

President's Message

FAKE NEWS

A free press has always been a bulwark of American liberty. Politicians have chafed under its scrutiny, but statesmen have simultaneously realized its indispensability.

The current resident of the White House, arguably neither a politician nor a statesman, routinely ridicules the press. He has repeatedly called the *New York Times* "failing" and lumped it along with the *Washington Post*, CNN, ABC, and NBC as "fake news." He has called out individual reporters covering his rallies to ridicule them. Part of this seems to grow from extreme sensitivity to any sort of criticism, but the overall pattern appears to be an effort to discredit the credibility of the free press.

A powerful tool in Trump's arsenal is the fact that vast amounts of fake news exists. Every day I see false and misleading stories on social media, many of them from purportedly liberal/progressive sources. Tabloids such as the *National Enquirer* have been around for a long time, but never before has a President quoted one as if it were serious news. One of the necessary difficulties of dealing with a totally free press is that the reader, the consumer, of the information must be discerning. The reader cannot simply put all of the media into a single category and expect to find the same amount of objectivity in all of them.

What can the individual citizen do to counter the recent proliferation of fake news? Quite a bit, actually. For example, when you get a post or message that seems false to you, there are ways to check its accuracy. Snopes.com is my favorite of such tools, but there are others including FactCheck.org,

PolitiFact.com, TruthOrFiction.com, HoaxSlayer.com, and several others. When you find that something has been sent you that is false, notify the sender or block the site of origin.

Another action available to the news/information consumer is to be discerning and support media which have a record for veracity. The amount of really fake news that exists works to undermine the credibility of reputable outlets. Several newspapers, though suffering from circulation losses, have solid reporting. Papers such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Wall Street Journal* may publish editorials on their opinion pages that I disagree with (especially the latter!), but I find their reporting to be generally accurate. When one of them makes a mistake, it usually quickly retracts the error. There are several such publications that have earned the public's trust. Subscriptions to most of the papers of this caliber can be obtained online, if getting a print edition is not practical for you. I have a digital subscription to the *New York Times* as well as to *Arkansas Times*, the only statewide liberal voice in Arkansas. The magazine world also provides some thoughtful reporting. *The Economist*, while pricey, provides some excellent reporting as do both *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*.

The airwaves and cable lines contain a huge amount of fake news, but there, too, are many outlets that can be trusted. National Public Radio provides both accurate reporting and reasoned commentary. Public Broadcasting Service provides the exemplary PBS News Hour on a daily basis. With the commercial broadcast and cable outlets, the viewer must select from the choices with a critical eye, but some sound reporting can be found there as well.

