

Standard online reader survey



Q: Do you think election meddling is a major concern?

YES or NO

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GUEST EDITORIAL

We can't fall asleep on election meddling

In July, Dan Coats made a point of telling the country: "The warning lights are blinking red again." The director of national intelligence had in mind that Russian interference remains an active threat to the November elections. His imagery was notable, alluding to concerns before the Sept. 11 attacks, intelligence officials and others failing to connect the dots.

Is the country today in position to respond effectively?

On Thursday, at the White House, Coats and other top national security officials both sounded an alarm and tried to reassure that the country is in a stronger position. Christopher Wray, the FBI director, talked about a "24-7, 365-days-a-year" effort, adding: "This is a threat we need to take extremely seriously and to tackle and respond to with fierce determination and focus."

Russian operatives continue to manipulate news stories, spread disinformation and amplify divisive issues. Officials are looking out for voter suppression activity, illegal campaign funding and computer hacks aimed at campaigns and voting infrastructure. Facebook last week shut down 32 pages and accounts with suspected ties to Russia. Microsoft discovered an attack on two election candidates. U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, a

Akron Beacon Journal/ Ohio

Missouri Democrat, reported she was targeted.

Security experts see political campaigns as perhaps the most vulnerable. As it is, steps have been taken to improve things.

Moving forward, Coats said, "It is essential that we apply critical thinking to all sorts of information."

Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, wants to aggravate divisions among Americans and thus weaken the country. More, Twitter and other social media are programmed to confirm our biases. As a result, misinformation spreads more rapidly. Social media has an obligation to play more the editor.

Which gets to the role of the president, and his disposition to divide and to declare as "fake news" accurate reporting.

The briefing by national security officials came as President Trump struggles with his own thinking, returning again to labeling the Russian intervention "a big hoax." He says this when a key priority in building a real deterrent goes to letting the Russians know there will be a heavy cost if they persist.

So far, the president hasn't sent such a clear and consistent message. He might have started by attending the briefing.

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Where is Barack Obama?

"Join me on Team '18," Barack Obama wrote in a recent fundraising email from his old political group, Organizing for Action. "Every election, every ballot measure, every conversation between now and November ... it all matters."

It wasn't much, but the email was one of Obama's few public, political, overtly partisan appeals as the Democratic Party approaches mid-term elections that could stop President Trump's agenda and boost Democratic prospects going into 2020. To have an ex-president who remains highly popular with his party sitting on the sidelines cannot be what Democrats hoped.

There are reports that Obama plans to campaign for some Democrats starting in September. But beyond simply hitting the stump for the midterms, Obama could be, if not the full-fledged leader of the Resistance, at least a constant and public critic of the direction taken by the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress.

Obama did have a political message earlier in July, but he chose to deliver it in South Africa, thousands of miles away from U.S. midterm campaigning. Speaking at an event in Johannesburg honoring Nelson Mandela, Obama never mentioned Donald Trump's name, but his message was undoubtedly aimed at his successor in the White House.

"Look around," Obama said. "Strongman politics are ascendant suddenly, whereby elections and some pretense of democracy are maintained -- the form of it -- but those in power seek to undermine every institution or norm that gives democracy meaning."

"We see the utter loss of shame among political leaders," Obama con-

tinued, "where they're caught in a lie and they just double down and they lie some more."

For Democrats, Obama, who isn't running for anything, could be as close to a leader as an out-of-power party can have until the Democrats' next presidential nominee comes along. But he's just not taking the job.

In June, *New York* magazine published an article with the almost plaintive headline, "Where is Barack Obama?" Writer Gabriel Debenedetti portrayed a former president who, for whatever reason, has decided not to stay up on day-to-day politics,

focusing instead on the new Obama Foundation and on his memoirs.

"In private conversations, Obama rarely mentions Trump at all," Debenedetti

reported. "Those who've visited the office he's leased from the World Wildlife Fund in Washington's West End say he's eager to talk for hours about the world's ills. When informed about the latest presidential tweetstorms aimed at him, he chuckles and changes the subject."

Maybe that works for him. But for his admirers -- and many Democratic voters -- Obama's absence borders on the mysterious.

One Obama is doing some shoe-leather work for the midterms. This week came news that former first lady Michelle Obama will travel around the country in a weeklong voter registration effort in late September.

That will certainly be welcome in many Democratic circles. But at the same time, no one should be surprised if party activists ask Mrs. Obama: "Where is your husband?"

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

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LACY GARRISON



Fighting illness with rhymes

As I write this week's column, I have a sinus and an ear infection. Feeling inspired, I even typed a short poem about it. It goes like this:

My ear throbbeth while I sobbeth. It hurts so bad and I'm so sad. Just wanna go home and be all alone.

Pure poetry, right? Seriously, it's challenging to write interesting, worthwhile stories when you're feeling badly. If you're like me, you have to be in some serious pain before you cave and go to the doctor. After two days and restless nights, I finally went to see Lacey Jones at Good Samaritan Family Health Center and she confirmed what I already suspected.

It's on sick days I wish I could go back to my childhood self. Do you ever wish that? Those luxurious days when I could lie in bed all day long being pitiful or recoup on the sofa watching TV as Grandma brought me food and medicine. I have a whole new appreciation for her.

Instead, I have to woman up and push through the pain as most adults do. (Quick shout-out to parents when sickness hits their house and you're sick and still have to be the caregiver.) Being an adult often means pushing through even if you have to use your lunch break to go to the nearest walk-in clinic before heading back to work with your meds.

This is my first experience with an ear infection in adulthood. I wasn't prone to them as a child so it took me a day to realize what was wrong with me. I don't particularly enjoy taking antibiotics or the feeling of ear drops, but I'll take anything that promises to ease the steady pulse of pain every 10 seconds in my right ear.

Speaking of childhood, to perk me up, Ross took me to see Disney's new "Christopher Robin" movie. If you enjoyed watching Winnie the Pooh growing up, this movie is a must-see. In my opinion, it's really aimed at grown-ups as the focus is on Christopher Robin in adulthood. It was so relatable, had important messages about priorities while also bringing back those charming stuffed characters we know and love.

Now, I love me some silly old Pooh Bear, but Eeyore is hands down my favorite character in the Hundred Acre Wood. Voiced by "Everybody Loves Raymond" actor Brad Garrett, his deep voice was perfectly suited to bring the gloomy donkey to life.

According to Rotten Tomatoes, home of the Tomatometer, and Ross' go-to measurement of quality for movies, "Christopher Robin" scored 68 percent and the majority of audience members liked it with an average rating of 4.5 out of 5.

I'm typically not a movie-goer, but I'm glad Ross talked me into seeing this one. So my advice for you this week would be to go see "Christopher Robin" and if you're feeling sinusy, go to the doctor before you feel worse.

Have a blessed week, everyone! Standard reporter Lacy Garrison can be reached at 473-2191.



My driving skills are eroding

"Oh look," I said, "there's a new store where that messy vacant lot used to be."

To which everyone else in the car said, "Keep your eyes on the road, would you?"

They all act as if I'm a bad driver. Bob says I look out the window as things go by as if I weren't driving, but sitting in the passenger seat.

"It's as if you learned how to drive by watching people drive in the movies," he says. "In real life, you can't turn to look at the guy in the passenger seat for 30 seconds while driving down a busy street. We can hear you even when your eyes are on the road."

This has all started just in the past few years. I used to be the one who drove everyone around, but now all I hear is "I'll meet you there" or "I'll pick you up." Maybe I really have become a bad driver. It's like the first time a kid stood up and offered me a seat on the bus. Do I look that old and infirm? Why is the cashier asking me if I need help getting my groceries to the car? I could understand if it was a 300-pound bag of dog food, but I just bought a pack of gum.

So, to myself from becoming a danger to keep and others, and to keep the few friends I have left happy, I bought a new car. It's got all kinds of bells and whistles that will alert me to the fact I'm drifting out of my lane, or I'm backing into a tree I don't remember being there yesterday. It brakes automatically if the car in front of me stops, and automatically rolls down the window when I want

to yell obscenities at another driver.

The car just yelled "Watch out!" when I tried to turn left in front of an 18-wheeler barreling down the road. Oh, that wasn't the car, it was Bob. I forgot he'd asked me to take him to the doctor's. I hope they can fix that nervous condition he's got.

I thought I was going to pick him up in an hour, but he said his niece would come get him.

"I thought your niece moved out of state?"

"Ahhh, yeah, but she's back, uh, visiting."

"Well, tell her I said hi." Poor man; he does not look well.

The trouble now is that the bells and whistles are distracting me. Something was buzzing or ringing all the way home, but I couldn't figure out what it was. I was in my lane, I wasn't going over the speed limit, my seatbelt was on, there was nothing in front of me or behind me to hit -- and that's when I ran out of gas.

"Didn't you notice the flashing red gas can on your dashboard?" the AAA guy said when he showed up with a can of gas.

"It looks like a fruit basket. I thought it was reminding me to send someone a gift."

"Right. Mister, have you ever tried Uber, or calling a cab?"

"I took one to the airport once, and it scared me to death. They drive like crazy people."

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