

"Post-Truth"-The Existential Threat to a Civilized Society

James L. Capra : jlcapra@yahoo.com - April 29, 2017

Our Nation is at a tipping point. Resolving life and death issues, from North Korea to drug trafficking, requires sound leadership. Sound leadership involves both good judgment and an understanding of objective truth. The crisis within a crisis is this: We are losing our moorings, our fundamental understanding of objective truth. Until we are willing to return to basics, we are headed for the abyss.

Anytime we consider, suggest, or execute a plan of action to handle serious issues in our nation or for that matter in our personal lives, demands leadership. Real leadership demands courage and a willingness to anchor the conversation to the truth-in the face of public scorn, ridicule, calls for political correctness and more lately violence. This type of leadership is the resolve to make the right hard decision in light of what we will leave as a legacy to the next generation.

Knowledge often constitutes truth. When a society turns away from knowledge, it turns away from truth, therefore if you no longer pursue knowledge or if you keep knowledge in the dark, how can we know the truth? I find it quite ironic that the 2016 word of the year is “post-truth!” According to the Oxford dictionary, post truth means relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. If this is our new baseline, we are lost.

According to Dr. Sean McDowell, we now live in a culture that seems to value experience and emotion more than truth. Over the past few years we have witnessed the exponential growth of this anything goes, how do you feel, “post-truth” culture. It now seems to define much of our political leadership, not just public sentiment. One example is the ongoing pursuit of senseless drug legalization in the United States. This issue plainly illustrates the rise of a “post-truth” ideology, where facts, rising death and overdose rates, pervasive violent and drug related crime, expansive drug trafficking organizations and their ties to known terrorist groups – make no difference.

For the past thirty plus years, the marijuana legalization movement has aggressively promoted and bemoaned the war on drugs is lost and the US is doing nothing but locking up addicts and users. More insidious was their successful decade’s long campaign to promote the idea that smoked marijuana is medicine that has the ability to treat and cure just about anything and everything with little to no scientific evidence. This tactic – emotion and indulgence over knowledge and truth - has been successfully executed over the years as evidenced by legislators in over 30 states that have enacted some type of “medical-marijuana” legislation absent any medical research or credible science. Emotions, opinions and outright false allegations now seem the root of public policy. Can we honestly survive that way?

Regardless of the onslaught of emotional outbursts and opinions, rallies and protests that give license to rule by “untruth” or “post-truth,” here is a spoiler alert: Truth still matters. According to the scientific and medical communities, smoked marijuana is not medicine. The Institute of Medicine, American Society of Addiction Medicine, American Medical Association, American Cancer Society, American Academy of Pediatrics, The National Multiple Sclerosis Society, The American Glaucoma Society and the American Academy of Ophthalmology all agree that smoked marijuana is not medicine.

A major study published in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* by researchers at Columbia University found that residents of states with medical marijuana had marijuana abuse and dependence rates almost twice as high as states without such laws. More recently marijuana is now the number one reason young kids enter treatment, more than alcohol, cocaine, heroin, meth, ecstasy and or other drugs combined.

To suggest that legalizing any illicit drug will have a positive impact on the safety and security of our society is illogical and mind-numbing. Time and time again, researchers, social scientists as well as law enforcement professionals have witnessed that as the perception of harm for marijuana or any drug decreases, there is a corresponding increase in use and abuse. A recent study of Colorado and Washington states since passage of recreational marijuana legalization showed an alarming increase in rising rates of marijuana use by minors; increasing arrest rates of minors especially black and Hispanic; higher rates of traffic deaths from driving while high; more marijuana related poisonings and hospitalizations and a thriving marijuana black market.

Does the truth still matter? Yes. Now we are witnessing the effects of forgetting that fact – data from schools, treatment clinics, emergency rooms, addiction measures, violent crime, marijuana movement to opiates, drugged driving and deteriorating public health are mounting. The question is, are we ready to return to truth? As a parent, former military officer, lifetime law enforcement officer, and American who loves his country, I hope so.

During my testimony before the Senate Drug Caucus in 2014, I made the statement that drug legalization in our country is reckless and irresponsible. Following my testimony, I received a copy of a letter that was sent to President Obama that declared my statement before the Senate “...served no purpose other than to inflame passions and misinform the public.” I was taken back by how a callous disregard for the truth based on evidence can be dismissed by those who are sworn to uphold the constitution and ensure that the next generation has an opportunity to be successful. The bottom line is this: Truth does matter, regardless of whatever political figures may say.

Sadly, we can no longer expect many of our legislators to have the safety and security of our children as a priority when it comes to making the hard right decision. In order for a civilized society to thrive, grow and survive, it must be willing to seek and utilize knowledge as a bright light that brings truth into focus. Let us do that with the drug crisis with truth not lies.

In the Old Testament we read how the tribes of Israel often fell away from their Godly standards and entertained the voices of false prophets which led to chaos, disorder and conflict. The Lord speaking through the prophet Micah invited the tribes of Israel to be reasonable and seek the truth and “do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8). Justice, love and kindness are the intended consequences of living in a society that pursues knowledge that leads to truth in every facet of our daily existence. I am hopeful that there remains a remnant in our American society that will continue to be light-bearers in a dark world willing to shine the light of truth in our daily walk.

James L. Capra is an author and the CEO of The Front Line Leadership Group. Mr. Capra retired after nearly three decades in government service and is the former Chief of Global Operations for the US Drug Enforcement Administration. His third book, "Raising Courageous Children in a Cowardly Culture" co-authored with his wife Michelle was recently released by Lulu publishing. www.FrontLineLeadershipGroup.com