

Job #1 (of many) Should Be Restoring Trust in Professional Journalism

President-elect Joe Biden has a lot of Trump-generated damage to undo, but one of the most important is to help the nation recover from the “fake news” and “enemy of the people” tropes promoted by Donald Trump.

From the beginning, news was labeled “fake” by him, not because it wasn’t true but because it was all too true and perceived as anti-Trump. But members of “Cult-45” took the label to heart, believing that straight news organizations like CNN, the New York Times, and the Washington Post were anti-Trump and were fabricating stories that were negative to the President. Shamefully, the conservative talk radio shows and evening Fox News opinion programs — Carlson, Hannity and Ingraham — gave undeserved credence to the actual lies, which were coming from Trump.

Often, the lies were created by the TV hosts and then tweeted and otherwise echoed by the president. It truly fit the definition of an echo chamber.

How can our incoming president neutralize and reverse this toxic situation? First and most importantly, Biden can do what he already did in his Nov. 7 victory speech and his Thanksgiving address to the nation: namely to be presidential. The contrast to President Trump will be as obvious as it will be refreshing.

Second, Joe Biden’s press secretary can hold daily briefings, and he can hold frequent press conferences.

He could learn from Pete Buttigieg’s example and make himself available for interviews and town halls on Fox News. Mayor Pete (who will hopefully have a high position in the Biden administration) was well received by Fox News’ moderators and audience, and being on Fox News is the only way to reach that audience.

There are two easily debunked lies by Donald Trump — three, if you include that he won the election. The first lie is that we were “turning the corner” on Covid-19 in October. The

second, however, is that Joe Biden was senile, incoherent, living in a senior home and incapable of serving as president. Trump supporters need to be reminded of such statements to help in their deprogramming.

Remember, it’s called “Cult-45” for a reason. Deprogramming is the appropriate technology to employ in helping that portion of the electorate recover their senses.

Biden’s appointment of John Kerry as a cabinet-level “climate envoy” was a welcome move. Joel Simon, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, has suggested the appointment of a “Special Presidential Envoy for Press Freedom,” whose job would be “to represent the administration at a high level wherever journalists are under threat.” Although the focus of his proposal is on threats to journalists and press freedom in other countries where authoritarian leaders have been inspired by Donald Trump’s attack on the press, I’d like to see a White House counterpart to the Washington Post’s Fact-Checker team when appropriate. Lies

will no doubt be forthcoming about White House initiatives, and they shouldn’t be allowed to fester unchallenged.

I like the motto of the Washington Post which appears on its front page: **“Democracy Dies in Darkness.”** It was popularized by Bob Woodward of Watergate fame in a 2007 piece criticizing government secrecy and was adopted as the Post’s motto a month after Trump’s inauguration.

Sonni Efron, a RAND Corporation analyst, coined the term “Truth Decay,” leading to a 2018 book by that name with the subtitle, **“An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life.”** It’s on my reading list.

Trump reportedly intends to stay in the public eye, announcing his candidacy for 2024 on Biden’s inauguration day. His ongoing spouting of lies calls for a diligent response.

Talking Turkey



By Jim Smith

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