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Paul Harvey
Broadcaster, Author

Paul Harvey News, the world's largest communications conglomerate, is featured on 1,350 commercial radio stations, 400 American Armed Forces radio stations, and in 300 newspapers. Every week, 24 million people "stand by" for Paul Harvey.

Mr. Harvey's broadcasts and columns have been reprinted in the *Congressional Record* more than those of any other commentator. He has earned 11 Freedoms Foundation Awards and has been elected to the National Association of Broadcasters Radio Hall of Fame and the Hall of Fame in his home state of Oklahoma. His other honors include the Horatio Alger Award, the



International Radio and Television Society Gold Medal Award, Network Personality of the Year, American of the Year, and Father of the Year. He is also named on the Gallup Poll List of America's Most Admired Men. ▲

With his skillful blend of news and views, Paul Harvey reports on the American heartland. He reminds us there are many important stories missed by the mass media that need to be told.

Mr. Harvey delivered these remarks at the Shavano Institute for National Leadership seminar, "The Future of American Business," in Memphis, Tennessee, on May 21, 1998.

Good day, Americans. As we contemplate our progress and our prospects—weighing whether this magnificent Republic heretofore worth dying for is now worth working at—we should take a long hard look at some page-one headlines. These are samples from a single day in mid-1998:

Troops Challenge Rioters in Jakarta;
Helicopter Hits House, Four Die;
Satellite Collapses, Cripples Communication.

People often say to me, "Paul, why don't journalists and broadcasters emphasize more good news instead of tragedy, destruction, discord, and dissent?" My own network once tried broadcasting a program devoted solely to good news. The program survived 13 weeks. In Sacramento, California, a tabloid called the *Good News Paper* printed nothing else. It lasted 36 months before it went bankrupt. A similar Indiana tabloid fared even worse; the publishers had to *give it away*. Evidently, the good news people say they want is news they just won't buy.

Listen to any broadcast, pick up any newspaper: Records are crashing, it is the worst wind or the worst fire or flood or earthquake or whatever, because *noise* makes news. On August 31, 1997, *Chicago Tribune* sales soared 40 percent due to coverage of the high-speed crash that killed a princess. The very next issue of *People* made it the lead story and sold more than a million copies. *Newsweek* and *Time* broke sales records when they followed suit on September 8 and September 15. For an entire month after the crash, Britain's biggest newspapers gave 35 percent of their total news coverage to the death of Princess Di. Not even the end of World War II got this much ink.

As I said, noise makes news. And one gunshot makes more noise than a thousand prayers. That does not mean it is more important—just that it sells more newspapers. The heads of all the major television networks understand this basic fact, and they make sure that news broadcasts are chock-full of noise, right down to the weather report, when the performing meteorologist warns that winter temperature isn't just 0 degrees—the “chill factor” is 40 degrees below!

With increasing media competition for our attention, noisy news is steadily increasing, and this leads to all sorts of contradictions: “These pills are bad for you,” or “they are good for you.” Take your choice. (Incidentally, in Jackson, Mississippi, the IRS office got a telephone call from an individual inquiring, “Are birth control pills deductible?” The answer was, “Only if they don't work.”)

News isn't news anymore, it is a round-the-clock warning: “Don't breathe—the air is toxic! And it is worse indoors than out. Don't eat—food is contaminated! Don't drink water with chemicals in it—and, for goodness sake, don't drink water without chemicals in it!”

The headline writers keep blowing hot and cold:

Oat Bran Reduces Cholesterol!
 Oat Bran Does Not Reduce Cholesterol!
 Coffee Can Cause Pancreatic Cancer!
 Coffee Does Not Cause Pancreatic Cancer!

Harvard Medical School has just reversed itself, says another news report. About what? You name it. Notes I have kept for my own medical file provide an education in vacillation:

1950—salt causes hypertension;
 1960—salt does not cause hypertension;
 1970—salt causes hypertension;
 1980—salt relieves hypertension;
 1998—the AMA Journal evaluates 114 separate studies and concludes that salt does not affect hypertension either way.

One recent issue of the *Wall Street Journal* says, “Aspirin is good for you,” and “aspirin is bad for you.” And now the Food and Drug Administration wants to declare mother's milk unsafe. Really! (So far, the agency has not been able to decide where to put the warning label.)

Bad News Pays

Bad news pays. I serve on a foundation board that dispenses large sums for research. Based on this experience, I can assure you that many scholars and experts attempt to secure money for research by producing bad news about our population, our natural resources, and our environment.

There is a demonstrable fascination with bad news. You could even call it a “proven public preference.” In part, this is because what is bad news to some people is good news—to others. Bad news allows us to say to ourselves, “Well, at least we are not as bad, or as bad off, as the printer whose printing press breaks down, the builder who bids too low, the salesman who fails to close a deal, the farmer who loses a crop, the wildcatter who drills a duster. Life is not a bowl of cherries for other people, so why should we envy them?”

As consumers of the news we do not want to read about some rich man who is healthy and happily married. But we are anxious to know every sordid detail when he suddenly finds himself divorced, diseased, or under investigation by the IRS. Noisy news is the billionaire in bankruptcy, the charity boss caught stealing, the actor doing time in jail or rehab, the president whose likeness will probably be carved into the side of Mt. Rushmore from the waist down.

Page one has become a fun-house mirror. But if page one cannot be trusted for perspective, does

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that mean that things are not really so bad after all? There is one substantive “if” in my answer, and I will get to that later. First, let me tell you that I believe the best of times is *now*.

The growth of the U. S. economy accelerated during the first quarter of 1998. The sum of all goods and services produced domestically increased at an annual rate of 4.2 percent—the fastest pace in a year. At the same time, the income of American workers increased a commensurate seven-tenths by the spring of 1998. And inflation—the worst of all economic bugaboos—was at the lowest rate in 35 years.

Our nation’s “index of leading economic indicators,” which is the best measure we have of how things are going to be, improved two-tenths in one representative month during the same period, indicating that our economy continues to prosper without overheating. Unemployment hit 4.3 percent, the lowest rate in 28 years. (Yet, with every metropolitan newspaper bulging with job offers for willing workers, we still have more than two million Americans collecting unemployment pay. As the cowboy Perk Carlson used to say, “If life were logical, it is men who would ride sidesaddle.”)

There will be ups and downs in our nation’s economy. By the time you read the figures cited above, they will have changed for better or worse and the stock market may plunge. But the general trend is toward greater prosperity achieved over a long period of time. And as one who has ridden this roller coaster through nine boom-and-bust cycles, I must say that I vastly prefer slow growth.

Self-Discipline

Despite the fact that our nation has enjoyed nearly a decade of controlled prosperity, with high employment, low inflation, and rising profits, many politicians, economists, and journalists are calling for drastic remedies to cure the problems that still afflict us. These remedies are expensive, unnecessary, and unworkable. Why? Because they call for more government and less individual responsibility. This is the big “if” in our nation’s future: If we cannot count on ourselves to do the right thing, how can we count on anyone or anything else? Self-government won’t work without self-discipline.

It has been nearly a decade since communism collapsed in Eastern Europe. Slave nations are finally free at last. But freedom demands responsibility, and Eastern Europeans are simply unprepared. Former Yugoslavia is in flames. Albania is mired in economic chaos. Former Czechoslovakia is repudiating early reforms. Poland is broke and bleeding, and the old communists are back in

power. Bulgaria, Hungary, and Lithuania have all found freedom too difficult and have reverted to caretaker communist governments. In Russia, the Kremlin is up for grabs, and the country is drinking itself to death. A 20-year-old Russian male now has half a chance of making it to 60.

I repeat: Self-government won’t work without self-discipline in America. Look at the skyrocketing rates of violent crime, drug use, illegitimacy, and illiteracy among the young. Or look at the so-called business ethics of their elders:

- The Federal Trade Commission reports that half of all car repairs American motorists have paid for have not been made or have not been needed.

- A retired general in Florida has been accused of selling the Pentagon defective ammunition.

- An Illinois firm has been selling the U. S. Air Force faulty parachute cords.

- A Virginia company has made fire safety sprinklers that are so unreliable that the Consumer Product Safety Commission has been forced to order a recall.

- A famous name-brand engine treatment has been falsely advertised as reducing engine wear by 75 percent.

- Nebraska meat merchants have violated sanitation rules repeatedly and are still in business.

- A New Jersey manufacturer has been claiming that his fluorescent lamps can cure the blues, reduce cavities, and enhance sex life.

The abandonment of self-discipline has ignited a regulatory explosion. The number of government agencies has doubled in ten years. On average, for every new law passed by Congress, unelected bureaucrats turn out 18 new regulations with the force of law. Already, traditional American freedoms have been so abridged that we are unable to get on an airliner without submitting ourselves, our luggage, and, if indicated, our underwear to search. Why? Because there is a lone dictator in Washington determined to dictate? No, it is because we have a handful of crazies running around. Because a few sickies hide razors in apples, towns have had to outlaw Halloween.

Because some loony birds with unbuttoned brains misuse theirs, the federal government is now threatening to take away our fireworks and our firearms. It is down this road that whole nations go from regulation to regimentation to tyranny.

My own profession struggles with self-discipline. To their credit, American journalists have done more than any government agency to expose corruption. Roaches run from the light, and the media can certainly provide illumination. Since Vietnam, it has dramatized the futility of pulled-punches wars. It has helped mobilize a nationwide response to domestic violence. It has told the stories of thousands of everyday heroes in small towns across America.

However, it has also frequently abused its freedom. That is why the Federal Communications Commission is considering prohibiting indecent radio and TV broadcasts. Regardless of how you feel about censorship, it is clear there is no such thing as a “family hour” on the networks anymore. Sex is the theme of programs that air morning, noon, and night. The Internet is fast becoming a red-light district, distributing violent pornography and organizing pedophiles while giving them unprecedented opportunities to target new victims. The worldwide web also allows children to learn the “best” ways to take drugs and make bombs. It even provides detailed instructions on how to kill parents and playmates.

Standing Firm

If there is one irrefutable lesson to be learned from history it is that excesses inevitably are their own undoing. Public education is a comparatively recent innovation that is guilty of excess. And, as a result, it is now flunking its finals.

For our nation’s first hundred years, nearly all schools were church-related. The great Ivy League schools, for example, were founded by men of immense evangelical fervor. What happened? Over the years, in the name of accommodation, they became “tolerant” to the point of excess. They began to tolerate, on their faculties and on their boards, men and women of so many warring predispositions that one day they found themselves tolerating everything and unable to stand firm for anything.

The cacophony of ugly aberrations in academia leaves one clinging to the likes of Hillsdale

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College. Elsewhere, schools have lowered standards to mollify media, malcontents, and bureaucrats, but Hillsdale is gradually raising the bar. Elsewhere, factory campuses have wholesaled diplomas and accommodated moral relativism, but Hillsdale has defended academic excellence and old-fashioned codes of conduct. Elsewhere,

university administrators have grappled with society’s pressure-cooker concerns for mandated “fairness” to every hue or creed or clan or gender, but Hillsdale has “been there, done that” a very long time ago, with a genuine commitment to nondiscrimination that

dates back to 1844 and that puts the government’s and other schools’ so-called “equal opportunity” policies to shame.

At Hillsdale College, education begins with self-discipline. One good example is worth a thousand admonitions and Hillsdale College is one good example. On 200 acres of Michigan soil, we are growing good fruit. ♣

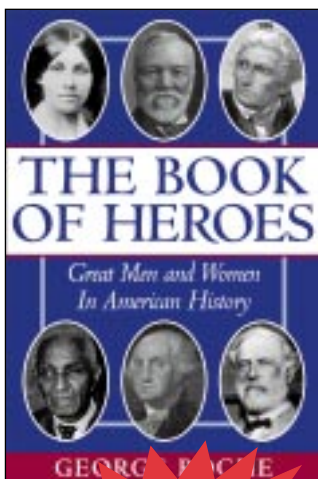


Paul Harvey greeted over 350 guests at the May 1998 Memphis Shavano, including Mr. and Mrs. Kemmons Wilson, founders of Holiday Inn.



Federal Express Chairman Fredrick W. Smith’s Memphis presentation focused on challenges presented by regulation and the global economy.

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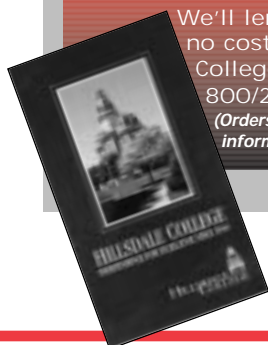
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