

Fake news

by BRIAN LOCKHART

There was a posting on my Facebook feed about a month ago that I found quite disturbing.

It was a photo of actor / director Clint Eastwood with dates under his photo indicating his birth and death. A caption said he had died suddenly while working on a movie set.

I've always been a fan of Eastwood's movies. He's the man with no name. He's the poncho-wearing, cigar-chomping, steely-eyed gunslinger who can hit 10 targets in under a second with his six-shot revolver.

'Do you feel lucky? Well do ya, punk?? 'You just shot an unarmed man!'

'He should have armed himself if he was going to decorate his saloon with my friend.'

I've seen just about every one of his movies since I was captivated by his character in 'The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly' when I saw it on TV one Saturday afternoon when I was a kid.

I was more than a little disappointed to learn of his death.

Wait a minute. Facebook is a credible news source, isn't it?

Well, no it's not. I quickly checked into the mainstream media and found that the death announcement was a hoax. Mr. Eastwood is alive and well.

So, fake news really does exist.

Fake news has been in the spotlight over the past few years and with the advent of internet-based sources, fake news is everywhere ? but it's not new.

There have been actual newspapers based on fake news or at the very least, based on ridiculous reports by a single person ? and they sold a LOT of papers. I would like to think that most people didn't believe the stories about the guy who wrestled Big Foot in a mountain campsite or had a conversation with an alien who landed his flying saucer on his farmland and asked to borrow a wrench to adjust the Johnson rod on his spacecraft.

The National Enquirer had similar stories on a weekly basis and their circulation was in the millions.

Last week, news stories hit the airways and newspapers that the Federal government was considering requiring media to obtain a license to operate to combat fake news. That story was very alarming to all media outlets.

Whether the Heritage Minister who made the news with this announcement was not clear, or whether he is now backtracking on his statements, is too early to tell.

On Monday of this week, the Minister made another statement at a news conference saying 'Clearly some people were confused.'

Well, no, some people weren't confused, everyone who covered the story heard the same thing.

The Minister clarified his comments, saying he was referring not to news organizations, but to organizations that produce and

distribute cultural content.

Licensing just organizations that produce 'cultural' content, doesn't make this sound any better.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms includes 'freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication.'

During an interview broadcast on Toronto radio, the Minister made the comment that this type of licensing is already in place in many European countries.

Well, so what? Many European countries do not have the same value we have when it comes to news media and a free press.

Just ask anyone, and I personally know several people, who lived in an Eastern European country when the Iron Curtain separated the continent - a free press did not exist. In many countries in the world today printing a story that has an unfavourable slant toward the government can land you in some serious trouble.

Many people in Eastern Block countries would secretly listen to Voice of America or Radio Free Europe over shortwave radio just to hear the real news - not the propaganda put out by state run radio and newspapers who had to have stories approved by government.

Yes, there is going to be fake news out there, especially on internet-based media type sites that allow pretty much anyone to post a news story or those that want to further an agenda.

Whether the Minister really made a mistake in his original comments or was backtracking due to a very negative response, we'll have to wait and see how this shakes out.

Requiring any news media to be federally licensed would be a serious mistake and an infringement on the rights of every citizen.

Any normal person has the ability to figure out for themselves which news sources are credible and which are not.

I'm glad Mr. Eastwood is alive and well, and I don't believe farmer Brown's story of an alien borrowing a wrench to fix his Johnson rod.

It didn't take much digging to find the truth.