

# Truth vs facts

BY DAVID TIMMERMAN

The moment I heard it uttered, I knew I had to call him. Tuesday morning, during the Grant County Board of Supervisors meeting, Supervisor Steve ‘Porter’ Wagner directed a charge at Grant County Health Director Jeff Kindrai - that he threatened to arrest a local school superintendent, if that person’s district did not comply with health orders related to COVID-19.

“You are overstepping your power,” Wagner said in front of the board. “That never happened,” Kindrai shot back. I immediately sent an email to every area district administrator asking them, if they had been ever threatened with arrest. I also asked them what they thought of the interactions they have had with Kindrai over the months we have been dealing with this pandemic.

I knew, getting to the fact of this public comment, I would be calling Wagner sometime in the afternoon and to his credit, he talked with me. Wagner does not hold back, and tells it how he believes it is.

Unfortunately, what he said in the boardroom was not what he told me. I asked who the superintendent was, which he would not disclose. I then followed up by asking if he heard it directly from that person, to which he answered, no he had not. He had actually heard it through a Facebook post by, what he called, ‘concerned parents,’ who he felt were the ‘voice of him.’

In talking with him, I am comfortable in saying that Wagner believes in this ‘truth,’ that Kindrai threatened an administrator, as it came from people Wagner knows and has relationships with.

Problem is, it’s not a fact - it didn’t happen. In his position as a county board supervisor, he gave credence to this, so that all of the people who were watching online for this meeting, or who get it relayed from those people online, will continue this dark version, and also believe a false ‘truth’ that was told. How many people repeat this? How many people will say ‘well, I heard it from the Grant County Board, it must be true?’

This is how something that is, in fact not true, becomes believed by so many. Something gets told so many times, it just becomes ‘true.’

In one of my favorite movies, A Few Good Men, there is that scene where Tom Cruise’s character confronts Jack Nicholson’s with the line “I want the truth! (Followed by Nicholson replying “you can’t handle the truth”).

Through movies and books and whatnot, we have come to believe ‘truth’ is this righteous, cleansing virtue. Superman’s catchphrase used to be ‘Truth, Justice and the American Way.’

But my definition of what ‘truth’ really is has become far more subjective. It’s like that Japanese film where you get told the story from the perspective of three different characters - each with their own feelings, memories, and views clouding the fact of what actually happened. You get led down a very different path until the end, when you actually see what happened, and you can see how each storyteller has changed things for their ‘truth.’

Social media like Facebook are more commentary than news, they allow us to get our own ‘truths,’ often unchallenged by the reality of facts. Don’t like what you hear from, say, a health official, well we can show you something that fits in line with your own beliefs.

When you have your own truth, it can be empowering and make you stronger in your beliefs. When it comes to what’s happening, it divides us from one another, as we all become paranoid that someone else is out to get us.

How many times have we lost something and we have two distinct, but separate thoughts, when an initial search doesn’t turn it up? We either think that it’s in the garbage (and sometimes it actually is) or that someone must have taken it (far less the case).

It happened to me the other day - I was attempting to post something on one our Facebook pages, and I could not. I kept looking, and I found I was made a moderator on every site I was an administrator.

As I was continuing to search on why, a thought crept into my head - someone did this to me. Someone either hacked me, or nefariously reported me to try and screw my user up, and locked me out.

At the time, this was a scary prospect of a spoofing incident that made me dump another administrator. Facebook did not help, given their customer service amounts to a Q&A page to give you possible answers.

Ultimately I found out it had to do with two-factor authentication being now mandatory, and once I dealt with that, I was good.

But again, I thought someone was out to do this to me. Now the most they could do is cause me to have to create a new user or something - annoying yes, but not something that can easily be overcome.

I was dealing with another person who was getting phantom type on their computer, thinking someone was hacking their computer. ‘Why?’ I asked - because hacking the person, was not worth it. Turned out they replaced their bluetooth keyboard, but had not shut off the old one, which was near their chair, getting bumped.

But this is human nature, we think people are going to take something that is ours, when in reality most people are oblivious to what we have, wrapped up in their own lives.

When I hear someone utter truth, honestly, I picture some young optimist who wants to tackle some injustice, naive of how the world is. That isn’t to say that I am some grizzled pessimist, who thinks the world does not change, but more like aware of the travel of society to improve things to the point that we are the most free, most affluent, and the most advanced nation in the history of the world.

It is so easy to believe the ‘truths’ we want to believe. But that does not make it fact.

# In chaos that is today’s Washington, R&D investment opportunity stands out



**MADISON** - You’re forgiven if you are among the millions of Americans right now who wonder whether Congress and the White House can agree on anything.

A contentious infrastructure bill, lifting the federal debt ceiling, feuds with long-time allies overseas, and breaking the supply-chain logjam tied to shortages and inflation are among the janky agenda items in the nation’s capital.

One potential bright spot, should policymakers pull it together, is the effort to invest more in America’s research and development sectors through universities and industry.

What was originally called “The Endless Frontier Act” has been rolled into the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act of 2021, which passed the Senate this summer but which has yet to garner attention in the House of Representatives. The reasons for delay appear to revolve around other roadblocks on Capitol Hill versus core opposition to reinvesting in R&D and reversing a decline in U.S. competitiveness.

Federal research spending as a percentage of the gross domestic product has been slipping for decades. Although partially offset by increased industry R&D spending, the decline in basic and applied research has been noticeable in an era when the United States faces massive competition from China and other emerging powers.

A bipartisan group of congressional leaders proposed the Endless Frontier Act in early 2020 to spend up to \$100 billion over five years to boost science and technology research, revive American manufacturing and create innovation hubs nationwide. That proposal morphed into the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act,

which would do much the same by directing the National Science Foundation to focus on areas viewed as most important to American security and prosperity.

Those areas are engineering and computer-science heavy. They include artificial intelligence and machine learning; high-performance computing, semiconductors and advanced computer hardware; quantum computing; robotics, automation and advanced manufacturing; natural and man-made disaster prevention; advanced communications; biotechnology genomics and synthetic biology; advanced energy technology; cybersecurity, data storage and data management; and materials science and engineering.

Wisconsin has R&D strengths in most sectors, which is why representatives of four of the state’s leading engineering schools and a leading technology transfer group will talk Oct. 19 about putting the state’s collective oars in the water in anticipation of federal action.

The luncheon meeting of the Tech Council Innovation Network in Wauwatosa will feature Andrew Graettinger, associate dean for research at the UW-Milwaukee; Erik Iverson, chief executive officer for Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation; Sheku Kamara, dean of applied research at the Milwaukee School of Engineering;

Ian Robertson, dean of the UW-Madison College of Engineering; and Carmel Ruffolo, associate vice president for corporate engagement at Marquette University.

They’ll talk about what kind of assets Wisconsin can bring to the table to compete for federal dollars which would likely take place with regional partnerships. Any regional collaboration would almost certainly include Madison and Milwaukee and perhaps beyond.

Other states are gearing up to compete in technology and engineering sectors where they have strengths. Wisconsin institutions and industry will need to decide where they can truly shine versus being a just another good team in a 50-state league with plenty of super-stars.

Wisconsin does have advantages. Each engineering school on the Oct. 19 panel has built industry partnerships in a state with one of the strongest manufacturing sectors in the country. When the Brookings Institution ranked emerging hubs in a late 2019 report, Madison and Milwaukee were high on the think-tank list of best bets for a return on federal investment.

There are impediments, of course, but it’s far better to talk about them now - while Washington is at a stalemate - than wait for the dam to burst. One example is much-needed state government investment in physical infrastructure to stay competitive with other states.

Wisconsin can make a case to become a place where federal R&D investments can quickly reap dividends. It starts with aligning the assets of some of its best research institutions.

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# Hardie sycamore is a hardy survivor

Fall is the time of year when we enjoy the different trees and the range of colors they display as the leaves start to change.

Maples, birch, elm, ash, hickory, walnut, poplar and oaks account for the vast array on the hillsides surrounding our valley, but there’s one tree in my mother’s yard that is out of place.

It’s a sycamore, a common tree to the south and east but not so much in Wisconsin or Minnesota. It thrives best in warmer climates, where it grows quickly and has huge canopies.

The sycamore in her yard was planted with seed from my mother’s grandmother’s family that lived in St. Louis. The fact that it grew this far north and in our sandy soil (sycamores

like damp feet) is a testament to my mother’s green thumb.

Under ideal conditions, sycamores can exceed 150 feet with massive trunks up to 14 feet in diameter. Mom’s sycamore — which is about 50 years old — is much smaller than that. We thought that it did not survive after the polar vortex a few years ago, as it only sprouted a few leaves that spring.

It must have taken seriously Mom’s threat with the chainsaw because while much of the trunk looks dead, it grew more foliage this year. One way to identify a sycamore is by its huge leaves — they grow up to a foot or more in size.

The leaves will soon turn a pale yellow and then brown. Time will tell

if it will survive another winter.

## Hungry yellow jackets

Last year, I wrote about my battle against a nest of underground hornets that were living near a clothesline pole.

This is the time of year when the marauding yellow jackets are nuisances if you’re outside with any kind of food. And they’ve returned to find another home under the corner of my garage, quite near the apple trees in our yard.

The other day I was attacked and was stung on my arm. I guess I was too close to the apple trees. But they are feisty creatures and even a few days later, the arm is still itching.

But I know where their nest is. Time for another round in the war.

## Waiting for the frost

I consider it a long season if we survive September without a hard frost, which as of this writing has not occurred. The last frost in the spring was when we had temperatures in the upper 20s on May 29.

Some recent clear nights we’ve had some white on the rooftops, but nothing on the ground so far.

It’s still that time of year when we finish the garden harvest. Last week, Sherry said she needed help picking the squash and pumpkins and suggested that I bring the truck.

I thought she was kidding.

Wouldn’t the wheelbarrow suffice?

But really, I knew better.

By the time we had harvested the squash, pumpkins and watermelons — along with a box of potatoes, peppers, tomatoes and beets — the back of the truck was quite full.

Now the real work begins. Getting them opened up, cooked and into the freezer may require a new chainsaw blade or a sharp axe.

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