

postscript

by Frances Edstrom, columnist

A better solution for disinformation

When it first became evident that the internet and its social media would be used for political and personal opinions unfettered by the same strictures that are imposed on TV, radio, and newspapers, I was understandably displeased.

The rest of the media, on the other hand, can and is often successfully sued for doing the same thing that is protected by our government for the internet. Not fair!

As a result, in addition to the reasonable and decent people who express their opinions and show you what they are eating and pictures of their children and grandchildren, all the crazies have parked themselves on Facebook and Twitter.

They feel free to disseminate their wacky far-right and far-left ideas and get the same recognition and lack of scrutiny as the rest. It used to be that such ideas were relegated to news sources that we in the mainstream recognized as on the fringes of political thought.

How did we get from having a fairly well modulated political discourse to where we are now, in 2022, where the Department of Homeland Security has instituted a "Disinformation Governance Board"?

Most of us cringe when we hear that the government has a "disinformation board." It smacks of stories by Kafka and Orwell, and feels like a direct threat to freedom of speech.

Isn't there a better way to tamp down the rhetoric than to involve the government in deciding which of us is spouting "disinformation" that threatens our national security?

If we examine the roots of the perceived problem, we may be able to find the cure.

I sat in on a panel discussion of the media and disinformation at the LA Times Book Fair. One of the panelists said that "the past is unpredictable" and that "history is being rewritten every day." Why is that?

First, I think, is the change in public education over the years since the advent of the internet and social media. Schools began to slowly erode their English curriculum, dropping such things as teaching grammar in order to allow time to teach kids the computer. (As if! Kids could teach the teachers and often did.)

When spellcheck was invented, why teach spelling? When reading could be done online, why have books? Why have newspa-

pers? Why have libraries? On another panel of which I was a member, a teacher from northern Minnesota said that in his school district, kids graduate having never read an entire book.

Our education systems have abandoned teaching reading fiction and non-fiction and the ability to read critically. It has for the most part abandoned teaching Civics, which explain the First Amendment and the U.S. promise of freedom of speech.

Secondly, faced with the newspaper-killing internet, mainstream newspapers began to change the way they presented news. Commentary and journalism are indistinguishable. Rather than keeping editorial opinion on the opinion pages, it was moved to the front page to offer provocative headlines to prospective paper buyers.

Together, these practices have produced a generation of readers who cannot separate well-researched stories from the preposterous ramblings from the fringes.

Is instituting a government board to decide what is disinformation, and do something about it that has not yet been made clear, the way to combat this problem? Can a disinformation board promise no infringement on free speech?

Rather, I propose that a triple-front attack on the problem be instituted.

One, rewrite the Communications Decency Act, 47 U.S.C. § 230, which provides immunity to providers of interactive computer services, including social media providers, both for certain decisions to host content created by others and for actions taken "voluntarily" and "in good faith" to restrict access to "objectionable" material.

Secondly, encourage the return of public education in the U.S. to teaching our children to be discerning readers. Demand that they give students the tools to decide how to know truth from fiction.

Third, mainstream media (especially New York Times and Washington Post) return to a journalism free of the writer's opinion, giving the reader a chance to decide what events mean to their way of life and to world peace.

The problem is one that cannot be cured overnight. But it can be cured.



guest column

by Erik Sievers, executive director, Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

May has been observed as Mental Health Awareness Month in the United States since 1949. It has never been more important than now to recognize that mental health is an essential component to one's overall health and well-being and that mental illnesses are common and treatable. We all have an opportunity to learn ways to recognize when others (or ourselves) are struggling with their mental well-being. We can be the difference in the health of others.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, mental illnesses are commonplace, with nearly one in five adults and one in six youth in America living with a mental illness each year. It is that estimated 17.3 million adults in the United States experience at least one major depressive episode and 31.1 percent of adults will experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives. Approximately 50 percent of all lifetime mental illnesses begins by age 14, and 75 percent by age 24. It affects many people in our country, and we have to do better in how we provide hope and recovery.

A number of factors create challenges when someone wants or reaches out for help, and getting what they need, when they need it the most. The average delay between onset of mental illness symptoms and treatment is 11 years. Someone on the average suffers for 11 years before getting help! The combinations of lack

of awareness, poor/inadequate screening, social determinants of health (people having to make the choice between health care and food or housing), limited or no insurance, and lack of providers all negatively affects someone getting help timely. It all affects someone getting mental health care and in a manner that best meets his or her unique needs. This is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but we can start as a society with learning and becoming more aware of the emotional well-being (health) of others. We all are in some way impacted by untreated mental illness. Many rely on all of us to do better to increase access to care and help those in need of care to improve their mental health.

Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center is one of many options people have in the area for mental health and substance use disorder services and supports. The various agencies, services, and supports available is there to serve others. All of us have an important role in supporting others who may be struggling with their mental health. All of us need to make it ok to get help when someone has the need to reach out to others. We collectively can reduce and end the stigma related to mental health treatment. Help is always available through Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center's 24/7 mental health crisis response program at 1-844-274-7472. Be the difference in the lives of others.



letters

What is wrong with this picture?

From: Kent Mason
Winona

First the city sells the Madison school property, then turns around and buys a quarter of the block back for initially the same price that they sold it for. Therefore the buyer technically got the land for almost free. (Where's the new playground?) Then they tried to shove a three-lane

Broadway project down our throats for bike safety, when the city already paid for a bike path down Seventh Street (an even safer route). Then we don't even get a vote on the Mankato Avenue project. (I would have loved to see the outcome of that!)

They let the Central school block go as well, and the owners gave the city another opportunity to buy that back, which the city failed to do. Wouldn't that have been a perfect spot for a senior citizen center? It's centrally located with a big parking lot.

The city had land purchased next to the fire department for an expansion and now

they want to build housing on it. Isn't a fire department more important than housing? And now they want to mess up the East End Rec Center with a combined police/fire station/rec. center and raise our taxes to do so.

What's wrong with expanding on the property that the fire department sits on now and what's wrong with expanding on the property that the police station currently owns? And please leave the East End Rec. Center alone. It was built for family enjoyment and for a safe, monitored place for our children to have fun.

What McCarthy's duplicity says about GOP

From: Steve Schild
Winona

The ugly, undeniable truth about today's Republican Party is that telling the truth gets Republicans in trouble with other Republicans. Trying to lie your way out of it, though, is just fine, even when the bail-out lie is laughable because there's proof of the

lie.

That's the Kevin McCarthy saga in a nutshell. McCarthy, Republican Speaker of the U.S. House, is caught in a recorded conversation saying Donald Trump "bears responsibility for his words and actions" leading to the Jan. 6 mob attack on the U.S. Capitol — "no ifs, ands or buts." McCarthy now denies saying that about Trump, fearing to fall out of favor with the Republican base.

McCarthy's ludicrous denial caused him no trouble with fellow Republicans, the New York Times reports, because the "greater danger for Mr. McCarthy . . . was the truth . . . that he might invite the ire" of

Trump, "who maintains a stranglehold on the party."

Some Trump loyalists will try to slide off the hook by calling it fake news — trying to cover one lie with another — but the recording speaks for itself.

Any Republican at the local, state or national level who does not loudly and publicly condemn such contempt for honesty is just as guilty, just as dangerous, as Trump and his McCarthy-like toadies.



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letters

Carbon fee and dividend: An effective transition from fossil fuels

From: Robert Tereba
Winona

On April 27 the College Democrats of WSU held a DFL Candidates' Forum for the vacant Congressional District 1 seat most recently held by the late Jim Hagedorn. The candidates included Jeff Ettinger, Sarah Brakebill-Hacke, Richard W. Painter, Rick DeVoe, and a spokesperson for Candice Deal-Bartell. Each candidate responded to a series of questions, one of which involved what government policies they would support to combat climate change.

Responses largely centered on government incentives that would spur businesses to transition to renewable energy and promote more private research and investment in sustainable and renewable energy (including wind and solar), the production and purchase of electric vehicles, the use of regenerative farming practices in agriculture, and weatherizing and rehabilitating buildings to make them more energy efficient.

These are all important steps to take to significantly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, i.e., primarily carbon dioxide and methane generated by burning fossil fuels. None of the candidates described exactly what form those incentives would take. (In fairness to them, they each had only two minutes to respond to the question.)

The absolute best way to incentivize those steps, as well as numerous other ones, is to price carbon and remit the funds each month to U.S. households in the form of a carbon cashback dividend. Pricing carbon will motivate every business, non-profit, agency, association, institution, and consumer to reduce their use of energy derived from burning fossil fuels and transition to sustainable and renewable energy sources. It would motivate all sectors of our economy and all consumers.

This comprehensive approach doesn't grow the size of government. It doesn't pick winners or losers among the various renewable energy sources. It promotes our nation's security and energy independence, and it grows our economy through new investment, new businesses, and new jobs. It incentivizes carbon capture and sequestration in our farming and forestry practices which will promote soil health and resiliency.

Carbon fee and dividend motivates change quickly compared to government regulations and mandates that take a long time to promulgate and implement, are potentially subject to prolonged litigation, and can fluctuate with changes in administration within the executive branch of our government. Carbon fee and dividend sends a clear signal to our markets that transformational change in how we produce energy is here and we're not going back.

So contact Senators Klobuchar and Smith, President Biden, and whoever are the nominees for the First Congressional District seat and tell them to include carbon fee and dividend language in legislation designed to combat climate change. You can learn more about this approach by visiting www.citizensclimatelobby.org

Prioritizing police over children

From: John Campbell

Regarding the Winona City Council proposal to merge the police department with the East Side Rec Center, let us not forget one basic geographical fact of this proposal: that the police department will be moved onto space and land until now reserved unambiguously for children and families.

Let me repeat this geographical fact: This proposal has the police permanently invading and taking over space/land reserved for children.

Is this what we want in our town: favoring the spatial needs of cops over the spatial needs of children?

What kind of town privileges such a perverse priority of cops over children?

Not ours, I hope.

Please urge the council to stop the proposal and to keep the East Side Rec Center as protected land for children.

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