

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

READY OR NOT, THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IS ONE YEAR AWAY

It's T-minus one year until the next presidential election in the United States. I hate to say it, but I'm feeling a sense of dread — not about the likely candidates but more so, the role that social media will surely play.

Usage of social media platforms in our country has increased dramatically: Just 5 percent of American adults used at least one platform in 2005, according to Pew Research Center. That climbed to 72 percent of adults by 2021.

The expansion has been beneficial in many ways, bringing important issues to the forefront of the public's attention. Further, social media has enabled candidates, political organizations and causes to reach more people with more efficiency, improving information flows, outreach, mobilization and fundraising.

According to the Integrity Institute, an organization that is dedicated to "protecting the social internet," it's why almost every political campaign has adopted a "digital-first" strategy.

With its growing number of users, social media has become

our country's primary news source.

A 2022 Morning Consult poll of people who consume news daily found that 37 percent rely on social media; 26 percent watch network news and just 12 percent read newspapers, like me.

Yet newspapers are considered most trustworthy: 61 percent of respondents trust them, while 59 percent trust network news. Just one-third of respondents trust social media.

This mistrust is not misplaced. Just as platforms can be used to educate, enlighten, and engage, they can also be used to spread misinformation and disinformation, support voter suppression and disenfranchisement, and promote hate speech, harassment and political polarization — which can compound in a way that affects election outcomes.

Social media can also cause what the Integrity Institute calls "off-platform, real world harm," including the incitement of election-related and political violence that targets voters, poll workers, election officials, candidates, party members and social groups.

It can erode public trust in the societal institutions that support democracy.

Last year, the former head of global elections for Facebook, Katie Harbath, participated in a conversation hosted by the National Conflict Resolution Center called "Social Media and the Future of Democracy." (Harbath is currently an Integrity Institute fellow.) She talked about the challenges that online platforms face, with the 2024 U.S. presidential election — and 82 other elections around the world — heading their way. Harbath implored them to initiate an internal elections integrity program, citing the need to safeguard democracy.

That's a big and important ask, when you consider that next year's elections will affect the lives of nearly 3.65 billion people, according to the Integrity Institute.

It appears that X (formerly known as Twitter) has gone in the opposite direction in the one year since it was purchased for \$44 billion by Elon Musk. When he bought the company, Musk claimed he wanted to create a "common digital town square,"

adding, "Twitter obviously cannot become a free-for-all hellscape."

Now X is valued at \$19 billion. Ad revenue has fallen 50 percent and site visits declined 14 percent in September, compared with the same month last year. In a recent New York Times article, Steven Lee Myers, Stuart A. Thompson and Tiffany Hsu pointed to the increase in harmful content on X during the Musk era, especially since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas. The authors noted that one of Musk's earliest decisions was to disband an advisory council focused on trust and safety issues, laying off employees who addressed them.

As social media proliferates (and with it, misinformation and disinformation), trusted newspapers are closing across the country.

We are on pace to lose one-third of our newspapers by 2025. Already, more than one-fifth of Americans live in what's considered to be a news "desert," with limited access to local news.

Yet now more than ever, we need an informed and active public that has confidence in our

institutions and elected officials. Absent that confidence, our democracy will become increasingly fragile. To Rosette Garcia, president of the League of Women Voters of North County San Diego, it means empowering every person with the knowledge, desire and confidence to vote. It also means increasing civic engagement: inspiring people to want to make a difference in the quality of life in their communities, through both political and non-political means.

That's the key, of course. When we recognize ourselves as members of a larger social fabric — and feel a sense of belonging — we care more. We see problems as our own. And we're more likely to act, rather than hiding behind social media. It's an idea that holds promise, not just for future elections but the health of our democracy.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com

SAND

FROM B1 Thursday.

"The overall intention of the meeting was to see if there was any overlap with projects that are slated to begin in the next few years, and to see what kinds of funding hurdles we may be collectively experiencing while trying to bring forth these larger coastal projects," Timberlake said.

No date was set for the next meeting, she said, but it probably will be after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers begins its Coastal Storm Damage Reduction Project to widen beaches in Encinitas and Solana Beach later this fall. The federal project has been in development for more than 20 years and will take sand dredged offshore near San Clemente periodically over the next 50 years.

Another possibility is a third regional replenishment project by the San Diego Association of Governments, the regional planning agency. SANDAG com-

pleted regional projects in 2001 and 2012, taking sand from nearby offshore deposits and placing it along the coast at sites from Imperial Beach to Oceanside.

Carlsbad, Oceanside, Encinitas, Solana Beach and Imperial Beach city councils agreed this year to share the \$200,000 cost for a planning, feasibility and economic analysis for the new project.

Engineering and environmental work for the proposal has not begun and is expected to cost \$3 million, and construction has been estimated at roughly \$37 million. Most of the construction costs would have to come from state and federal grants.

The annual clearing of the Oceanside harbor and periodic dredging of San Diego County's coastal lagoons also provide sediment for beach nourishment. But it's not enough.

Eroding beaches and sea-level rise have many coastal cities looking for answers.

The California Coastal Commission has long supported replenishment ef-



Sand pours out of a pipe along the beach just north of the Oceanside Pier (background) in October 2018.

EDUARDO CONTRERAS U-T FILE

orts, but generally opposed the construction of hardened structures such as rock revetments and groins to keep the sand in place. Among the concerns are that the structures can impede beach access, may contribute to erosion, and can stop the down-current flow of sand to other beaches.

That position could change as the situation grows more dire.

A representative of the

grassroots group Save Oceanside Beaches, President and CEO Bob Ashton, went to the Coastal Commission's meeting in October to request support for the Oceanside project, which includes ideas ranging from building artificial reefs to small islands, and found some apparent support.

"We will continue to work with the city and encourage their creativity," said Kate Huckelbridge, the commis-

sion's executive director. "It's exactly the approach that we want people to take, to bring all the ideas to the table as we are trying to figure out how to adapt to sea-level rise."

The Oceanside City Council voted in August 2021 to spend \$1 million on plans and permits for beach groins and a sand bypass system.

However, Carlsbad's City Council got wind of the plan and passed a resolution opposing the jetty-like groins or any hardened structure that could stop sand from flowing south to their beaches. Encinitas, Solana Beach and Del Mar also went on record as opposed.

Since then, Oceanside has continued with the project, while downplaying the idea of groins and emphasizing a need to work cooperatively with all coastal cities.

Also, an increasing amount of data collected by University of California San Diego scientists and others shows that the dominant southward migration of sand along the coast is more complicated than once thought and is affected by many factors other than hard structures on the beach.

In January of this year, Oceanside approved a second phase of planning at a cost of \$2.6 million that included the Re:Beach contest to find an innovative solution.

The three teams competing for the Oceanside design contract are: Deltares/MVRDV, which proposed building a peninsula off the beach to support biodiversity and recreational activities while serving as a type of breakwater to hold sand;

SCAPE, ESA and the Dredge Research Collaborative, which proposed the concept of a sand dune park with a layered beach at Tyson Street; and International Coast Management, which proposed a rounded headland with a sand bar and an artificial reef.

The teams at the October workshop presented "well-defined sand retention concepts" based on more than 335 comments previously provided by the community, Timberlake said.

"The designers are seeking to create widened beaches that also afford the community additional benefits, such as improved access to the ocean or restored natural habitat," she said.

Contest jury member Charles Lester, director of the Ocean and Coastal Policy Center at the University of California Santa Barbara's Marine Science Center, said in a recent news release that the chosen project will help protect the coast for future generations.

"Adapting to sea level rise along our coast will be a huge challenge in coming decades, but Oceanside's design competition is clearly taking it seriously by inviting the public to actively engage with some high-powered and creative technical teams thinking about Oceanside's future shoreline," Lester said.

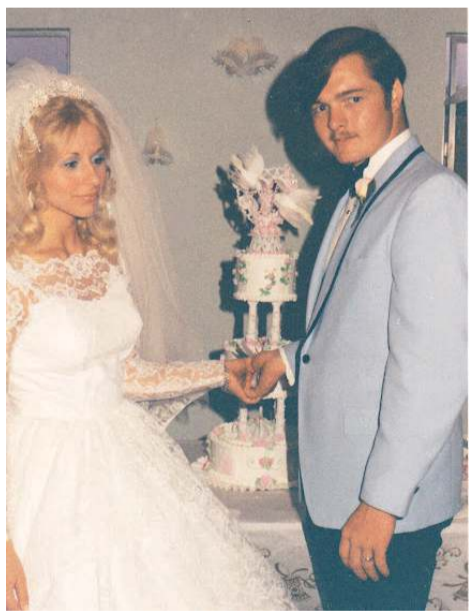
Advisory panel member Jeremy Smith, a coastal engineer at the Coastal Commission, said all the designs presented were thought-provoking and warrant careful consideration.

philip.diehl@suniontribune.com

Celebrations The San Diego Union-Tribune

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY Art and Donna Webb

Congratulations to Art and Donna Webb of North County, San Diego on their 50th Wedding Anniversary. They celebrated their Love on the 30th of June 2023 at the Atlantis Resort in the Bahamas. They were surrounded by close friends and their 5 children, Buddy, Jason, Nicole, Brandon and Jannelle, along with their spouses and 12 GrandChildren. Arthur was a graduate of Carlsbad High, 1971 and Donna (Givis) Escondido High, 1972. They enjoy traveling around the World together, entertaining, and spending time with their Grand Children.



SAN DIEGO

FROM B1 to implement a checklist and take other steps to protect the city, Elliott objected to most of the findings.

According to Hanau, the City Attorney's Office did not fully cooperate with city auditors reviewing the Ash Street and skydiving center deals, among others, Hanau said in 2021.

"We must be able to obtain independent legal advice when we determine it is needed to best serve the public," Hanau wrote in a prior memo. "We believe there is a structural conflict because the (city attorney) advises city officials and departments that we are charged with auditing and investigating."

But Elliott has contended that city rules delegate sole responsibility for city legal work to her office.

"It is my office's view that even the auditor must have oversight," she said in a 2022 memo. "An elected city attorney is 100 percent independent and accountable to the people, and not to any one individual or department."

Under the proposal being considered Monday, the council would place the measure before San Diego voters during the March primary election. If approved, it would empower the city auditor to bring in his own attorney in cases where he felt the city attorney posed a potential conflict.

In a staff report to the council ahead of the Monday meeting, Hanau said he expected his office would

spend money on outside lawyers only when needed.

"We anticipate requesting approximately \$180,000 per year for independent legal services, although actual needs will vary depending on the audits we conduct and the fraud, waste and abuse allegations we receive and must investigate," he wrote.

The issue has been moved forward numerous times but has yet to make it to voters.

In a split vote last year, the City Council agreed to proceed with meet-and-confer negotiations with the two unions that would be mostly affected by the change to an independent counsel for the auditor. Under existing collective bargaining agreements with the Municipal Employees Association and Deputy City Attorneys Association, the city was required to negotiate terms over how any private lawyers would be retained.

Earlier this year, the council voted 5-4 to approve the language negotiated with the MEA and DCAA. The issue Monday will be whether to formally place the matter on the ballot.

In June, Council President Sean Elo-Rivera and Councilmembers Joe La Cava, Kent Lee, Monica Montgomery Steppe and Vivian Moreno voted to approve the agreement reached with the two labor unions.

Councilmembers Jennifer Campbell, Raul Campillo, Marni von Wilpert and Stephen Whitburn were opposed.

jeff.mcdonald@suniontribune.com

Celebrations

TO PUBLISH A CELEBRATIONS ANNOUNCEMENT

CALL: 866-411-4140 OPTION 4

EMAIL: celebrations@suniontribune.com

The San Diego
Union-Tribune

Village Cremation Services

Simple, Dignified Cremation Services
Serving San Diego & Southbay
303 F St., Chula Vista, CA 91910
(619) 422-7900
VillageCremations.com FD#2110



**GIVE
Life
to
Others**

By donating your body for medical science. Donations are made to the UCSD Body Donation Program, which covers the cost of cremation and scattering at sea after study is completed. For information, call: (858) 534-4546 or visit: bodydonations.ucsd.edu