Opinion: Populism shouldn’t have to embrace ignorance

By Daniel R. DeNicola

Public ignorance is an inherent threat to democracy. It breeds superstition, prejudice, and error; and it prevents both a clear-eyed understanding of the world and the formulation of wise policies to adapt to that world.

Plato believed it was more than a threat: He thought it characterized democracies, and would lead them inevitably into anarchy and ultimately tyranny. But the liberal democracies of the modern era, grudgingly extending suffrage, have extended public education in parallel, in the hope of cultivating an informed citizenry. Yet today, given the persistence and severity of public ignorance, the ideal of an enlightened electorate seems a fading wish at best, a cruel folly at worst.

Unfortunately, our current civic problem cuts even deeper: We are witnessing the rise of a culture of ignorance. It is particularly insidious because it hijacks certain democratic values. To begin to understand this culture and its effects, it is helpful to identify the ways it differs from simple ignorance.

Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of a culture of ignorance is the extent of willful ignorance. Ignorance that is willful may involve resistance to learning, denial of relevant facts, the ignoring of relevant evidence, and suppression of information. Such ignorance is usually maintained in order to protect a prior belief or value—a sense of self, an ideology, a religious doctrine, or some other cherished cognitive commitment. False knowledge often bolsters one’s will in maintaining a closed mind; but of course, it is only ignorance

in elaborate disguise.

When the willfully ignorant are cornered by mounting evidence, they assert their individual right to believe whatever they choose to believe. This is a hollow and silly claim. Beliefs are factive; they aspire to truth. Moreover, beliefs affect attitudes, decisions, and actions. As the Victorian mathematical philosopher William K. Clifford remarked, “No one man’s belief is in any case a private matter which concerns him alone.” He proposed “an ethic of belief” and championed our responsibility to respect evidence for and against our beliefs. Though his standard of evidence may have been too stringent, we can agree that claiming the right to believe “whatever” exploits the democratic respect for individual rights by foregoing individual responsibilities.

A related characteristic is the rejection of expertise. Liberal democratic theory and practice have always elevated individual autonomy and independence, rejecting authority and dependency. They therefore have had difficulties with any relationship that yields individual autonomy—which seems to be involved in consulting an expert. It is true that the place of expertise in a democracy remains contested: We may yield to the expertise of the physician, pilot, or engineer (albeit uneasily); but we may be skeptical of the expertise of the economist, climate scientist, or critic.

Our ambivalence regarding expertise has increasingly come to be a rejection. The rise of social media has certainly contributed to this trend. Who needs a qualified film or restaurant critic when one can find websites that provide thousands of audience or diner ratings? But the implications go far beyond aesthetics: As a senior minister famously said during the recent Brexit campaign, “Britain has had enough of experts.” Among at least a significant portion of the population, this attitude has led to a rejection of the traditional sources and certifiers of knowledge—universities, science, established journalism. As this attitude engulfs

public life, it undermines the fragile but vital distinction between knowledge and belief, between informed judgment and unreflective opinion.

This epistemic populism seems radically democratic, but that image is an illusion. Democracy is, as John Dewey described, a moral climate in which each person may contribute to the construction of knowledge; but it doesn't imply that each person possesses the truth. Moreover, one need not yield political authority to experts; it is epistemic authority—the authority of knowledge, skill, experience, and judgment—that is carried by experts.

At some point, the "wisdom of crowds" becomes the celebration of ignorance. Conspiracy theories, wild speculations and accusations, nutty claims, "alternate facts," and pronouncements that are far afield from one's knowledge—all these claim time or space on a par with accurate and important information. The politician who is ignorant of politics, the law, and history is seen as the person who will "get things done." Some public figures wear their ignorance as a badge of honor. Let's be clear: Ignorance is not stupidity, though I admit it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart in practice. And stupidity is likely to produce ignorance across a broad front. But one can be ignorant without being stupid.

Underlying all of these factors is the loss of respect for the truth. No doubt, many things have contributed: the venality of some experts, the public disagreement among experts, the continual revising of expert advice, and the often-unwarranted movement by social scientists from the descriptive to the normative, from facts to pronouncements. Religious fundamentalism, which stretches credibility, is another precipitating factor. The postmodernist deconstruction of ideals like truth, rationality, and objectivity, also contributed to this loss—though I doubt that postmodernist treatises were widely read among conspiracy theorists, religious fundamentalists, or climate change deniers.

The irony is that these folks believe they are holding the truth. Indeed, I am not suggesting that we need to claim we possess the truth, firmly and finally; in fact, I believe those who make that claim actually disrespect the truth. Rather, we need to keep the ideal of truth to guide our inquiries, to aspire to greater truth. Not all opinions or interpretations are equally worthy. The concept of truth is required to separate knowledge from opinion; those who give up on truth, those for whom truth doesn't matter, are—as the contemporary philosopher Harry Frankfurt said—left with bullshit.

There are signs of hope. Many young people have a naturally skeptical, even cynical, attitude regarding information sources. There is a surge of interest in investigative journalism in various forms. The teaching of critical thinking has broadened to include information literacy: Many colleges now provide ways to learn the skills of evaluating informational sources and content, including statistical integrity. Scholars are giving new attention to epistemic virtues, capacities and traits that enhance the acquisition of knowledge. There is excited talk among feminist and educational philosophers of "an epistemology and pedagogy of resistance" that confronts willful ignorance and the "epistemic injustice" of systematically discrediting certain voices.

The danger, and by the same token, the hope lies in this truth: In the end, ignorance will lead to error. Serious mistakes and their consequences may be required before there is momentum sufficient to roll back this culture.

Daniel R. DeNicola, professor and chair of philosophy at Gettysburg College, is author of "Understanding Ignorance: The Surprising Impact of What We Don't Know" and "Learning to Flourish: A Philosophical Exploration of Liberal Education."

Landmark case could affect every cell phone user

By Sara Israelsen-Hartley, Deseret News

SALT LAKE CITY — Anyone carrying a cellphone could be tracked by the government without their knowledge and without permission — which is why legal scholars are encouraging the Supreme Court to set a few more rules regarding privacy in a digital age.

A case argued Wednesday before the high court, Carpenter v. United States, is a "once-in-a-generation" case, asking whether it was constitutional for law enforcement to research the location of a suspected armed robber for 127 days through cellphone tower data without a warrant.

The case brings up questions about expectations of privacy for personal data handled by third parties, how police can access that data, and what it means to be searched — questions that some experts worry are beyond the power of digitally naive case law to answer, including the long-standing Fourth Amendment, which protects people from unreasonable government search and seizure.

Read the whole story

Cold weather alert for Lake Tahoe Basin

By Tracy Sheldon

The National Weather Service in Reno is forecasting low temperatures in the days ahead.

Starting Dec. 5, a strong high pressure will builds over the area resulting in a prolonged period of strong morning inversions which will be very cold. This pattern will likely last through this weekend and may negatively impact air quality.

Monday night there will be strong east ridge winds. Gusts to 80 mph will likely result in very cold wind chills. Some of these winds will flow down into the area creating boating and tree-fall hazards. Many of our trees are not accustomed to east/northeast wind directions.

As temperatures drop this winter, the American Red Cross offers 10 steps people can take to stay safe during cold weather:

- **Layer up.** Wear layers of lightweight clothing to stay warm. Gloves and a hat will help prevent losing your body heat.
- **Don’t forget your furry friends.** Bring pets indoors. If they can’t come inside, make sure they have enough shelter to keep them warm and that they can get to unfrozen water.
- **Remember the three foot rule.** If you are using a space heater, place it on a level, hard surface and keep anything flammable (things such as paper, clothing, bedding, curtains or rugs) at least three feet away.
- **Requires supervision.** Turn off space heaters and make sure fireplace embers are out before leaving the room or

going to bed.

- **Don’t catch fire.** If you are using a fireplace, use a glass or metal fire screen large enough to catch sparks and rolling logs.
- **Protect your pipes.** Run water, even at a trickle, to help prevent your pipes from freezing. Open the kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. Be sure to move any harmful cleaners and household chemicals out of the reach of children. Keep the garage doors closed if there are water lines in the garage.
- **Better safe than sorry.** Keep the thermostat at the same temperature day and night. Your heating bill may be a little higher, but you could avoid a more costly repair job if your pipes freeze and burst.
- **The kitchen is for cooking.** Never use a stove or oven to heat your home.
- **Use generators outside.** Never operate a generator inside the home, including in the basement or garage.
- **Knowledge is power.** Don’t hook a generator up to the home’s wiring. The safest thing to do is to connect the equipment you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator.

We strongly encourage you to sign up for the **emergency alert**, text messaging service which is part of the city’s comprehensive emergency notification system. Whether you live in the city limits or the county, sign up now for **reverse 911**.

Tracy Sheldon works for the city of South Lake Tahoe.

Skiing in Europe or America: which is best?

By Helen Coffey, Independent

USA vs Europe: which is best for a ski or snowboard holiday? The whole experience becomes very different depending on which side of the pond you're on – off-piste etiquette, chair-lift queuing, après ski and even the kind of snow you're turning on all vary wildly between continents. We look at the pros and cons for each to decide which might be right for you.

The prevalence of package deals mean a European ski holiday can work out cheaper than a North American equivalent. Of course, you can choose to spend thousands on a private chalet in Courchevel 1850 with a 24-hour butler, Champagne on tap and helicopter transfers, but there's also the option of booking a seven-night package deal to Bansko in Bulgaria for $618, including flights, transfers, B&B accommodation, ski hire and lift pass.

In comparison, U.S. lift tickets can work out to be pretty expensive for a week's ski trip: for example, a six-day pass for Breckenridge, Colo., is currently a whopping $727.

Read the whole story

Scam involves callers impersonating law enforcement

The Douglas County Sheriff's Office is warning the public that people are falsely saying they are DCSO personnel.

The callers are using DCSO member’s names and falsely stating the person has missed a court date and a fine is now due. The caller is asking for a credit card number.

These calls are phone scams and the callers are trying to obtain personal information from those they are calling. The calls may appear local on the resident’s caller ID.

DCSO never calls people to notify them they owe money on a warrant or fine.

The public is encouraged to hang up on those calls and never give out personal information on the phone.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

· Early bird registration is open for the annual Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce Business Expo. It is March 30, 4:30-8:30pm in Stateline. Go **online** for details.

· The Christmas Eve Torchlight Parade at Granlibakken in Tahoe City starts at 5pm. For more info, go **online**.

· Tahoe City Ice Rink at the Winter Sports Park is open daily from 10am-8pm.

· Tahoe Cross Country in Tahoe City is having a welcome winter party on Dec. 16 at noon.

· Save the date: Erected to honor the immigrants who passed through Truckee en route to new opportunities in the West, the Pioneer Monument has stood at Donner Memorial State Park for 99 years. At its dedication on June 6, 1918, thousands of people and three Donner Party survivors gathered to honor the past. June 9, 2018 is the rededication,

centennial celebration, and restoration kickoff of this iconic statue. Ceremonies begin at 11am, followed by family activities and a fundraising gala to raise funds for the construction of an education pavilion and restoration of the iconic landmark. For more information, call 530.583.9911.

SLT club soccer team headed to state competition



Top row: Ivy Gonzalez, Independence Newberry, Anna Lyle, Alexiah Solorzano, Jenni Arias, Isabel Wigart, Natalie Bitzer, Malia Solis, Leah Nisenfeld, Sydney Irwin, Olivia Kwachak Bottom row: Kiana Buchholz, Jazmyn Schumaker, Anna Sharpe, Gulia Lancelotti, Krystyna Schembri, Kylie Muskovitz, Blake Wallace

The South Tahoe Futbol Club U13 Girls, Tahoe Revolution, team is headed to the State Cup Championship in Modesto on Dec. 9.

The soccer team this past weekend won the quarter and semifinals of the NorCal Premier State Cup.

The Revolution battled in the quarter final to win 4-3 against Central Valley Premier from Visalia. The game was scoreless at the end of regulation, necessitating two overtimes. A shootout ultimately determined the winner, sending the Revolution to the semi-finals the following day.

The next day the revolution competed against Sunnyvale Alliance, which once again ended in a shootout resulting in a 3-0 win. The winner was decided with goals from Malia Solis, Anna Sharpe, and Isabel Wigart, including a stunning performance from goal keeper Leah Nisenfeld.

The entire team played a stellar weekend of soccer, with every team member contributing to the team's success. It was a hard fought, suspenseful and emotional battle that resulted in an opportunity to compete for the NorCal State Cup this next weekend, said Russell Wigart, assistant Coach of the Revolution.

This weekend was a true test of mental mettle from the team. These 12 year olds have demonstrated all season that there are no limits with this passionate bunch. They stepped up to the penalty mark not once, but twice in two games; putting their stamp on a ticket to the State Cup Championship game, said Joaquin Solis, head coach of the Revolution.

The Tahoe revolution will compete against South Valley Chivas Academy from Porterville for the championship on Saturday at 1pm in Modesto.

– Provided to LTN

Status of snowpack after a mild November

By Angela Schilling, KTVN-TV

Lake Tahoe is the fullest it’s been for this time of year since the mid 1980s, and according to the National Weather Service, the region would need to have more than one dry winter to go back into a drought.

It usually takes about three dry years for Lake Tahoe to deplete its storage.

As far as the current snow season, the snowpack is doing quite well above 8,000 feet. Looking at the snow water equivalent, the Truckee basin is 145 percent of normal and about the same in Carson and Walker. The Tahoe basin is at 64 percent, as it is lower in elevation.

Read the whole story

Controlled burns slated for Tahoe basin this month

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team will continue prescribed fire operations over the next several weeks, weather permitting.

Lake Valley, North Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Douglas fire protection districts, California State Parks, California Tahoe

Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service will conduct prescribed fire operations in multiple areas around Lake Tahoe. Smoke may be present. View the **online map** with project locations and details.

Each prescribed fire operation follows a specialized prescribed fire burn plan, which considers temperature, humidity, wind, moisture of the vegetation, and conditions for the dispersal of smoke. This information is used to decide when and where to burn.

Before prescribed fire operations are conducted, agencies post road signs around areas affected by prescribed fire, send email notifications and update the local fire information line at 530.543.2816.

Nev. receives $5.7M to keep child health programs running

By Gary Martin, Las Vegas Review-Journal

WASHINGTON — Nevada will receive $5.7 million in unspent funds for federal health care for low-income children, but the state's entire congressional delegation urged House and Senate leaders Friday to quickly reauthorize the program that expired two months ago.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services notified the state that it would receive the redistribution of unspent funds, which should allow Nevada to provide Children's Health Insurance Program services through January.

Nevada was expected to run out of CHIP funds around Dec. 15,

prompting Gov. Brian Sandoval and the state’s bipartisan congressional delegation to urge quick action to reauthorize the program.

Read the whole story