

Media literacy was one of the lessons in good citizenship, lessons in living as I called them when first writing my books. The lesson addressed myths, idea laundering, conspiracy theories, the end of expertise, confirmation bias, and how to evaluate news. Little did I realize that now, almost a decade later, how critical that lesson has become for all of us.

There was one issue that I didn't seem to cover adequately then. I focused on issues of misinformation but perhaps overlooked just plain lack of information.

There are three current concerns of mine being covered by both sides of the media, two where filling in the information gaps would be a great help and one where the journalists are doing a good job digging down into the details and addressing solutions. The media might consider giving some more time to them since Elon Musk and Sean "Diddy" Combs are finally used up, and hopefully Jeffery Epstein will be shortly.

First among my main concerns is with the One Big Beautiful Bill act recently passed and relates to 11.8 million needy persons who, according to the CBO, will lose their Medicaid funding in order to help support huge tax cuts for the wealthy. On face value, this is tragic, cruel, and totally unacceptable. However, most of the articles indicate that some of those are able-bodied and will be taken off the rolls because they can't/won't (which is it?) meet the requirement of 20 hours per week working, volunteering or studying. Very few of these articles indicate just how many of those affected fall into this category. Some sources indicate that this could be as many as half of them. Now this still seems unacceptable but not quite so bad. Then again, many opponents of the Big Beautiful Bill claim that the work requirement

carveouts are overly complicated. How complicated can they be? Surely, they can be simplified. Many of you will agree with me that the able-bodied should be required to work, volunteer or study in order to receive benefits even if the application and authorization process is inconvenient. It doesn't relegate them to a second-class identity. Quite the opposite, it affords appropriate dignity to equate them with "us" and not just as "others."

My second main concern, and this also addresses the bill, is the carte blanche give to the \$29.9 billion for ICE enforcement and deportation and \$45 billion for building detention centers with limited specifics on who is to be deported or detained. We were told by Donald Trump and his Border Czar Tom Homan that they would be focusing on the criminal element of immigrants, and many of us assumed that other illegal immigrants in jeopardy, if and when addressed, would be reasonably categorized and given due process as required by law, before being detained and/or deported. But this clearly, based on ICE's goals and actions to date, has not been the case. To me, the most egregious of the ICE actions has been rounding up asylum seekers when they appear for court appointments.

ICE should be required to give us a very detailed breakdown of their deportation goals by refugee status, asylum seekers with court dates, holders of green cards authorized to work, others currently participating in the labor force contributing income and payroll taxes, others with each temporary protected status identified, and a breakdown by length of time since entering the US.

And a reminder to ICE and all of us --- while the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights by itself does not convey specific legal obligations, it forms a basis for the obligations outlined in our immigration law. We protect asylum seekers if already in the US or

arriving at the border if they qualify for asylum by meeting the definition of a refugee --- a person who is unable or unwilling to return to their home country, and cannot obtain protection in that country, due to past persecution or a well-founded fear of being persecuted in the future on account of race religion , nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Remember that, even if someone crosses the U.S. border illegally, they are still eligible to apply for asylum and receive an interview. While illegal entry is a violation of immigration law, it doesn't automatically disqualify someone from seeking asylum. However, changes are being considered, and in some cases now implemented, to bar all those who enter illegally from asylum protection. This would be fine, if we reform our legal entry procedure to accommodate the demand, and if we also include “emergency” carveouts” as appropriate. One way to help accommodate the need could be to train AmeriCorps seniors and other volunteers who wish to perform national service to conduct asylum interviews. Adequate due process shouldn't require the interviews be by those with a law degree.

All that said, regarding the third issue that currently gets my attention, I am pleased that the media is really getting into some of the up to now questionable specifics of the our rivalry with China for world hegemony or, if not hegemony, at least a leadership role. We have gone back and forth over this for some time. China is “catching up” --- or “China has its own problems preventing them from catching up.” It seems that the general consensus now is that China is indeed “catching up”, but the facts that I'm just beginning to accept is that not only have they caught up with us, but they already surpass us in most key technologies.

There were two very disturbing articles on this in The New York Times two weeks ago, one by political and cultural commentator David

Brooks, the other by two economists, MIT professor David Autor and Harvard Kennedy School professor Gordon Hanson. Mr. Brooks says that “Trump Is Good at Competing for Last Place”, the title of his article. He refers to the aftermath of Sputnik when “American leaders understood that a superpower rivalry is as much an intellectual contest as a military and economic one.... So they fought the Soviet threat with education, with the goal of maximizing talent on our side.” Today he says we’re in a second Cold War, the rival now China whose “research and development funding has grown 16-fold since 2000” when they “produced very few broadly cited research papers. Now they produce more ‘high impact’ research papers than Americans do.” This has led to their recent dominance in 57 of 64 key frontier technologies in which just two decades ago we led the way in 60 of them.

But our research is not the only concern. Mr Brooks goes on to express justifiable concern with America’s role in AI. The polling organization Ipsos took a representative sampling from 32 countries and found that those most excited about the prospects for AI were China, South Korea, and Thailand, notably not America. America still retains a lead but China “has a lot of momentum” --- not a good sign for us.

Instead of the called for huge increases in funding for universities supporting scientific research, the Trump administration is withholding funding. “The administration is trying to cut all basic research by a third according to the American Association for the Advancement of Science.”

Above mentioned Professors Autor and Hanson in their article dig further down into Mr. Brooks’s concerns with our diminishing research effort. These two professors first discuss “China Shock 1.0” in the period between 1999 and 2017 when China transitioned to a market economy taking advantage of their huge manufacturing force, now

estimated at 100 million compared with our 13 million, and wreaked havoc on our manufacturing economy. They continue by saying that, while this was inevitable, and there is no going back for us, we can and must reverse a similar trend, “China Shock 2.0” in which they are “aggressively contesting the innovative sectors [where we have] long been the unquestioned leader: aviation, A.I., telecommunications, microprocessors, robotics, nuclear and fusion power, quantum computing, biotech and pharma, and solar batteries.”

Their article cites the same statistics that Mr. Brooks did and also includes a chart comparing the trend of our efforts with China’s in 11 cutting edge fields over the years from 2017 to 2023. Notably, while we led them in 2017 in six of these, including for example quantum computing and advanced integrated circuit design and fabrication, by 2023 they had gained on us in quantum computing and surpassed us in all the other ten categories.

What are we doing to reverse this? Professors Autor and Hanson recommend rather than the trade war in which we are now engaged a coalition with our commercial allies on this, the EU, Japan, Canada, Mexico and Korea. And they offer four core principles with which we may or may not agree, but which are at least a plan on which to build.

First, invite China to establish battery and auto plants in the US, the strong foreign competition encouraging our manufacturers to up their game, just as China did with us over the past decades. We would consider security concerns by simultaneously strengthening our military capabilities in shipbuilding and rare earth metals for example --- second, focus heavily on other strategic capabilities, drones, advanced chips, fusion, biotech and other high tech fields --- third, prioritize only where we can maintain a sustainable competitive advantage --- and fourth, plan ahead by revitalizing trade adjustment assistance to

combat job loss resulting from prioritizing investment in fields that don't promote significant job growth.

I opened the newsletter stressing the importance of reliable sources for our news. All of you are familiar with David Brooks whom I have again quoted. I find him particularly interesting because of his varied background from the very conservative National Review, on to opinion writing for the Wall Street Journal, columns for the New York Times and other well respected publications, as well as his many books including several best sellers on social and political issues.

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