. And it sounds similar to what you did with Connected DMV because as you say, you had a lot of conveners and people holding meetings, but there weren't a lot of implementers. And identifying those gaps that needed to be addressed. So I think it's a very smart way of forming a new organization, especially a non-profit because everybody is dialing for dollars.

0:08:04                   And if you don't have a good mission to sell, you're not going to be able to get people to invest in your mission. So congratulations on getting it launched with an appropriate mission and actually beginning to thrive and grow today.

**Stu Solomon:**           What we're able to do then, because we were working side by side with the board of trade and then those five organizations, we were able to understand the market better before being completely out and independent on our own. And that independence ended up coming pretty fast as a result of COVID. But if you look at Connected DMV and what we're really trying to do here, I liken it--I think in terms of analogies. But think if you had professional baseball without the Major League Baseball organization, without the MLB, and you had teams trying to schedule games with other teams, trying to figure out how ticketing would work, trying to figure out, "Do farm systems play against each other?" trying to figure out what emergency protocols would look like, and every team was doing that on their own.

0:09:02                   And that's really how a lot of the region's organizations work. They've each got their missions, and they're doing them on their own. But nothing was connecting them. So at Connected DMV, we saw that opportunity to say, "Hey, well, if you had an MLB or an International Olympic Committee," think about any of these types of organizations that

pulled the ecosystem together, that really make it function at a higher level but still stay behind the scenes more or less, that's really what we envisioned for Connected DMV.

**Rich Bendis:**

Well, that's a great analogy and it almost also talks about some of the challenges that exist in the district and the administration right now. I mean, there hasn't been a lot of connectivity, and hopefully that's going to change next year. But hopefully your initiative also is--and I'll say our initiative is trying to help address some of those issues. But when you start a new non-profit, you go down one path, and you're going down very nicely, knowing what the initiatives are that you're going to focus on. And then all of a sudden, you can't predict in your plan that a pandemic or COVID-19's going to hit.

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So all of a sudden you're going down your plan in 2019, working with the greater Washington Board of Trade, you have your task forces set up, and then all of a sudden, pandemic hits. What happens then, Stu?

**Stu Solomon:**

Like the rest of us, we all had to reassess. So we did a full pivot to COVID, and we went independent. And so when COVID hit, we said, "All hands on deck. COVID is going to be the issue of the day for quite some time." We separated completely, became a fully independent 501(c)(3) on April 1 of 2020 and created Connected DMV as a standalone 501(c)(3). And we created a COVID-19 Strategic Renewal Task Force. And so that happened when COVID hit. We put that machinery in place. The five partners we had been working with that I listed previously came together with us, and we built out this Strategic Renewal Task Force.

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**Rich Bendis:**

I'd love to talk about the Strategic Renewal Task Force, but do you have any problems with starting on April Fool's Day?

**Stu Solomon:**

It kind of went along with COVID, I tell you. We were all thrown for a loop. But it's really interesting, Rich, because all the work that we had put into building the model on how to make a region operate well, when COVID hit, it became immediately time to exercise that. And what we found ever since is that the model we built is being proven out here during this COVID time. And we weren't looking for a crisis, but the fact that we had one really allowed us to accelerate and build this model.

**Rich Bendis:** Let's talk about names again. You said you formed a Strategic Renewal Task Force. So what does that mean?

**Stu Solomon:** Yeah, well what it means is that with COVID, we believed that it was going to take a regional response. A bunch of local responses would not get the job done. And that if the region could band together, that would be required for us to address appropriately what was happening with COVID.

0:12:04 But I'll say on top of that, strategically, we looked at it and said, "The local jurisdictions, the government, many organizations were going to address the immediate issues around reopening." And that was going to be very consuming for the region at large and all the pieces that make it up. And we really needed to focus our attention more so on long term strategic items. Because our objective was to make sure that the region didn't end up right back where we started, but that we come out at a different place when we eventually get our way out of this. That meant taking a longer term focus and perspective, and it also meant that we needed to turn down a number of opportunities for the immediate issues that needed to be addressed and support our local governments and other organizations in pursuing those.

**Rich Bendis:** And how many members of the task force were there, and how did you select them?

**Stu Solomon:** There are 51 members on the task force.

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**Rich Bendis:** Wow.

**Stu Solomon:** Which continues today. It's a large group, as you well know. And so the task force, basically, they were selected through Connected DMV with our five partners. And we took a look at--we basically said, "We need the federal government to participate, we need state government, we need local government to participate in this task force. We also need industry. We need the non-profit world to participate." We wanted the task force to be truly representative of the community here in greater Washington. So we put those 51 members together to reflect and represent the entire region. Now, the strategic element, really strategic element in how we formed the group was we went to the leaders of the regional

organizations. So think Board of Trade, and the Council of Governments, and the Consortium of Universities, and the Northern Virginia Chamber, and the Economic Club of Washington. Basically, we got the CEOs of 16 of those regional organizations to be 16 of the 51 members.

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And I think that was one of the best and most fortunate things that we did because they also brought leverage into their membership. And so, Rich, with you from BioHealth Innovation representing the entire industry on this task force, basically, you made sure that you brought the interest of your industry at large to the strategic renewal of the region. And as we'll talk in a little bit, I'm sure that led to some very specific strategic initiatives for the task force to evaluate.

**Rich Bendis:**

Thank you for inviting me to participate, and I've found that it's been a very excellent process in the manner in which it's been functioning. And the thing that's very unique is a lot of the people who are leaders, doing what they do in the same region, had never met one another before. And one of the greatest goals and outcomes from this task force is connecting people together, which is part of your name, and finding ways to leverage and partner with resources, and organizations, and networks that had never done it before.

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I just think that that's really one of the indirect benefits for what you have created, Stu.

**Stu Solomon:**

It's really neat to see those 51 people together. And we meet every month. So we've had six meetings this year. The rest of the year, we're taking a hiatus and starting again in January on an every other month cycle. But it's been a great group, and it's been great to watch them share with each other.

**Rich Bendis:**

And then as you talk about coming out of the pandemic, the group would meet, talk about things that were important to the region, challenges and problems that were occurring today as well as opportunities to improve for the future. And members of the task force had to be champions to present things that they thought the task force would buy in. Do you want to talk about that process, and sort of some of the initiatives that had been proposed by your task force members, and what sort of the democratic process was in deciding what to support and back?

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**Stu Solomon:** It's been a real fun process. But what we did, for each meeting, we would invite outside speakers. And, really, a part of that was to help educate and stimulate a discussion. So we had folks like David Rubenstein from the Economic Club come and talk about economics. We had folks like Fred Maxik, Chief Engineer, come and talk about some of the safe workspace type of solutions that could be provided. And every meeting, we basically brought outsiders to speak. But in the very first meeting, we asked the task force to give us their priorities. And so the 51 task force members gave the Connected DMV team a set of priorities. We took those priorities, and then throughout the course of the six months of meetings, the Connected DMV team would use those priorities to establish strategic initiatives, to define them, to frame them out and work with task force members, and what we call solution groups within Connected DMVs and the network here broadly across the region to put these strategic initiatives together.

0:17:13 Then we would bring them back to the task force, and they would get presented to the task force. The task force would deliberate on those, and then we had a nice little cell phone voting machine process, and we would ask the task force members to vote on each initiative. And we imposed a very high hurdle rate for an initiative to pass. And to date, we have passed 12 strategic initiatives for this region. The intent is to continue to bring more. But I'd say those initiatives are very much targeted at long-term renewal, and they're targeted at economic growth and social equity. And we believe those two things must go together.

**Rich Bendis:** And then with 12 that have been approved, it sounds like a big number. I would imagine they vary in magnitude and dimension, having different weights or impacts.

0:18:06 So talk a little bit about some of those that have been approved and are actually underway right now, and then we'll focus on some of the larger ones that require greater support.

**Stu Solomon:** Yeah, some really good creativity from the folks in putting these together. But one of the ones we approved fairly early is called Regional Resilience Exercises. And so the observation was made that our region is unprepared for unexpected events, whether they're natural or man-made, whatever they might be. There's a lot of good emergency preparedness that goes on, but a lot of it's happened in silos. A lot of that



emergency preparedness might be state and local government-oriented, or industry might do their thing, or the feds might do something. But we really didn't have an integrated resilience capability here in the region to speak of. And so we said, "Well, let's establish a set of ongoing exercises for resilience."

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And that would happen once or twice a year, where we would bring the region together to do an exercise on a particular topic. Let me give a quick example on that because we just conducted the first resilience exercise. So the recommendation was passed a few months ago. We've already had the first exercise on that. And Ron Amuthiya [0:19:24] from Capital Area Food Bank was a task force champion for resilience exercises. And our first exercise, again, just conducted, was about food insecurity. So when COVID hit, the supply chain, the workforce, many parts of the supply chain broke down so that the needy in our region that were dependent on food getting distributed to them were unable to get it. So this set of resilience exercises said, "How can we make sure that doesn't happen again?" And so we just looked at the critical supply chain issues and brought the region together with the fed, state, local, and leaders in this space, and they hashed it out and had a great exercise.

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And we'll publish the findings of that shortly. But that's an example of a more near-term, more limited scope case-by-case set of exercises.

**Rich Bendis:**

And while we don't have time to go through all 12 initiatives on this *BioTalk* today, I think one of the things we do want to focus on are those things that are direct related to this COVID-19 pandemic, having much longer implications and things that we can be more proactive about in the future. And by the way, we're talking with Stu Solomon, who's the president and CEO of Connected DMV. So, Stu, let's talk about the one that you and I have been working on most closely together. And it's when we identified the challenges associated with COVID-19 and some of the problems around this pandemic, and what could be done for the future. Why don't you talk a little bit about how the initiative we're working on evolved?

**Stu Solomon:**

Again, thank you, Rich, for being the champion in BioHealth Innovation, kind of helping lead the charge on this Global Pandemic Prevention and Biodefense Center.

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**Rich Bendis:** That's a mouthful.

**Stu Solomon:** That's a mouthful. So we're working on the branding a little bit for that, but again, what we found is we talked to some of the medical experts in the task force, we talked to others as well, and what the scientific community also came back with as well as industry was that, "Hey, we can actually get in front of pandemics now. You can actually prevent them." And for many good and valid reasons, a lot's been left on the table in that space up until now. And so when we looked at this, we said, "Well, if you were to prevent a pandemic in the future, what would you need to do?" One, you would certainly need the appropriate medical solutions to go with it. But you would also need the ecosystem to be working together. And as we looked at how the ecosystem on some of these broader health and medical solutions work, a lot of it is bilateral.

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NIH plays certainly an important role in coordination across multiple entities and lots of the federal organizations and agencies do. Industries have their associations that do a really good job at this as well. But when we started not he front end of that value chain, starting with global policy, and follow it all the way through the clinical trials, and the manufacturing distribution, and all the way through to how state and local governments are implemented and how the communities are impacted, it looked to us broadly that the ecosystem needed to be brought together. So the initiative for this pandemic center is as much about bringing that ecosystem together so that we can accelerate, we can go faster, and we can get better solutions, but also we wanted to be initiatives-based. And so this pandemic center is not, I would say, just another center in the sense that it's going to study, evaluate, publish and the like, but that it's going to be a mechanism to help deliver strategic initiatives.

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So that first strategic initiative for the center, we've only defined one strategic initiative within that because we want to limit the scope to that. And the first one that we defined is called Ahead 100. And Ahead 100 calls for the development of monoclonal antibodies for the world's top 100 known pathogens with the belief that if we create those, we would be well on the way towards being able to have the appropriate solutions in the medical community's hands to distribute.

**Rich Bendis:** And talk about the evolution of Ahead 100 and why that became the first initiative. And I think one of the other things that's important, maybe before you talk about that, is that in doing part of the research for the creation of a potential center, you have to look and see what the landscape had of existing centers or initiatives that already existed and find that there had been a gap that needed to be filled that wasn't being filled by somebody else.

0:24:02 So we heard about CEPI, we heard about the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense, we heard about NIAID BARDA, DARPA, everybody else doing all of these things. But what did you find was the missing ingredient by doing this analysis of all of these initiatives, Stu?

**Stu Solomon:** When we sat down to try to make sense of this and put it together, when we sat down with you, with BioHealth Innovation, we talked to Marty also over at the Maryland Tech Council and a variety of others, we noticed that the ecosystem really needed to come together. But there was no better place in the world to do this than greater Washington. All of the assets are here, and we also have reach into the global community from here like no one else on the planet would have. And so the region had the assets in place. And so I think, Rich, all of the components were here that we needed to be able to do this.

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah, and to pick up on that, basically, when you have the regulatory body as well as the major research body in the world with NIH, and you have HHS from a policy perspective, you have BARDA, you have DARPA, you have, NIAID, you have 2,300 BioHealth companies.

0:25:15 And if you look at the Warp Speed funding, 40% of the Warp Speed funding is going into one county in the United States, which is Montgomery County, Maryland, which is right up the road, the center of our BioHealth Capital Region. So it is amazing for people to understand that we are the epicenter and the only appropriate place that you could actually form a Global Pandemic Prevention and Biodefense Center that makes sense, really, Stu.

**Stu Solomon:** And I think, Rich, as you presented and the team presented to the task force, I think many were blown away just to see how rich the capability set was here. And I can say we've already entered into a collaboration

agreement with the University System of Maryland on this. They've got tremendous capabilities around this.

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And so they're with BioHealth Innovation and others. But they're a lead academic partner in this as well.

**Rich Bendis:**

And we'll talk more about existing and future partners in a second. But let's digress because you were starting to talk a little bit about Ahead 100. I went off track a little bit to talk a little more background. But with the first initiative of Ahead 100 and a preeminent researcher and scientist, Dr. James Crowe from Vanderbilt University, who has actually been one of the creators of Ahead 100, it is something that seems to have resonated when you talk about this with the potential partners or collaborators on the pandemic center that they can get their hands around and understand that this is a need that we need to proactively go after. So you might want to talk a little bit more about Ahead 100 for the listeners, Stu.

**Stu Solomon:**

You bet. And so, with Ahead 100, the founder is Dr. James Crowe. And this was his idea. He's had the idea of Ahead 100, he's been working on this for some time.

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And basically it, to date, had not received the funding and the support to take it forward. Dr. Crowe runs the vaccine labs down at Vanderbilt University, he's one of the top immunologists in the world, he does a lot of work with the federal government, and he gets called in as an expert specialist on a variety of different topics, whether it be Ebola outbreak or other items like that.

**Rich Bendis:**

As well as working with companies in our backyard.

**Stu Solomon:**

Absolutely. So he's an NIH fellow. He's kind of through and through, his origins there at NIH and...

**Rich Bendis:**

AstraZeneca.

**Stu Solomon:**

Worked with AstraZeneca and MedImmune back in the day and certainly knows this region incredibly well. And when we talked with him about Ahead 100, he was in complete agreement that this ought to be done right here in greater Washington. This was the appropriate place to do this. And so we invited Dr. Crowe to speak to the task force.

- 0:28:00 He did. He presented the case for antibodies, and there's a lot of emphasis right now on vaccines, and appropriately so. Antibodies, I think we all know that President Trump received an injection of antibodies. The antibodies Dr. Crowe created are in--and I won't list whose solutions they're in, but they're in multiple of the solutions out there for COVID antibodies right now. And so with Dr. Crowe, we basically decided that that would be the strategic focus of this Global Pandemic Prevention and Biodefense Center would be first on the development of these monoclonal antibodies. Now, when we decided that, you kind of say, "Well, if you were to develop the medical solution for this, wouldn't that be expensive?" And the answer is yes. And so we looked at that and said, "Well, if you were to take it up through phase 1 clinical trials for the top 100, it would cost about \$2 billion to do so. If you were to complete it all the way out, the expense would go up dramatically.
- 0:29:00 So if we could get up to the end of phase 1, then you're just weeks away from having a solution that can be in hand versus what's going to be a year-plus for the population here today with the vaccine."
- Rich Bendis:** So the benefit to that is you basically have a stockpile of antibodies once you've completed this, not knowing which pandemic's going to hit next. But rather than starting from ground zero, you're already sitting there with a phase 1 clinical trial completed.
- Stu Solomon:** Exactly. And so you've got a national stockpile of antibodies available. And is it possible that you didn't get the right one? Yes, it's possible. But it's far more possible that you did. And when we looked, Rich, at the loss of life and the economic harm from COVID-19, I mean, economically, we're, what, \$15 trillion globally into this? And to think about a \$2 billion expenditure to get monoclonal antibodies created, that's not even a rounding error in what's happened to the global economy.
- 0:30:00 And I think part of the challenge is, if we don't do it now, societies tend to have short memories. So we really do need to seize on this and make this happen right now while people will directly understand the importance of getting these solutions.
- Rich Bendis:** And in order to put an appropriate plan together and educate more people about this initiative as well as the center, you just don't go with creating the center's name and then go raise \$2 billion. There's some

interim steps that you have to go through in the formation of a new center, just like a new non-profit. So talk about where you are with the current status and what the current steps are and the next steps that need to occur with the Global Pandemic Prevention and Biodefense Center.

**Stu Solomon:**

Well, what we did at Connected DMV is we laid out a six-month strategy to develop this center and the Ahead 100 program. And we're, right now, funding that strategy. The strategy to compete it will cost a couple million dollars, and we're raising money both from industry, and from government, and from the non-profit world to fund that first \$2 million.

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The vision long term on the \$2 billion is that half of that would be funded by government, and half of that would be funded by philanthropy. And that, I think, creates the right balance, we believe that creates the right balance to actually get this done and get it done well. But the first phase is a \$2 million, six-month strategy phase, and we've got partners coming to help us with that. We've not raised all the funds yet, but we're generating good interest, and we've got some good initial commitments, both from governments as well as major global philanthropists providing some money. And so a lot of people wanting to help. We've started to talk to industry, and I think the benefit to industry is huge. And to the extent that your members are interested, we'd certainly like to talk with them.

**Rich Bendis:**

We're talking to all of them, Stu, as you know, and had several meetings. We're waiting for them to pull the trigger. But for those people who are hearing about this for the first time that would have more interest, and we're not going to close this conversation yet, but might as well insert how they could contact you to get more information about getting involved in this initiative and potentially being a funder for this strategic planning phase.

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So how would they contact you?

**Stu Solomon:**

So you can contact us directly at [ConnectedDMV.org](http://ConnectedDMV.org), and you can reach out to us directly through our website there. And you can also send me an email directly if you'd like to [StuSolomon@ConnectedDMV.org](mailto:StuSolomon@ConnectedDMV.org). So you can do that, but you've also got another great avenue with BioHealth Innovation with Rich is the champion on the task force. So if you're

having trouble getting in touch with us, please reach out to Rich. We work together every day on this.

**Rich Bendis:** Thank you, Stu. You're right, it's something that has become a daily adventure, talking to Stu. I can't really close my day until I've had my Stu moment.

0:33:00 But while you're doing the fundraising and putting some of this planning together, another important element right now is assembling a world-class steering committee that would be involved with the governments of this center. You want to talk a little bit about the progress on the steering committee and the types of members you're soliciting?

**Stu Solomon:** We want to have formal governance on this that eventually will be its own governing body. So we're creating a steering committee for the first phase to put governance in place. That steering committee is going to be comprised of leaders from industry, from academia, from government, from the community. So those four sectors will all be represented on the steering committee. We've also got some global leaders that are going to participate. This is a global center, and so we'll have global interests represented. We're also making sure that we've got kind of the biodefense sector represented very well on the steering committee because that whole intersection, if you're the one impacted by it, you don't really necessarily care if it was man-made or if it was natural.

0:34:08 You need the protection. You need the solution. And so we think it's really important that both of them be represented, as well.

**Rich Bendis:** And while it's premature to publicly announce some of the individuals who have committed or who are on that short list, it is impressive to see the names that are being put forward or those who have already committed. And I know that you're looking to have your initial steering committee meeting sometime in the next couple weeks, once we get a good cadre of initial steering committee members committed.

**Stu Solomon:** That's right. We're two weeks out from the first steering committee. And the steering committee won't be completely full. We don't really want it to be completely full by that first meeting. But we've got the right core basically coming together for that first steering committee meeting, and we'll continue to fill that out.

0:35:00 We're also building an advisory committee, and that allows a number of others to participate that might have limitations on participating otherwise, especially from the federal government side.

**Rich Bendis:** Especially if they have to vote on things that relate to funding or things that may relate to their specific institution or agency. I don't want to confuse the listeners, but there's something almost equally important but not as dramatic today as the pandemic that you're also engaged in through the connected DMV Strategic Renewal Task Force. And there is some talk about a quantum computing innovation center for this region, as well. Would you like to have a very brief introduction on that, Stu? Because there's a corollary of how those two need to interact with one another.

**Stu Solomon:** That's right. So yes, we do have a strategic initiative that's been passed to create a national quantum computing center here in greater Washington.

0:36:00 The federal government is on an accelerated path to make the US [0:36:02] in this space. Industry's beginning to come together in this space. We need the ecosystem to cooperate if we're going to be a global leader in quantum computing. And life sciences use cases are right in the middle of that. And so yes, kind of like the pandemic center, we've got this quantum center that we're in the middle of building out, and we've got a tremendous group of leaders coming together for that. We're equally excited about that.

**Rich Bendis:** We both know what it's like to raise money for non-profits, but isn't it interesting to raise money for 12 initiatives plus your non-profit at the same time?

**Stu Solomon:** Interesting's not the word I would use. I spent my life in the corporate world, and really, fundraising isn't how we spent our time there. And it's interesting, there is a lot of money out there to do good things for society, and finding the right way to tell the story to the people that have that money continues to be good, hard work for the team.

0:37:00

**Rich Bendis:** This is one thing that we're never, ever going to be able to cover everything that's relevant to either a pandemic center or a quantum center in one podcast. And I think that what we're going to have to do is



develop a little regular series for the listeners to keep updating them because of the magnitude of this initiative. I mean, when you're talking about a multi-billion-dollar center, it's going to take a lot of horses to bring that together. And I think one of the things that we should clarify for the listeners is the center isn't the one who will actually be doing the research on all of this antibodies to get them to a phase 1. And there was a little confusion when we introduced this at first because of people thinking about a conflict of interest, and who's in control, who's getting the money? And I guess the important thing for people to understand is, the center is going to be an intermediary to help connect people to the most appropriate resources who can do the best work and leverage their knowledge, their resources, their assets rather than duplicating them.

0:38:03

And the center doesn't have to be in control of everything. It just needs to be in control of who is the best to do the work that needs to be done.

**Stu Solomon:**

Think of the center as really driving the ecosystem and putting structure around the strategic program to making it happen. But the work is going to be done by the institutions, companies, organizations, governments that do their thing to build antibodies.

**Rich Bendis:**

Super. Well, I know we could go on and talk a lot more about this, but we generally try to keep these to about 30 minutes. And also, we're getting close to the end of the year, and this is one that I know your year isn't ending, my year's not ending. We have another four weeks or X number of days to get a number of things done that are on the milestone list that have to be accomplished. So I'm going to give you an open mic right now, Stu. Is there anything that you would like to tell our listeners related to Connected DMV, the pandemic center, or any other things that you're working on that you'd like to enlighten them before we close?

0:39:05

**Stu Solomon:**

We've had our eyes opened in diving into this to realize just how deep and rich the asset base is here in this space, in this region. And so Montgomery County and the broader region, like no place else in the world, can do this. And so we can include the others as part of that and plan to. But really, we want the participation, we want the ecosystem to come together. And for those that are so inclined to want to help us make this happen financially, you can give on our website, you can call

Rich, you can call me. But we would like to be spending the majority of our time doing the work and raising the funds is part of that. We understand that. But for those of you that are interested in doing that, we certainly appreciate it. And then we need the creativity also from these groups. As we begin to put the center together and build it out, there's all kinds of innovation that's constantly going on, and we want to make sure that we've got the latest and greatest innovation front and center in front of the people responsible for this center to make sure that we're making forward-looking decisions, not just doing things as we've always done them in the past.

0:40:14

That's the other big way I think that this group can help.

**Rich Bendis:**

Well, I think one of the indirect benefits or unintended consequences of this pandemic is, there's a lot of people that didn't know about the DMV or BioHealth Capital Region until this hit, and then they recognized all of these major assets we had within our region. So we have established a goal to be a top-three BioHealth and BioPharma region by 2023. By creating this center, we think that that can help accelerate that and get us the global recognition and national recognition that is deserved for all those people, entrepreneurs, scientists, researchers, institutions that are doing all this quality work that has gone unnoticed in the past. So I think we have a common goal now. You're going to help me achieve our goal of becoming a top-three by 2023, and I'm going to try to help you get this pandemic center formed.

0:41:06

So we have a dual mission, but they overlap, and ultimately, the goal is similar for what we both want to achieve.

**Stu Solomon:**

A perfect combination.

**Rich Bendis:**

Thank you.

**Stu Solomon:**

And our team thanks you.

**Rich Bendis:**

No, we thank you for doing God's work, Stu, because this non-profit work, sometimes people don't understand how difficult it is and how it takes people who are willing to personally sacrifice in order to get it done. So we've been speaking with Stu Solomon, who's the president and CEO of Connected DMV, also leading the charge to create a Global Pandemic Prevention and Biodefense Center here in the DMV and

BioHealth Capital Region. We wish him the best of luck. We're going to bring him back on a regular basis so we can get updates as to how this is progressing. So, Stu, thanks for being on *BioTalk*.

**Stu Solomon:** Thank you, Rich.

**Narrator:** Thanks for listening to *BioTalk* with Rich Bendis.

**End of recording**