

EDITOR'S DESK

Trust is a fading currency in America today

Today, let's talk about trust. Our society functions on trust. We buy food from restaurants or grocery stores instead of growing everything ourselves because we trust it is safe to eat. We drive 70 miles per hour down the interstate because we trust that other drivers will obey the signs that tell them which direction to drive. You are willing to trade people valuable items or work in exchange for cash because you trust other people will place the same value on the rectangular pieces of paper in your wallet. In terms of paper and ink alone, a \$100 bill and a \$1 are bill are no different in value, but you would be willing to put in far more work for a \$100 bill than a \$1 bill because you trust the system. And yet, at every turn, people are falling prey to the constant barrage of messages telling them not to trust anyone. You've heard the messages over and over, whether you realize it or not: You can't trust journalists because they're biased. You can't trust police because they're racist. You can't trust teachers or professors or academics because they're tools of liberal indoctrination. You can't trust religious leaders because they're



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Ballots await sorting at the Umatilla County Elections office ahead of the ballot deadline on Tuesday, May 19, 2020. Elections are one facet of American society that rely on trust.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan, File

bigots. You can't trust scientists about climate change or COVID-19 because they're just trying to control you. You can't trust our national intelligence agencies because they're part of the Deep State. You can't trust the military because they only care about oil. You can't trust doctors or hospitals or public health departments because they just want to make more money. You can't trust secretaries of state because they're trying to rig the elections. At some point, when someone is telling you not to believe anyone but them because everyone else in the

world is conspiring against them, that should raise a red flag. Think about how you would feel if a date or a job applicant acted that way — "I swear, every single one of my exes who says I'm an abuser are all crazy!" Eroding trust in experts does not bode well for a society that relies on trust for everything from economics to elections. I'm not saying that there aren't people out there who are incompetent and/or corrupt. Every single profession has people in it that are bad at their jobs and should be fired. For exam-

ple, it seems at least once a year at least one person working in education or coaching in Umatilla or Morrow counties ends up in the news for being charged with sexual misconduct with a student. And yet, if everyone suddenly started pushing the narrative that most teachers are sexual predators, and schools are full of rapists who will attack your child any day now, that would be untrue, unfair and unethical. Instead, parents should talk to their child about appropriate boundaries, schools should put policies in place that help prevent abuse, administrators should immediately pass reports of abuse on to law enforcement and unions should not make it unduly difficult to remove abusers. Then, parents should trust that if they sent their child to school they will be taught by many decent people who truly care about their child and are helping them learn. Think about your friends and family. What professions are they in? Do you trust their expertise? Now consider this — what do you think is more likely? That you just happen to know one of the few decent teachers, police officers, doctors, lawyers and mechanics around? Or that perhaps the good, competent people you know are the rule rather than the exception?

COLUMN

Focus on the basics this school year

I'm sure no one in the world would have expected something so small that you cannot even see it to turn everything in the world upside down, but COVID-19 did. School does not look anything like it has in recent years. Stress ranges all the way from kids up to governing officials. For the most part, we have all come to the conclusion that what school looks like this year may last for quite some time. Though school today does not look like 100 years ago, or even 200 years ago either, children still learned. If we take time to focus on the "Big Three" — reading, writing, and math — every day our children will survive this year of unknown while expanding their knowledge. If children practice reading, writing, and math every day, they will make steady growth. They do not have to read a novel or write a book. If they read about 20 minutes at their appropriate reading level each day, in most cases, this will be more than sufficient. If possible, adding 10 minutes of reading orally will give that extra boost too and provide some guided practice with unfamiliar words. Extremely important is for adults to model the importance of reading. Having younger children sit with you as you read and asking them questions helps them develop understanding and improves their comprehension



Scott Smith

skill. They will need comprehension later when they begin reading to themselves. Older children also benefit from having material read to them, and then retelling what they heard. The retelling what was read to them aids in their development of comprehension. Communicating through writing is another key skill that needs to be nurtured. Writing is one of those skills that can easily slip through the cracks, more so than reading or math. Writing is the hardest of the three and requires the most skills to accomplish. Just like us, kids do not always want to work on things that are hard. Having children write lists is one way to help them develop writing skills. One thing that all of us can do is write notes. We write notes for ourselves and notes to friends and family. Taking time to help children use writing skills for notes may just brighten someone's day while allowing the child to improve in this area. For younger children or children who struggle, a way to help is to have them tell you what they want to say and then copy it onto the paper. One of the first steps in writing is being able to know what you want to say, therefore providing this support for getting information on the paper can be a great relief. Copying the writing still provides the fine motor skills needed for writing. It is OK to copy. It is a way to help your child record the ideas they generate. Math is all around us and does not have to be learned

using worksheet after worksheet. Helping students apply the use of math in everyday life will build their skills for when we are able to return to the classroom. Asking questions like, "How many spoons are we going to need for dinner?" seems so simple yet truly is abstract. Each person might need a spoon, but you may also need spoons for serving. Also, allowing them to read and calculate prices when shopping to see which would cost less gives them a chance to apply their math skills. Another activity is to have them use a tape measure and measure things around the house. Children love to measure and use things adults use, but what you are also doing is allowing them to use their applied math skills and practice in a fun way. We are all busy and it does take time, but if you can stop and say to yourself, "My child read some today. They practiced their writing when I had them make the shopping list. And they had to use their math calculating our coupons." Then no matter what level your child is working at they spent some time expanding the three most important skills of learning: reading, writing, and math. Stay strong; you've got this! Dr. Scott Smith is a 40+ year Umatilla County educator. He taught in Umatilla at McNary Heights Elementary School and then for Eastern Oregon University in their teacher education program at BMCC. He serves on the Decoding Dyslexia-OR board as their parent/teacher liaison.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Respect free speech

Two weeks ago, I put a Biden Harris 2020 sign in my yard. Today, it is gone. Stolen. Someone decided my right to free speech wasn't important since it appeared to offend that someone's sensibilities. I am certain there will be people who say that's what you get when you put a Democrat's sign on your lawn in Republican Eastern Oregon. I call BS! Just because I don't agree with Trump supporters doesn't mean I would ever tear down or spray paint their Trump signs. It is tempting, but what is the point? It is your right to spout whatever is in your head because we have free speech in this country. We must be better than this. So, we don't agree. So what? Hermiston has always been a town who come together in a crisis. I don't see that any longer. What happened to us? Is supporting Trump so important that you forget the people you despise were once your friends? Please vote. No matter who you vote for, please cast your ballot. If we lose our right to vote, we are no better than the dictatorships Trump admires so much. Voltaire wrote, "I do not agree with a word you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Those are words to live by. Karen Talaski Hermiston

Reflect on what's important

It is time to reflect on what is important. A wise man once told me, "Sometimes the right thing, and the hardest thing, are the same thing." Over the last decade District 57, serving Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam, Sherman counties, has been extremely blessed with prosperity from the Oregon Legisla-

ture. We've received funding for key developments — from school renovations, to housing projects, to public health opportunities, and so many more. Essentially, the state of Oregon has funded more than \$200 million worth of projects within District 57 over the last 10 years. Now, during this time of crisis, we must be prepared to modify our expectations. Our focus needs to shift from developing new opportunities for ourselves to rebuilding this great state. We've seen generosity and the power among us when we all come together. Over the last week, we've watched many Oregonians endure tragedy, and whether we have been affected directly or not, we feel it. Families are losing their homes, their livelihoods, their possessions and, in some cases, their loved ones. Again, we may not be there, but we feel it. Our friends and neighbors across the state are facing the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and now extreme wildfires, and no matter our own personal situation, we feel it. An already tight state budget must now be realigned to help our fellow Oregonians with their most critical needs. Priorities that may have been deemed earlier as crucial could potentially be eliminated. These decisions won't be easy, nor popular, but our shift may very well reflect the right thing and the hardest thing. In tragedy comes courage and great strength, and I have no doubt my fellow Oregonians will rise from the ashes. These difficulties can't and won't hold us down forever. As a family, as a city, as a district, and as a state, it's our responsibility to help pick up the pieces from this immense loss and offer our support. Representative Greg Smith House District 57