



Racine Dominicans Justice Team

UPDATE:

MIS-INFORMATION

in Wisconsin's Mid-
Term Elections

WISCONSIN



1848

PRAYER

Dear God:

We give thanks for the democracy alive in our country
and for the freedom to worship You.

Help the elected government and all in positions of power and
authority to govern wisely and for the common good of all.

Help us all to recognize that humility and respect for
democracy are characteristics which call
America to be a beacon for stability and prosperity around the
world – characteristics which should be upheld, as they were
fought for by ancestors who sacrificed so much for the
freedoms we too often take for granted today.

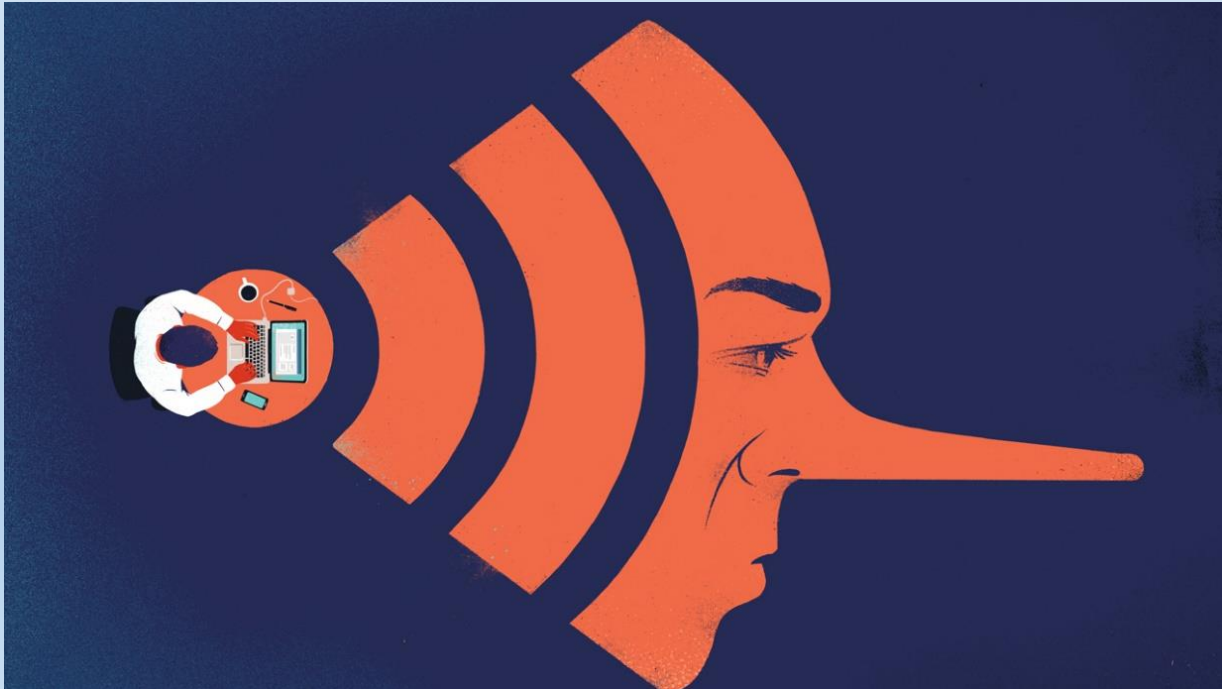
Amen.

(Adapted from *A British Prayer for Democracy*)

Misinformation vs. Disinformation

The Difference, according to *ProPublica* (non-profit newsroom, first online news source to win a Pulitzer Prize):

- *Disinformation*:
 - False information that is deliberately created and shared by individuals or organizations to knowingly cause harm
 - e.g., Russian “troll farms” attempting to influence US opinion by promoting divisive social media messaging



Misinformation vs. Disinformation

(According to ProPublica)



- *Misinformation:*
 - Also false information, but shared by people who are unaware of its untruthfulness
 - e.g., your newly politically enthused relative on Facebook

In Actual Common Modern Use:

- Term you choose depends on how thoroughly you want to discredit the person(s) spreading the information in question

Truth in Advertising (Sometimes)



Federal Statutes and Regulations

- Require *conventional* commercial advertisers in the US to back up their claims with facts
 - Example: 2014 lawsuit compels Red Bull energy drink to settle for \$13 Million over false claim that the drink “gives you wings”
 - Notable kinds of advertisers who do NOT have to back up claims with facts:
 - Nutritional Supplement Marketers; and
 - Political Candidates

Communications Act of 1934



A Legal System Strongly Committed to Free Speech:

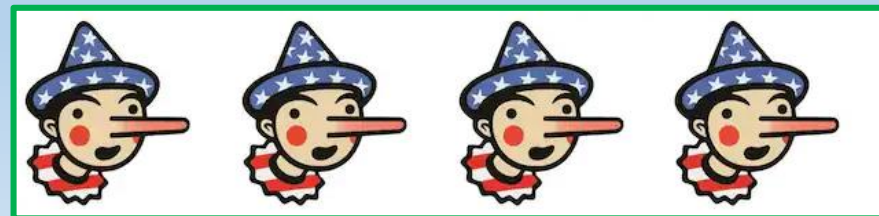
- Broadcasters have “no power of censorship” over any “legally qualified candidate” for political office
 - Broadcasters therefore required to air any political ad no matter how “controversial,” and without edits
 - Broadcasters also required to sell political ads at their lowest rate
 - Act does not prevent a broadcaster from including disclaimer (e.g.: “opinions expressed are not necessarily those of”)
 - Act applies to broadcast airwaves but not cable networks or social media companies

Recent Uptick in False Claims?



2016 Seen as Dawn of New Era

- Many observers see an increase in false statements in election ads dating from 2016
- Ubiquity of the internet search drives heavier reliance on real time fact-checking
- Example of Joe Biden 2020 presidential campaign ad
- Ad earns four “Pinocchios” from the [Washington Post’s fact-checker](#)



2022 Wis. Mid-Term Elections: Senate



Ron Johnson (R) Television Ad:

Question: *Did Mandela Barnes Really Justify Violence Against Police?*

- <https://host2.adimpact.com/admo/#/viewer/89c93009-0b19-4094-8d91-e3783633f021>

2022 Wis. Mid-Terms: Senate



Answer: *No. Johnson's ad is misleading in that it omitted Mandela Barnes's condemnation of anti-police violence.*

Barnes, in the same interview:

“So what I’ll say, you know, like I’ve said before, is people are very upset, and there’s no way that the Dallas police officers, that killing is not justified in any way. I have repeatedly denounced that. I don’t condone violence in any way. I get so mad about police killings because ... I don’t want anybody to die. But we want everybody to be able to live peacefully, live in a safe environment.”

2022 Wis. Mid-Terms: Senate, Round Two

Gun Control Group's Television Ad:

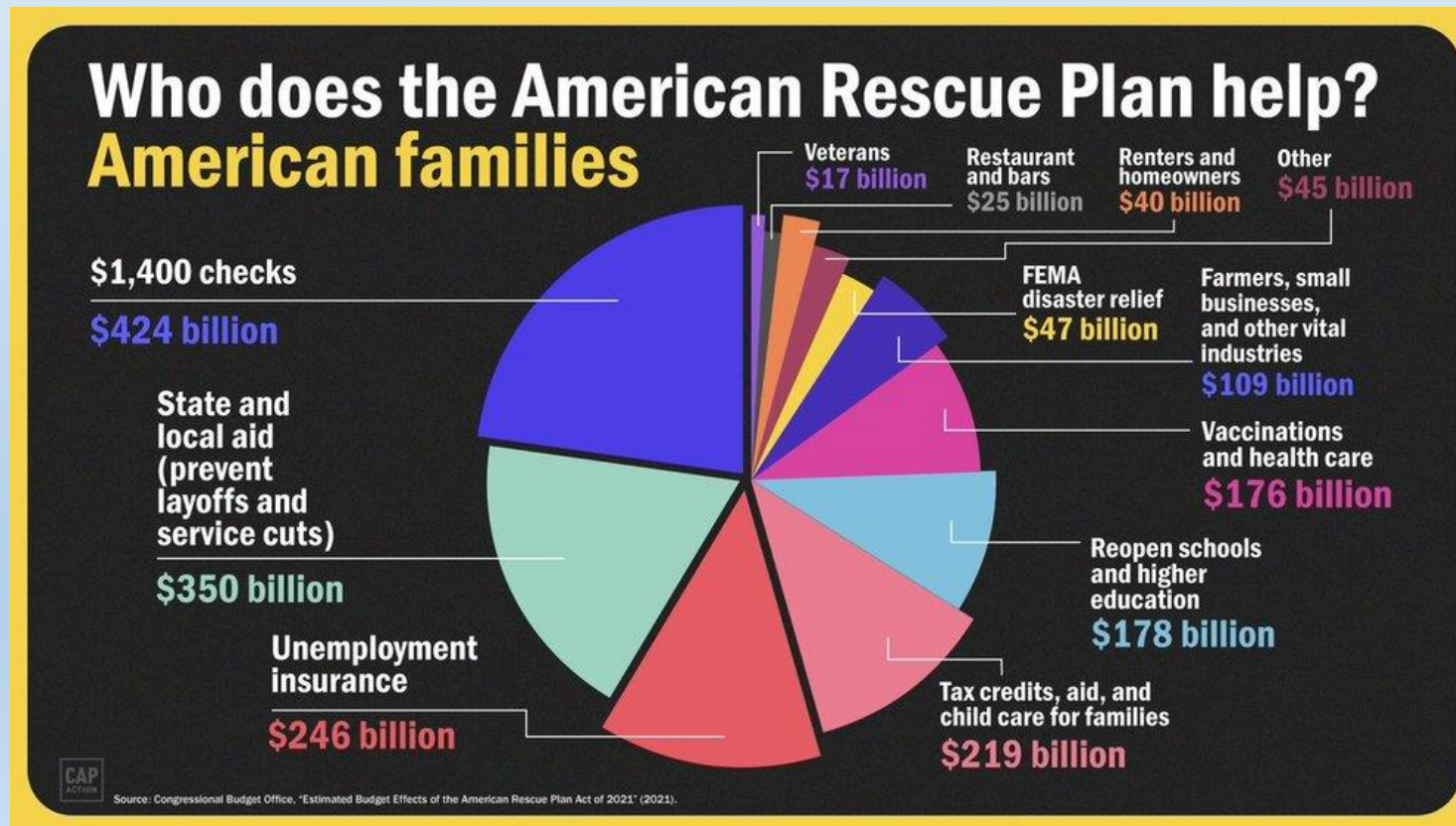
Question: *Did Ron Johnson really deny funding to law enforcement?*

(Ad placed by super PAC called “Everytown for Gun Safety Victory Fund”)



2022 Wis. Mid-Terms: Senate, Round Two

Answer: No. The Johnson vote referenced in the ad was on the “American Rescue Plan” of 2021, a nearly \$2 trillion proposal with a scope far beyond funding of law enforcement



2022 Wis. Mid-Terms: Governor



Tim Michels (R) Televised Campaign Ad:
Question: *Has Governor Tony Evers (D) or “Governor Evers’s Parole Board” really paroled large numbers of violent criminals?*

<https://twitter.com/i/status/1575171212547747850>

2022 Wis. Mid-Terms: Governor

Answer: No, (and also Yes, but only kind of). The Parole Commission, not the Governor, releases criminals on parole, often to comply with sentences courts entered years ago.



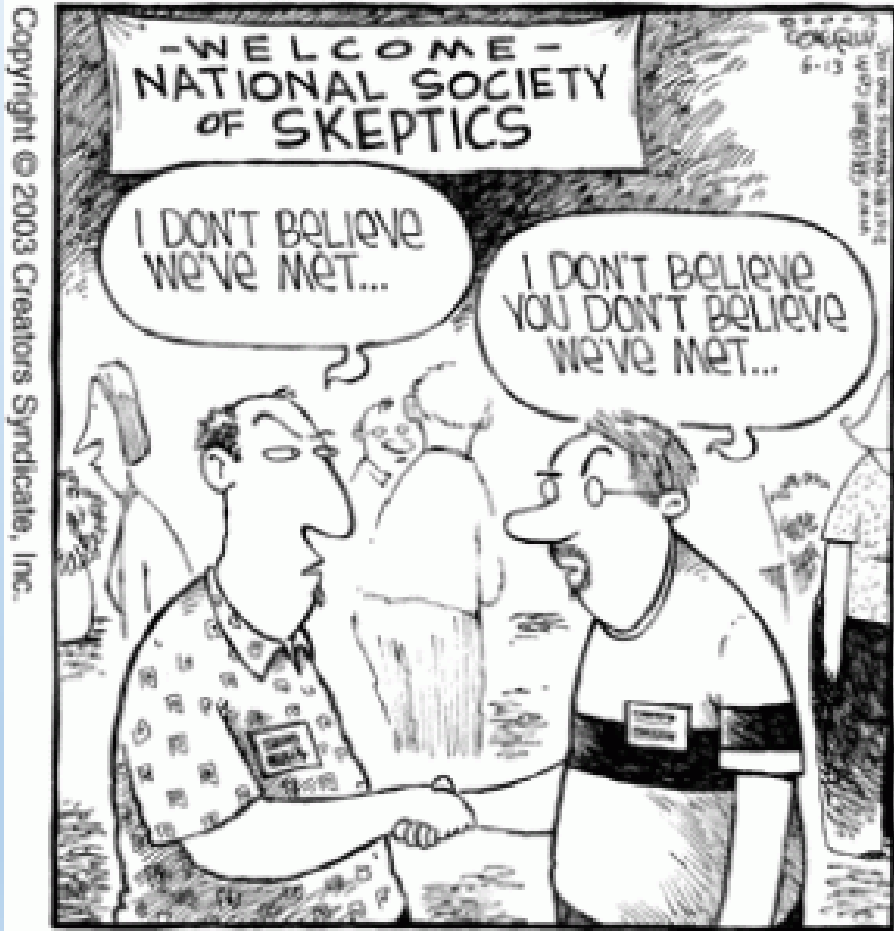
How Can I Tell if the Information I'm Consuming is False?



Reputable Places to Fact-Check Political Claims:

- snopes.com
- factcheck.org
- politifact.com
- [AP News Fact Check](https://apnews.com/fact-check)
- [Washington Post Fact Checker](https://www.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/)
- Ways to Investigate a Source's Legitimacy
 - Have you ever even heard of the publication you are consulting?
 - Does the source have an "about us" page?
 - Does it list a mailing address?
 - Does it have a Wikipedia page?

Maintaining a Well-balanced Critical Stance



Practice Emotional Skepticism

- We are more likely to be misled by false information that confirms our biases
- Political misinformation is often intended to cloud or short-circuit critical thinking with vague, over-broad claims, emotional appeals or inflammatory assertions
- Political misinformation is created and communicated in ways intended to obstruct or evade verification
- Much modern political discourse is more propaganda than news reporting