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Guest Column

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Astute individuals read information from multiple sources, research material up one side and down the other and develop their own opinions versus being lemmings to the dictum of others. A news source that is gaining more attention as political divisiveness becomes apparent is 'Think Tanks'.

Think tanks broker ideas on topics such as social policy, politics, economics, and culture. America's oldest think tank was founded by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1910; today we have about 2,000 think tanks.

Most people perceive think tanks to be non-governmental organizations, but research reveals the majority are associated with political parties where most of their funding comes from wealthy individuals and — to a lesser degree — corporations. Rarely, if ever, does a think tank voluntarily announce their political persuasion. There's the rub.

Think tanks as well as political parties can unduly take a person's thinking, values, beliefs and actions down a deep and dark rabbit hole. And, when the two join forces, being duped can occur.

The media watch group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting reveals 37 percent of think tank citations are conservative, 16 percent liberal and 47 percent non-partisan (The incredible shrinking think tank, Dec. 2020).

Georgetown University notes (Apr. 7) some of the more conservative-based think tanks include The Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, Hoover Institution, Cato Institute and

Hudson Institute. The Koch brothers are contributors to the Cato Institute and Hudson Institute plus ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council), which many Republican legislators copy as their model legislation when making bills (e.g., voter suppression laws, stand-your-ground gun legislation, anti-LGBTQ, private school vouchers, etc.).

Some liberal think tanks are Center for American Progress, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Human Rights Watch, Inter-American Dialogue and Economic Policy Institute. George Soros – Forbes called him the most generous giver — is among many contributors to the Human Rights Watch.

The most reliable, highly factual, least biased and non-partisan think tanks people ought to trust include The Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, National Bureau of Economic Research, RAND Corporation, and Pew Research Center (Media Bias/Fact Check, 2020).

What effect have bias-based think tanks created for Democrats, Republicans and America?

Matt Grossman of Michigan State University and David Hopkins of Boston College assert that since the 1950's Republicans have been hostile to journalists by thinking their reporting is tainted with a liberal bias. Hence, the GOP created and/or supported alternative sources to promote their conservative perspectives: talk radio (e.g., Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, Alex Jones, etc.), Fox News and The Heritage Foundation think tank (Scholars Strategy Network, Oct. 13, 2017).

Grossman and Hopkins state “no parallel to the conservative media and think tank apparatus currently exists on the American left.” Let's be candid here. The Heritage Foundation, Fox News and other Republican operatives (e.g., Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection deniers, QAnon, Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, the Big Lie advocates, etc.) rule the roost in dishing out disinformation and misinformation. Americans are being hoodwinked with falsehoods of information from multiple sources.

Unless the public wakes up to the reality of purposefully tainted news reporting and politically-driven think tank ideas, it's safe to say America will soon – if not already — turn more away from a democracy and into an authoritarian, populist and dictatorial country.

The marketing concept of caveat emptor (let the buyer beware) also applies to the propaganda spewed by politically-based think tanks and political parties. Remember, toxins upstream eventually make their way downstream. Be very cautious of what political operative toxins you are consuming; they may destroy America as we know it.