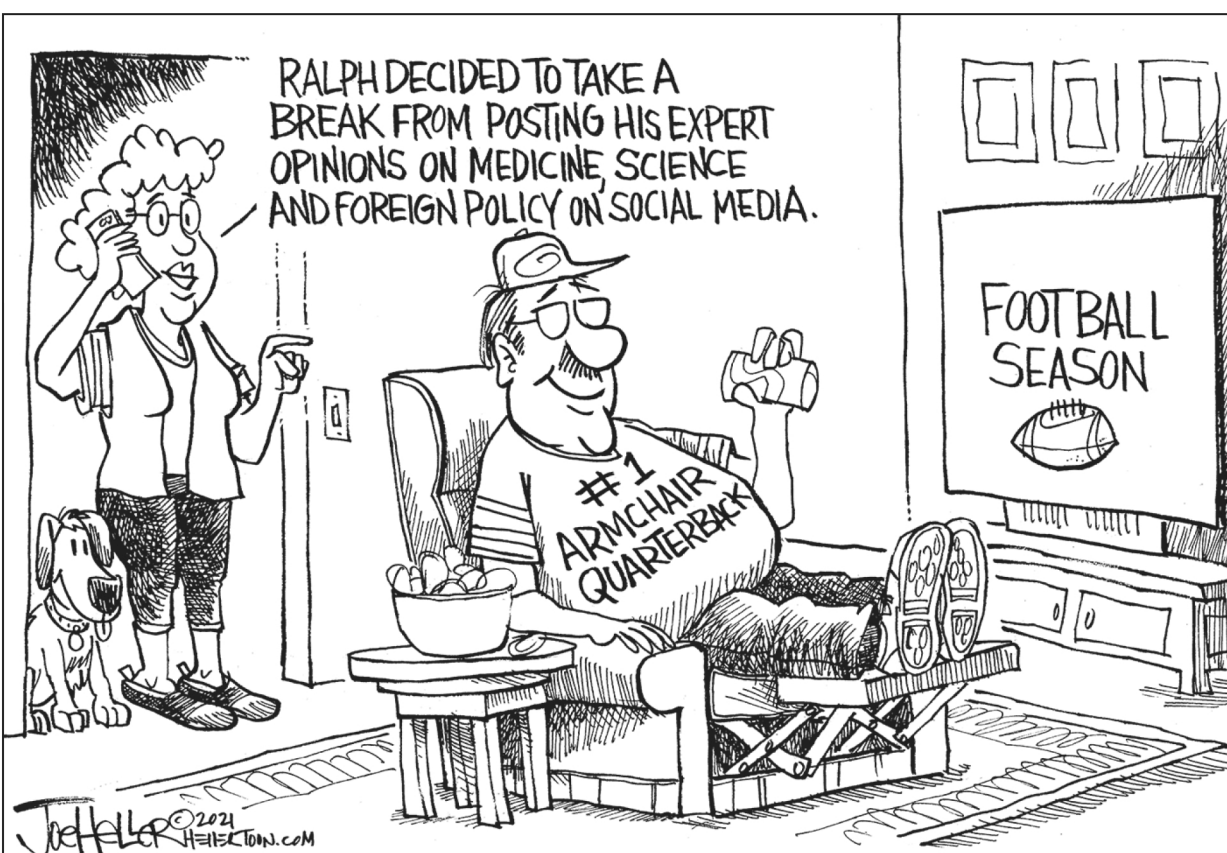


Opinion



Shop Local - It Helps Workers

Business and corporations, executives and marketers say it so often you hardly notice it anymore - like "Have a nice day."

But the fortunes of those most important assets - American workers - have stagnated for decades. And now, as Labor Day 2021 approaches in the midst of a continuing pandemic, worker shortages are headline news.

It's possible those two facts are related.

Much has been said about the reasons for the current workforce crisis. Some say too-generous unemployment benefits are keeping workers home. Others point to a child-care crisis that was already crippling, then was exacerbated by the pandemic. Some speculate that the COVID-19 risk to themselves or vulnerable loved

ones is keeping some workers on the sidelines. Several hundred thousand more American deaths than would normally be expected happened in the past year, some certainly in their working years. Still others speculate that the historic workplace upheaval of the pandemic gave workers a new perspective on their worth and what they want in return for their labor.

The truth of this worker shortage is likely in all of those reasons. And at least one more:

Since the 1970s, American wage gains have fallen behind gains in productivity. Employers, in short, are getting more for their money. Workers are getting relatively less for the fruits of their labor, in terms of wages, retirement benefits and job secu-

urity. What's behind that?

Competition from cheap overseas labor markets is one reason, although the offshoring of American jobs didn't start in earnest until the 1990s. The rise of automation, another common explanation, is a fairly recent phenomenon. So what happened in the 1970s when the wage-stagnation trend emerged? Economic research supports a theory: corporate consolidation or, put another way, labor market concentration.

What that means is this: As the number of employers in a labor market declines (even if the number of jobs stays the same), there is less competition for workers. Companies can hire without raising wages and benefits be-

Shop local See Page 5

Hate Crimes Affects All Of Us

Hate crimes across the country and much of Minnesota are climbing and all of us — no matter where we live, our skin color, ethnicity, religion or gender identity — need to be aware and work to keep the statistics from escalating.

The FBI's recently released annual hate crime report reflected a 6% increase in hate crimes in 2020 compared to the previous year. That adds up to nearly 7,800 criminal incidents known to have been motivated at least in part by bias and is the highest number reported since 2018.

Fortunately, south-central Minnesota saw a dip in reported hate crimes. Last year 11 bias crimes were reported in the area compared to 17 in 2019. (The region includes the counties of Blue Earth, Nicollet, Le Sueur, Waseca, Brown, Sibley, Watonwan and Faribault.)

However, that doesn't mean area residents should pretend that hate crimes don't happen in their backyard. Any such crime is one too many. As Mankato Public Safety Deputy Director Matt DuRose said: "Our community can do much better than the seven that were reported. I would like to see our number as zero, and I think we could get there in the future."

And sometimes low numbers may be too good to be true. The FBI reports have long drawn concern that they significantly underreport hate crimes. Law enforcement agencies are not required to participate and nearly 3,500 departments didn't last year. The fact more than 60 jurisdictions with populations over 100,000 affirmatively reported zero hate crimes is simply not credible, says the Anti-Defamation League.

Minnesota's hate crime reporting system varies from the FBI protocol

a bit so that it had 223 incidents in 2020, which is 29 more than in the federal report. So varying reporting requirements, uneven participation and subjective interpretation by those taking reports can make the reports more unreliable than ideal. But they do, at least, offer a glimpse of what is going on in parts of the country — and in some cases indicate what isn't being acknowledged when no reports are filed year after year.

The country has a long way to go when it comes to eliminating hate crimes. An attack on a Hmong Cultural Center in St. Paul last week was visible proof of that. The words "Life, Liberty, Victory," a phrase associated with a white nationalist hate group, was written on the paint that the vandals applied to cover up Black artwork. And on Friday a threat of violence closed a St. Louis Park synagogue.

Communities need to keep reporting such crimes and set high expectations that law enforcement will take them seriously and report the incidents at both the state and federal levels.

The Free Press - Mankato

Only Love Drives Out Hate

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

Martin Luther King Jr. A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches

A Challenging Time To Trust The News

A Drop of Ink

By Reed Anfinson
Publisher



In these days of bitterly divided politics, we are always looking for lessons on how we can better reach out to our readers to improve their belief that we can be fair and trustworthy.

Generally, community newspapers are the most trusted source of news for their readers when it comes to local reporting. Our stories of the actions of local governments, what is happening in the community, and feature stories are seen as fair and accurate.

It is our editorial pages that can get us in trouble. Not so much when we editorialize on local topics such as a tax levy to support education, or the need for better child care in our communities, or the importance of good healthcare facilities. It is when we touch on national topics such as the fairness of elections, the quality of candidates or political parties, voting rights, or equal rights for all groups of citizens that we run into deep and sometimes bitter divisions.

That is why a recent article published by an organization called "Trusting News" caught our attention.

"At Trusting News, rather than accepting distrust in journalism, we work to better understand it so we can help journalists actively earn trust. We believe healthy

democracies depend on civic dialogue and a shared set of facts. We also believe local news can play an especially important role in bridging conversations across political divides," reporter Lynn Walsh writes in a story about showing how "journalists can connect with conservatives and right-leaning audiences."

Her story was based on a study Trusting News did with the Center for Media Engagement that looked into what is behind distrust in the news and how to address it.

"The research suggests journalists can help bridge the divide between the news media and conservative, right-leaning audiences by listening and building relationships with conservatives in their community, avoiding catch-all labels and over-generalizations, focusing on facts, correcting mistakes, and paying attention to the political beliefs and backgrounds of newsroom staff," she writes.

We know from other surveys and studies we've read that Democrats and those who lean left have a broader trust in a variety of news outlets while those who lean right or identify as Republicans trust few sources.

"And while trust in local news is higher than trust in national news — even among conservatives — local journalists say they feel like they're facing an uphill battle to demonstrate their credibility and ethics," the Walsh writes.

As it gathered the information for their survey, Trusting News and the Center for Media Engagement conducted many in-depth interviews with journalists across the country. Those journalists provided the researchers feedback from their conservative and right-leaning viewers, listeners, and readers on why they distrusted the media.

From what they gathered, they laid out

six "approaches journalists can take to better connect with their conservative and right-leaning audiences:

- Build relationships with people who have conservative and right-leaning viewpoints in your community and listen to them.

- Include a variety of voices from people with conservative and right-leaning views in stories. Journalists should be cautious of using "conservative" or other terms as catch-all labels for people who may have very different beliefs.

- Consider the diversity of political beliefs and backgrounds when hiring for the newsroom.

- Focus on story facts, not interpretation.

- Correct mistakes promptly to demonstrate trustworthiness.

- Don't criticize only one side of an issue. "Some of the journalists who conducted the interviews were surprised to hear the extent to which perceptions of their work were affected by perceptions of the national news they carry," Walsh writes. "But many were not."

We are among this latter group. We have seen the heavy focus in people's lives on watching the national news and following it on social media. That bitter tension that colors national news filters down to the local level. There is little patience, or tolerance, for differing points of view these days on the big national and state topics.

Another theme throughout the interviews was how conservatives see themselves reflected in news stories. Walsh writes that "according to the research, 'multiple interview participants said they felt that media portrayals of conservatives seem to rely on narrow or extreme stereotypes,

which they felt assume conservatives are racist, uneducated, unkind, or only care about money."

This sentiment isn't just the perception of those right of center. Most rural residents feel as if the national media treats us with condescension.

A news director for a Cincinnati television station said that he had heard many news consumers say journalists "paint conservatives all as Trumpers who are racists and bad people." We know many Republicans who did not support Trump but hold fast to their conservative ideals. Even in our local reporting or column writing, we must not fall into the trap of identifying all conservatives or Republicans as identifying with one politician or one particular stand. The same applies to those left of the center. They are not all Sen. Bernie Sanders fans.

The study found that another source of conservative and right-leaning citizen distrust of national and state media based in larger urban areas is that they don't have reporters who live among us.

To understand rural people, their frustrations, their needs, and where they feel the government is letting them down, you have to have writers who live among them.

We can't lay all the blame on the regional metropolitan and East Coast media for a distrust in the news. Awareness that fairness and balance are needed is a challenge even at the local level that we agree must be sought and provided. Another challenge is sifting through all misinformation that spreads so easily and is taken fact by too many. We seek to provide both sides of an issue that informs, not misleads, our readers.

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