

# SPOKESMAN Opinion

## GUEST COLUMN

# Living in the 'post-truth' world today

BY STEVE TROTTER

I came across a new term recently. Or, I thought it was new. Turns out I'm late as usual.

The term has been around since 1992, where it first appeared in an essay. In 2016 the folks who produce the Oxford Dictionary gave it the title "Word of the Year." How did I miss that? Some days I feel like I've got a grocery bag, the old, brown, paper grocery bag, firmly planted on my head. I fail to notice what's right in front of me.

So there I am, reacting to a "new" term that isn't new at all. Perhaps it's only new to me, discovered on a rare adventure outside the grocery bag with blinders off. The term? "Post-truth."

When I read it I was puzzled. "What the heck does that mean?" I wondered. I asked friends to give me their definition. Many said they had no idea.

Might it be an extensive expose on the things we put in a pasture to hold barbed wire taut? Probably not.

Here's what the source of all wisdom, aka the internet, provided after a quick search: "relating to a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs, rather than one based on facts." Or, I want to add, "evidence."

Now I get it. It's another one of the mental shortcuts I've been exploring with you over the last couple months. That's what the psychologists call a "cognitive bias" and I label a "shortcut."

"Shortcut" here means going from A to E without bothering to consider B, C, or D. Sometimes such shortcuts are helpful. Visiting a major city, I glance skyward and notice a piano dropping rapidly through the air soon to land exactly where I stand. Shortcut says "Move it, big guy! NOW!" Without another thought — without B, C, or D — I jump to one side and stay unimpressed by heavy music. Thank god for shortcuts.

I didn't wait to consider if the piano is a concert grand or some other size. Is it a Yamaha or a Bösendorfer? In tune or going flat? Falling piano? "Get out of the way!" my brain quickly tells me. Love those shortcuts.

"Post-truth" is like that shortcut. It moves me rapidly from a considered, carefully thought out and reasoned, based-on-evidence conclusion regarding X, to a conclusion based solely on how I feel about X or what I already believe about X.

I learned about this in high school, I just didn't know the term. I joined the school's debate team and discovered what "post-truth" means. In debate we dealt with solid arguments and supportive evidence. I don't know if it's still this way, but then we had to be prepared to argue either side of a proposition. "Resolved: The state sales tax is regressive and should be abolished." (I was in a state with a sales tax while in high school.)

My partners and I gathered evidence, reading text and journals, consulting periodicals and scanning expert commentary — all this long before personal computers and the internet. We recorded each piece of information on a 3x5 card and soon amassed a hefty pile, each carefully cataloged for quick access. The proposition has good evidence on both sides. Pro and con each held strong possibilities for making a decision. We would be judged on both the quality of our evidence and the quality of our presentation.

Imagine I offered information from an expert: Donald Duck or Dumbo the Elephant. "Mr. Duck, who teaches at Stanford, has written extensively on the effect of a sales tax on the poor. He states..."

I'd be laughed out of the room, rightfully so. Imagine I offered this instead: "I think a sales tax is dumb. I don't agree with it. It's just a bad idea. It makes me angry just thinking about it."

I'd be laughed out of the room for that sort of "reasoning," too. But that's the reasoning that is meant by the term "post-truth." No longer concerned with qualified sources or verifiable evidence, post-truth decisions grow from emotions or long held — and most likely not well examined or questioned — opinion.

Evidence? Post-truth reasoning doesn't want it. Factual information? Information with verification and support? Post-truth reasoning says: "Who needs it? I already know what's right."

If I brought post-truth "reasoning" to the room for a high school debate, I wouldn't last very long. Nor should I.

Imagine going to the doctor and hearing that you have a heart condition which, with care and surgery, along with changes in diet and exercise, will allow you to lead a full and active life.

"How do you know?" you ask your doctor. "It's how I feel," she says. "I know I'm right."

Post-truth "reasoning." Look for a new doctor. Recently I called a good friend in Montana who's a wizard with all things cars. My clutch was acting up. He diagnosed it over the phone and told me what to do. I did it. Clutch is now working great.

He asked me many questions, he formulated his opinion not on the condition of his gut or the words of some celebrity or the guidance of a Greek goddess, but on his long experience repairing cars and his knowledge of how they operate. I provided evidence and he made a decision based on that evidence. Rational. Considered. Thorough. Nothing knee-jerk about it. Not a decision based on emotion. Or indigestion.

Nothing "post-truth" about it. We don't see eye-to-eye on some issues. That didn't change anything either. Nope. He used his noggin, not his emotions. His recommendation was based on the truth of the evidence I provided, nothing post-truth going on.

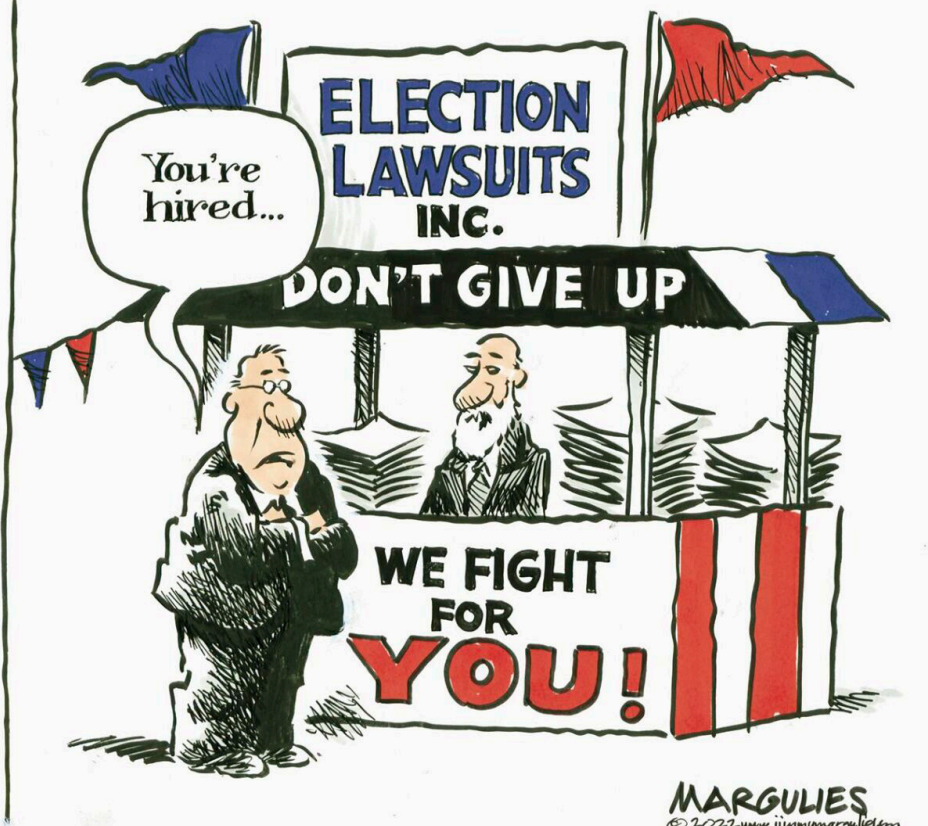
We're living in a time which can accurately be called "post-truth." It's more than a little bit frightening. It doesn't lead to a thoughtful, careful future. "Post-truth" almost guarantees strife and misunderstanding as we rely only on our emotions or spurious information from a social media site to make decisions — decisions which could well have serious effect on us all.

■ Steve Trotter, with his wife Bonnie, has lived in many places before settling in Redmond for retirement. His last for-pay job was teaching at a small university in Central Washington.



Trotter

The election is over... We take you to the losing candidate's concession speech...



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# Ridgeview student wins LWVDC essay contest

BY TIM TRAINOR

Redmond Spokesman

Gabby Bale of Ridgeview High was named the first winner of the 2022 Y-Essay Contest sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Deschutes County.

LWVDC initiated the contest this year, open to all high school seniors in Deschutes County. The contest invited seniors to submit an original essay that answered the question "Why Vote?"

Essays were blind judged by Deschutes County community members, including members of the media and educators. Once read, each essay was assigned a score using a rubric

and scoring tool created by the LWVDC Y-Essay Contest team.

Bale, a senior at Ridgeview, was declared the winner. As the winner, she received an award certificate and a check for \$500.

According to LWVDC, the organization received several essays with strong messages about the responsibility of citizens to be informed voters.

"Gabby's essay was particularly persuasive as she focused on the importance of individual votes, collectively, as essential for citizen participation in how our country is run."

LWVDC said they plan to continue the contest next year.

■ Reporter: ttrainor@redmondspokesman.com



Winning essayist Gabby Bale, at left, accepts a check with her mother Susan Kernutt, center, awarded by LWVDC Carol Loesche.

## WINNING ESSAY

# Why vote? Your voice matters

Why vote? It's only one vote and that's not going to tip the scales, so what's the point? The point is that you are a part of this republic and you deserve to voice your opinion.

It may not always seem like your voice is heard, but you have a better chance if you vote. If everyone has this mindset, then we can make a difference together.

Imagine if everyone you have ever met decided not to vote. That's hundreds, maybe even thousands of people opting to let decisions that directly affect them be made without their opinion on the matter. That has the potential to change policies.

We need to look at the bigger picture instead of thinking about it as just one vote. Because if everyone with just one vote decided not to vote, then that's a lot of people giving up their power in the government.

Think about the history of the United

States. Our Founding Fathers designed this government to better benefit the people than the English Monarchy ever did. They were unfairly taxed — among other things — and without representation, they couldn't say anything about it. They believed that all people were born with natural rights: life, liberty, and property. These rights were being oppressed by the King, so they chose to form their own government with their own rules. Even though this took place centuries ago, it is important to remember the blood, sweat, and tears our ancestors put into this country for us. Voting is the best way to honor their sacrifice and the best way to protect your rights.

In order for a large republic to function properly, as many people need to vote as possible. We will get better representation for our needs if we choose to participate. The government is more likely to listen if more

people support an idea. Things like education, healthcare, infrastructure, economy, immigration, etc. are all affected by our vote. Remember that voting doesn't only affect you; it could affect your friends, family, and millions of other people around the United States. Plus, you will pay taxes in the future if you don't already, and voting allows you to help decide where your money will be spent.

Almost anything you can think of in your life is affected by government decisions. By choosing not to vote, you are choosing not to take control of your life. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

Vote for the things you believe in. Vote for the people you love. Vote for the change you want to see.

■ Gabby Bale is a senior at Ridgeview High School. This essay won top prize in a League of Women Voters of Deschutes County contest.

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**Oregon Legislature:** Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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