

# The Biggest Source of Fake News in America Is ...

Many of us – no, make that *most* of us – have lost faith in important American institutions – which, and forgive me for stating the obvious, is not a good thing in a free country like ours.

A Gallup poll last June found that given a long list of institutions, Americans had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in just three – the military, small business and the police.

Not doing so well was organized religion, the Supreme Court, public schools, banks, organized labor, and big business.

Congress came in dead last. Just 9 percent of respondents said they had a lot of confidence in the institution. I’m assuming more than a few blood relatives of senators and members of congress were counted in that 9 percent.

Then there’s the news media. According to a recent Gallup poll, “Americans’ trust and confidence in the mass media ‘to report the news fully, accurately and fairly’ has dropped to its lowest level in Gallup polling history, with 32% saying they have a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media.”

We don’t even trust each other. A poll taken a month before the presidential election last year found that only 31 percent said, “most people can be trusted.”

As for the president, a USA Today poll conducted this month says that 47 percent of Americans approve of his job performance while 44 percent don’t.

“On personality, though, there is a broad and negative consensus,” according to the poll. “By 60 percent to 30

percent those polled disapprove of Trump's temperament, and 59% say he tweets too often."

The president has heard that before. But the tweeter-in-chief is unmoved. By tweeting, he believes, he can go over the heads of what he calls the fake news media and speak directly to the American people.

But even if he has enemies in the press – and he does! – the main source of fake news in America isn't the New York Times or the Washington Post or CNN. It's the president himself. Let's be kind and simply say he disseminates a lot of information that isn't in the same zip code as the truth.

He doesn't seem to grasp an important concept: The truth matters, especially when you're the president. One day he'll have to tell the nation something truly important – something that might require sacrifice from the American people. We need to believe what he says.

And the president's latest unsubstantiated tweet alleging that he "just found out" that former President Barack Obama "had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower" just before the election is only the latest example of how this president shoots first and asks questions later.

Now he says he wants an investigation. Of what? To see if what he told us was true? This might be funny if he weren't the most important person in the free world.

Instead of impulsively tweeting something he couldn't prove, the president should have checked around before sending out his inflammatory message that put another well-deserved ding in his credibility. He could have asked the FBI chief what he knew. He could have done a whole bunch of things – but decided to do the one thing that caused him the most damage.

So what else is new?

President Trump didn't start the fire. Trust in our institutions has been eroding for a while now. But his intemperate claim that Barack Obama bugged his offices during the presidential campaign only fuels the mistrust and ratchets up the already dangerous polarization in America.

So here's an idea: Apologists who have defended Donald Trump no matter what he's said and done, need to do him a favor. They need to take him aside and let him know that if he wants to be a successful president he has to start acting like a president and stop imitating Pinocchio. They need to tell him to figure out a way to control his impulse to fire back at every slight, real or imagined. And someone needs to shut down his Twitter account, for his own good.

And the Democrats need to grow up too. Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi need to tell their hyper-partisan base, a base that won't rest until Donald Trump is impeached, that it's not going to happen; and that as supposed "leaders" they will no longer reflexively oppose every idea the president and his party have just to make angry progressives a little less angry. They need to make clear that acting on principle is one thing; partisan politics and obstructionism are something else. But delivering such a message would take courage, and that's a commodity in short supply in Washington.

Both sides need a timeout. Milk and cookies will be provided.

I know, I'm dreaming.