

Eau Claire County Democratic Party Coffee Klatch Notes

Thursday, January 10, 2019

Present: Jeanie Aloia, Marjorie Bunce, Carol Craig (facilitator), Jan Frase, Judy Gatlin, Bonnie Golden, Dave & Debbie Gratz, Carolyn Haar, Ann Heywood, Sharon Hildebrand, Ray Hilficker, Carole Johnson, Pam Lee, Terry Lee, Bob Matthews, Ann McKinley, Linda Norton, Mike O'Brien, Chuck & Connie Russell (recorder), John Sandquist, Chris Satz, Nick Smiar, Liz Spencer, Vic Sorenson, Phil Swanhorst, Kathy Tuttle, Charlie Warner, Pat Williams, Bob Wojnowski, Eleanor Wolf (32)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Next Coffee Klatch: Thursday, January 17, 10 a.m. – 12 Noon; Resource Center, 440 Broadway St.

Next Meeting: Community Coalition for Non-Violence: Thursday, January 24; 1 p.m.; 2516 E. Princeton Ave., Eau Claire (home of Jan and Lou Frase). Join forces with others in this local non-partisan group focusing on addressing the culture of violence in our society. The group is hoping to follow the strategies of [Paul K. Chappelle](#), author of *The Art of Waging Peace*, and a featured speaker at last year's [10 Days of Peace](#) event put on by the [Twin Cities Non-Violent](#) organization. The goal is to help people and communities to develop "muscle" to wage peace with the same intensity and strategic actions we use to wage war. A holistic approach is being envisioned that will address care of the environment, roots of poverty, and treatment of mental illness.

Monthly Meeting & Campaign/Election Debriefing: Tuesday, January 22, 6 p.m. - ??; Resource Center, 440 Broadway St. 6 – 7:30 will be a potluck supper and meeting, followed by a debriefing session with DPW Chair Martha Laning. (This is also the date of Governor Evers' State of the State address.)

Veterans Tribute Trail meetings: The City Parks, Recreation & Forestry Division of the Community Services Department is holding a series of meetings about a proposed memorial in the Forest Street Greenway.

- Thursday, January 10; 6 – 8 p.m., 910 Forest Street – Information session
- Wednesday, January 23, 7 p.m., 910 Forest St. – presentation to the Waterways & Parks Commission
- Monday, February 4, 7 p.m., 721 Oxford Ave., Room 1277 – Plan Commission meeting

Also, citizens can send comments, questions, or concerns to communityservices@eauclairewi.gov, call 715-839-4649 or mail to Community Services, 910 Forest St., Eau Claire, WI 54703.

Community Conversation on Medicare for All: Saturday, Feb. 9; 1 – 3 p.m.; Menomonie Public Library.

Presenter: Dr. Mark Neuman, a pediatrician in critical care at the Gunderson Lutheran Medical Center. Free; open to the public.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Kitty Rahl sent a note thanking everyone who sent condolences to her and her family after the death of her mother.
- Jan Frase has "**Practices for Peace**" buttons available from the Community Coalition for Non-Violence. Wear the buttons in public to prompt conversations about how we can reduce violence in our culture. Violence prevention was rated as a high concern among those completing a community health survey last year.
Related State News: Governor Evers is joining AG Josh Kaul in supporting a "red flag" (or Extreme Risk Protection) law allowing judges to take firearms away from people determined to be a threat to themselves or others. Thirteen states already have some version of such a law.
- **Terry Lee** introduced himself. He is running for Board Chair of the Town of Brunswick, a position held in the past by State Senator Jeff Smith. He will be emphasizing transparency in government in his campaign.

RECOMMENDED READING/LISTENING

Book: ***Without You, There is No Us*** by Suki Kim (2014).

A memoir of teaching English to the sons of North Korea's ruling class during the last six months of Kim Jong Il's reign, offering a rare glimpse of life in the world's most unknowable country, and at the privileged young men she calls "soldiers and slaves" whose total obedience is to the regime.

DISCUSSION

Media and Foreign Policy video

The group viewed the video [Media and Foreign Policy](#).

Notes from the video:

- Under the First Amendment of the Constitution, protection of the freedom of the press was included to create a more informed citizenry, act as a watchdog to hold government leaders accountable, and to be the fundamental check on power.
- The video chronicled the history of the press in foreign relations from the days of the founding fathers, through the Vietnam war, and the “after glow” effect of the Watergate scandal. Things changed in 1987 when Reagan’s FCC abolished the Fairness Doctrine, a policy that required the holders of broadcast licenses both to present controversial issues of public importance and to do so in a manner that was—in the FCC’s view—honest, equitable, and balanced.
- In the late 1990’s, with the onset of social media, it was hoped that digital media outlets would be a democratizing force, but it has proven to be a mixed bag of both good and bad effects, depending on who is using it and for what purpose. As the Arab Spring showed, social media can be a global force for change. The advantage of providing an easy way to share information is countered with the downside of the ease of inciting violence and being a forum for sowing seeds of conflict.
- Actually, social media has muddled the line between what is true and not true because there are limited means to edit for integrity. ISIS and other such groups have used social media as tools to spread false information.
- Media users are now more vulnerable to social media bias, as we can now filter out news that contradicts our beliefs. It’s very easy for users to stay in their echo chambers. Studies showed that most people said they got their news through social media during the 2016 election campaigns.
- Follow the money: in our “Attention Economy” there is a great monetary incentive for media outlets to attract increased viewership by fabricating news, -- a manufactured form of news pollution.
- When Donald Trump started applying the term “fake news” to legitimate, traditional news sources, main stream media news was hijacked and the term has come to be used to describe any news that a person in powder doesn’t like.
- Problem: Where do we go to get the truth? It’s become too costly for traditional news outlets to support investigative reporting. There have been massive closings of foreign news bureaus. And, younger generations have been raised in a culture of getting news and entertainment for free.
- Social media: are they a neutral platform, or an editorial platform? Will they accept more responsibility as traditional media did? How will the old business models work in this digital era?

Discussion Points:

- With the decline of a free press and informed citizenry, is our democracy at a crisis point?

“When people in a democracy are not educated in the art of living – to strengthen their conscience, compassion, and ability to question and think critically – they can be easily manipulated by fear and propaganda. A democracy is only as wise as its citizens, and a democracy of ignorant citizens can be as dangerous as a dictatorship.” (Paul K. Chappell)

- Extending franchise, but not education for all citizens, contributed to the fall of the Greek empire.
- As we strive to reduce a culture of violence, we must recognize how false news can be an impetus for people to act violently.
- A recent article related to this video was noted: [Elderly, conservatives shared more Facebook fakery in '16](#); According to a study published in the journal, [Science Advances](#), people older than 65 and ultra conservatives shared about seven times more fake information masquerading as news on Facebook than younger adults, moderates and super liberals during the 2016 election season.

The proliferation of disinformation

- The de-regulation of media was a critical turning point.
- Opinions are conflated with news. Efforts to be balanced have led to printing/airing unsubstantiated, ideological propaganda.
- Critical thinking skills are not taught as much in schools now.
- With the rise of digital media, one no longer sees magazines on the stands in stores any longer.
- The digital world of 24/7 information is filling the space with speculation, rather than facts.
- Newspapers often carry syndicated editorial columnists based on what they can afford, which can result in lower-quality content.
- Responders to facts often insert a kernel of truth in their rebuttals.
- People so turned off by all of the propaganda have completely lost trust in any news source and have chosen to be uninformed. Is this a deliberate strategy to numb people's minds? Inevitably, however, these uninterested citizens will be directly affected by political policy decisions, will wake up to reality, and find themselves without a support system.
- The movie "Vice" now out in theaters recaps how public opinion can be shaped by misinformation.
- When money is the motivation, news media outlets will print/air whatever sells. As long as there is demand, they will furnish a supply. Boycotts can have a limited effect. It's unlikely that Facebook's corporate model will ever change, regardless of what Mark Zuckerberg says.
- We have entered a new universe where the White House panders to clearly-biased talk show hosts. See Vice President Pence's [recent call to Rush Limbaugh's show](#).
- Nothing is for free. There are always economic, social and intellectual costs.

Finding Good News Sources & Fighting Fake News

- A smart phone application called [SmartNews](#) is rated by [Media Bias/Fact Check](#) as "least biased," carrying a balance of left and right leaning news sources.
- Attachments: See the attachments to these notes:
 - [Resources You Can Trust](#) article in the AARP Bulletin, citing 4 organizations dedicated to providing fair, nonpartisan election information: Votesmart.org, RealClearPolitics.com, Ballotpedia.org, and PolitiFact.com.
 - "Facts Still Exist" article by Jennifer Egan from the December 24-31, 2018 issue of Time magazine.
 - A discussion guide to the Media and Foreign Policy video.
- Consider correcting posters of false stories on FaceBook – let them and their followers know they are spreading false information.
- Champion truth. Without Truth there is no Trust. What is the definition of truth? Does what is in one's mind correlate to reality?
- Promote news sources and activities that inform with facts. Thank the Leader Telegram for running the regular fact-checking column.
- Support legitimate media with subscriptions.
- It is encouraging that more media stories use the terms "*not quite accurate, alleged, not based on any evidence*" to tip readers off to false statements made by people in the news.
- Do your own digging and research. Be alert to "value" words in articles that reveal a deliberate bias.
- Remember: "*Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.*" (Carl Sagen)
- One member of the group traced the claim that 3 million people voted illegally to an Alabama RNC leader's tweet right after the 2016 election.
- You can use word strings to effectively [search the internet](#).
- Distinguish between journalism, entertainment, and opinion.
- Take personal responsibility for escaping your own confirmation biases.
- Don't click on Facebook surveys that harvest personal information about you.

Voters as Consumers

As consumers in the economy, people can “vote” with their pocketbooks by avoiding the products and services sold by businesses that work against the public interest. Find out where their labor force is and be deliberate about supporting workers. Find out who is funding lobbying efforts for policies like voucher schools, for example. Regardless of intentions, however, many people do not have the financial resources to choose another option when items like medications are so much cheaper at Walmart.

These are tough choices, but we have to live with the consequences of our actions.

Challenges for Democrats nationally

- How to revitalize rural communities? Increasingly, coastal cities are drawing workers to heavily concentrated areas of population. The Electoral College system requires strong support in less populated states.
- It's critical to flex our collective muscles and keep the pressure on all of our representatives, including Democrats, to address climate change.

Fun Moments at Recent Events

- The standing ovation for retiring State Supreme Court Justice Shirley Abrahamson at Governor Tony Evers' inauguration.
- Anti-LGBTQ Vice President Mike Pence swearing in Krysten Sinema (D-Arizona), the first openly bisexual person elected to Congress.