

Fake News

By Dr. Dan Bishop - Published in the Mountain Mail, Salida, Colorado (2017)

Fake news has received a lot of attention lately. The focus is largely directed toward Internet sources, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and the like. But fake news can even creep into our hometown newspaper. For example, the political cartoon in the January 10 Mountain Mail depicted President Obama giving his farewell speech amidst a crumbling Parthenon with labels on the debris "Economic Growth", "ISIS", "National Unity", "Affordable Care Act", and "Foreign Policy". "It's just a political cartoon," you say. Nevertheless, it conveys misleading information that portrays an image in opposition to reality.

For example, American economic growth is far from crumbling. Unemployment has dropped from 10% to 4.7% (defined as "full employment") during the Obama administration. The stock market has been recording record highs well before the November 8th election. Our annual GDP growth for 2016 is over 2% and is higher than other developed nations that have yet to rise out of the worst recession since the 1930's. (Have we already forgotten the financial and housing market collaps which occurred during the Bush administration?) This incredible recovery has taken place entirely under President Obama's watch.

As for ISIS, how soon we forget the lessons of Viet Nam, where an indigenous guerilla movement outmaneuvered and humiliated the world's greatest superpower. Or the more recent lessons from Iraq. How easily we might have been sucked into another "boots on the ground" fiasco with great loss of American life and nothing substantive to show for it. Let's hope that our newly elected president can show an equally mature and discerning judgement as has President Obama.

The Affordable Care Act stands as one of America's great steps forward during the Obama administration. Over 20 million previously uninsured Americans now have health insurance. Many of the punitive practices of insurance companies (such as policies regarding "pre-existing conditions") have been eliminated. More needs yet to be done, but this has been a great first step toward the universal health-care that is currently available in most other first-world countries. One can only hope that the Republicans will replace it with something even better.

President Obama never stood a chance on the national unity issue, given the Republican's vow at the very beginning of Obama's first term to thwart his every move and the depth of racial bigotry in America that exhibited itself during the recent presidential campaign. To hold Obama accountable for crumbling national unity is ridiculous.

I do believe that the Obama administration could have done better with foreign policy, though not through military might, but rather through more forceful and cohesive diplomacy. The successful Iran nuclear treaty was the exception to an otherwise fragmented approach to international relations. Let's hope our new president can stop tweeting and put together an intelligent and thoughtful response to international issues. He doesn't need to make America great again, he just needs to keep America as great as it already is.