**POEM**

**JUST A COMMON SOLDIER**

**(A Soldier Died Today)**

**by A. Lawrence Vaincourt**

He was getting  old and paunchy and his hair was falling fast,

And he sat around the Legion, telling stories of the past.

Of a war that he had fought in and the deeds that he had done,

In his exploits with his buddies; they were heroes, every one.

And tho' sometimes, to his neighbors, his tales became a joke,

All his Legion buddies listened, for they knew whereof he spoke.

But we'll hear his tales no longer for old Bill has passed away,

And the world's a little poorer, for a soldier died today.

He will not be mourned by many, just his children and his wife,

For he lived an ordinary and quite uneventful life.

Held a job and raised a family, quietly going his own way,

And the world won't note his passing, though a soldier died today.

When politicians leave this earth, their bodies lie in state,

While thousands note their passing and proclaim that they were great.

Papers tell their whole life stories, from the time that they were young,

But the passing of a soldier goes unnoticed and unsung.

Is the greatest contribution to the welfare of our land

A guy who breaks his promises and cons his fellow man?

Or the ordinary fellow who, in times of war and strife,

Goes off to serve his Country and offers up his life?

A politician's stipend and the style in which he lives

Are sometimes disproportionate to the service that he gives.

While the ordinary soldier, who offered up his all,

Is paid off with a medal and perhaps, a pension small.

It's so easy to forget them for it was so long ago,

That the old Bills of our Country went to battle, but we know

It was not the politicians, with their compromise and ploys,

Who won for us the freedom that our Country now enjoys.

Should you find yourself in danger, with your enemies at hand,

Would you want a politician with his ever-shifting stand?

Or would you prefer a soldier, who has sworn to defend

His home, his kin and Country and would fight until the end?

He was just a common soldier and his ranks are growing thin,

But his presence should remind us we may need his like again.

For when countries are in conflict, then we find the soldier's part

Is to clean up all the troubles that the politicians start.

If we cannot do him honor while he's here to hear the praise,

Then at least let's give him homage at the ending of his days.

Perhaps just a simple headline in a paper that would say,

Our Country is in mourning, for a soldier died today.

**CULTURE/SONG**

“We Didn’t Start the Fire” by Fall Out Boy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LkVKCWL0U4>

Lyrics: <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/falloutboy/wedidntstartthefire.html>

**CURRENT EVENT**

<https://indianacapitalchronicle.com/2023/10/06/school-consolidation-conversation-should-focus-on-fact-not-emotion/>

[**COMMENTARY**](https://indianacapitalchronicle.com/commentary)

**School consolidation conversation should focus on fact, not emotion**



 The Indiana Chamber of Commerce is pushing for consolidation of smaller districts. (Getty Images)

It’s hard to separate the sentimentality tied to your high school years from a fact-based discussion about school consolidation. But it needs to be done.

I get it. I loved my Ohio high school and I have amazing memories of being a Wildcat. But I came from a small district and as an adult I know that, had we consolidated with the nearby town, all students would have been better prepared for the future.

It is this focus that the Indiana Chamber of Commerce is bringing to a push for lawmakers to consolidate school districts with fewer than 2,000 students.

It’s not a new idea — it goes back to at least 2017.

That’s when a Ball State University [study](https://www.indianachamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/SchoolCorpStudy815.pdf) found students in smaller districts fared worse on standardized tests and in Advanced Placement classes. The chamber is updating that study now, and will likely push the idea in the 2024 budget session.

And the problem is getting worse.

Kevin Brinegar, the outgoing chamber president and CEO, said he’s still awaiting final results, but new data shows the number of school districts with fewer than 2,000 students has increased by six: to 56% of all districts.

Behind the numbers

So why is the number 2,000 important?

“Students attending small school corporations (enrollment of less than 2,000 students) face resource constraints that impede secondary school performance, as measured by standardized test scores and pass rates. These constraints are likely to restrict post-secondary educational opportunities and outcomes,” the 2017 report said.

In other words, smaller school corporations simply offer less to their students, whether that’s in the number of foreign languages, advanced placement or STEM classes. It simply isn’t feasible to hire teachers for these more tailored courses with so few students taking them.

Consolidation can work.

To begin the 2018-19 school year, Rockville and Turkey Run High Schools combined to form a new 9-12 grade high school called Parke Heritage High School located at the former Rockville Junior-Senior High School location. The new 6-8 grade middle school formed is called Parke Heritage Middle School, and is located at the former Turkey Run Junior-Senior High School location.

“This consolidation brings many new opportunities to our students, both in the classroom and on the athletic field,” the district website says. “The NCP staff has strived to maintain the heritage of the former schools while moving forward in the best interest of our students. We are striving to celebrate the past while shaping the future.”

Moving forward

That 2017 study found that if small school corporations increased their size to around 2,000 students, they’d see an increase in the average student’s performance on the SAT of 20.5 points, a 14.9 percentage-point increase in share of students passing AP exams, an additional 4 percentage-point increase on end-of-course assessment pass rates in algebra and biology, and a 5 percentage point-increase in the 8th grade then-ISTEP pass rate.

I understand the attachment people have to a school and a mascot and how much it becomes a part of the community. But I hope more counties will examine whether one robust, thriving district is better for the community as a whole than two smaller, struggling districts that aren’t adequately preparing its students for the future.

We need students ready to fulfill jobs if the state is to grow — and that includes in the struggling rural parts of the state.

While some might fear a consolidation will lead to further decay or rural cities and towns, I believe it could lead to a renaissance.

**MASS MEDIA**

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/14/tech/social-media-misinformation-israel-hamas/index.html>

**The Israel-Hamas war reveals how social media sells you the illusion of reality**

**** [](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/brian-fung)

By [Brian Fung](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/brian-fung) and [Clare Duffy](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/clare-duffy), CNN

 9 minute read

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**New York CNN —** As the [Israel-Hamas war](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-news-hamas-war-10-13-23/index.html) reaches the end of its first week, millions have turned to platforms including TikTok and Instagram in hopes of comprehending the brutal conflict in real time. Trending search terms on TikTok in recent days illustrate the hunger for frontline perspectives: From “graphic Israel footage” to “live stream in Israel right now,” internet users are seeking out raw, unfiltered accounts of a crisis they are desperate to understand.

For the most part, they are succeeding, discovering videos of tearful Israeli children wrestling with the permanence of death alongside images of dazed Gazans sitting in the rubble of their former homes. But that same demand for an intimate view of the war has created ample openings for [disinformation peddlers](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/09/tech/musk-x-misinformation-israel-hamas-conflict/index.html), conspiracy theorists and propaganda artists — malign influences that regulators and researchers now warn pose a dangerous threat to public debates about the war.

One recent TikTok video, seen by more than 300,000 users and reviewed by CNN, promoted conspiracy theories about the origins of the Hamas attacks, including false claims that they were orchestrated by the media. Another, viewed more than 100,000 times, shows a clip from the video game “Arma 3” with the caption, “The war of Israel.” (Some users in the comments of that video noted they had seen the footage circulating before — when Russia invaded Ukraine.)

TikTok is hardly alone. One post on X, formerly Twitter, was viewed more than 20,000 times and flagged as misleading by London-based social media watchdog Reset for purporting to show Israelis staging civilian deaths for cameras. Another X post the group flagged, viewed 55,000 times, was an antisemitic meme featuring Pepe the Frog, a cartoon that has been appropriated by far-right white supremacists. On Instagram, a widely shared and viewed video of parachuters dropping in on a crowd and captioned “imagine attending a music festival when Hamas parachutes in” was [debunked](https://apnews.com/article/fact-check-parachute-hamas-egypt-777994192182) over the weekend and, in fact, showed unrelated parachute jumpers in Egypt. (Instagram later labeled the video as false.)

This week, European Union officials [sent warnings](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/12/tech/eu-tiktok-israel-hamas-disinformation/index.html) to TikTok, Facebook and Instagram-parent Meta, YouTube and X, highlighting reports of misleading or illegal content about the war on their platforms and reminding the social media companies they could face billions of dollars in fines if an investigation later determines they violated EU content moderation laws. US and UK lawmakers have also called on those platforms to ensure they are enforcing their rules against hateful and illegal content.

Since the violence in Israel began, Imran Ahmed, founder and CEO of the social media watchdog group Center for Countering Digital Hate, told CNN his group has tracked a spike in efforts to pollute the information ecosystem surrounding the conflict.

“Getting information from social media is likely to lead to you being severely disinformed,” said Ahmed.

Everyone from US foreign adversaries to domestic extremists to internettrolls and “engagement farmers” has been exploiting the war on social media for their own personal or political gain, he added.

“Bad actors surrounding us have been manipulating, confusing and trying to create deception on social media platforms,” Dan Brahmy, CEO of the Israeli social media threat intelligence firm Cyabra, said Thursday in a video posted to LinkedIn. “If you are not sure of the trustworthiness [of content] … do not share,” he said.

**‘Upticks in Islamophobic and antisemitic narratives’**

Graham Brookie, senior director of the Digital Forensic Research Lab at the Atlantic Council in Washington, **DC,** told CNN his team has witnessed a similar phenomenon. The trend includes a wave of first-party terrorist propaganda, content depicting graphic violence, misleading and outright false claims, and hate speech – particularly “upticks in specific and general Islamophobic and antisemitic narratives.”

Much of the most extreme content, he said, has been circulating on Telegram, the messaging app with few content moderation controls and a format that facilitates quick and efficient distribution of propaganda or graphic material to a large, dedicated audience. But in much the same way that TikTok videos are frequently copied and rebroadcast on other platforms, content shared on Telegram and other more fringe sites can easily find a pipeline onto mainstream social media or draw in curious users from major sites. (Telegram didn’t respond to a request for comment.)

Schools in Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States this week [urged parents](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/11/tech/tiktok-social-media-israel-hostage-videos/index.html) to delete their children’s social media apps over concerns that Hamas will broadcast or disseminate disturbing videos of hostages who have been seized in recent days. Photos of dead or bloodied bodies, including those of children, have already spread across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X this week.

And tech watchdog group Campaign for Accountability on Thursday released a [report](https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/x-premium-accounts-spread-hamas-propaganda-videos-of) identifying several accounts on X sharing apparent propaganda videos with Hamas iconography or linking to official Hamas websites. Earlier in the week, X [faced criticism](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/09/tech/musk-x-misinformation-israel-hamas-conflict/index.html) for videos unrelated to the war being presented as on-the-ground footage and for a post from owner Elon Musk directing users to follow accounts that previously shared misinformation (Musk’s post was later deleted, and the videos were labeled using X’s “community notes” feature.)

Some platforms are in a better position to combat these threats than others. Widespread layoffs across the tech industry, including at some social media companies’ [ethics and safety teams](https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/06/tech/tech-layoffs-platform-safety/index.html/), risk leaving the platforms less prepared at a critical moment, misinformation experts say. Much of the content related to the war is also spreading in Arabic and Hebrew, testing the platforms’ capacity to moderate non-English content, where enforcement has historically been less robust than in English-language content.

**Sharing stuff that you’re not sure about is not helping people, it’s actually really harming them and it contributes to an overall sense that no one can trust what they’re seeing.”**

Imran Ahmed, CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate

“Of course, platforms have improved over the years. Communication & info sharing mechanisms exist that did not in years past. But they have also never been tested like this,” Brian Fishman, the co-founder of trust and safety platform Cinder who formerly led Facebook’s counterterrorism efforts, said Wednesday in a [post](https://www.threads.net/@brian.fishman.5/post/CyPGcjtvUaE/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==) on Threads. “Platforms that kept strong teams in place will be pushed to the limit; platforms that did not will be pushed past it.”

Linda Yaccarino, the CEO of X, said in a [letter](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/12/tech/elon-musk-hamas-affiliated-accounts/index.html) Wednesday to the European Commission that the platform has “identified and removed hundreds of Hamas-related accounts” and is working with several third-party groups to prevent terrorist content from spreading. “We’ve diligently taken proactive actions to remove content that violates our policies, including: violent speech, manipulated media and graphic media,” she said. The European Commission on Thursday formally opened an investigation into X following its earlier warning about disinformation and illegal content linked to the war.

Meta spokesperson Andy Stone said that since Hamas’ initial attacks, the company has established “a special operations center staffed with experts, including fluent Hebrew and Arabic speakers, to closely monitor and respond to this rapidly evolving situation. Our teams are working around the clock to keep our platforms safe, take action on content that violates our policies or local law, and coordinate with third-party fact checkers in the region to limit the spread of misinformation. We’ll continue this work as this conflict unfolds.”

YouTube, for its part, says its teams have removed thousands of videos since the attack began, and continues to monitor for hate speech, extremism, graphic imagery and other content that violates its policies. The platform is also surfacing almost entirely videos from mainstream news organizations in searches related to the war.

Snapchat told CNN that its misinformation team is closely watching content coming out of the region, making sure it is within the platform’s community guidelines, which prohibits misinformation, hate speech, terrorism, graphic violence and extremism.

TikTok did not respond to a request for comment on this story.

**‘Switch off the engagement-driven algorithms’**

Large tech platforms are now subject to content-related regulation under a new EU law called the [Digital Services Act](https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/25/tech/eu-launches-big-tech-regulations/index.html), which requires them to prevent the spread of mis- and disinformation, address rabbit holes of algorithmically recommended content and avoid possible harms to user mental health. But in such a contentious moment, platforms that take too heavy a hand in moderation could risk backlash and accusations of bias from users.

Platforms’ algorithms and business models — which generally rely on the promotion of content most likely to garner significant engagement — can aid bad actors who design content to capitalize on that structure, Ahmed said. Other product choices, such as X’s moves to allow any user to pay for a subscription for a blue “verification” checkmark that grants an algorithmic boost to post visibility, and to remove the headlines from links to news articles, can further manipulate how users perceive a news event.

“It’s time to break the emergency glass,” Ahmed said, calling on platforms to “switch off the engagement-driven algorithms.” He added: “Disinformation factories are going to cause geopolitical instability and put Jews and Muslims at harm in the coming weeks.”

Even as social media companies work to hide the absolute worst content from their users — whether out of a commitment to regulation, advertisers’ brand safety concerns, or their own editorial judgments — users’ continued appetite for gritty, close-up dispatches from Israelis and Palestinians on the ground is forcing platforms to walk a fine line.

“Platforms are caught in this demand dynamic where users want the latest and the most granular, or the most ‘real’ content or information about events, including terrorist attacks,” Brookie said.

The dynamic simultaneously highlights the business models of social media and the role the companies play in carefully calibrating their users’ experiences. The very algorithms that are widely criticized elsewhere for serving up the most outrageous, polarizing and inflammatory content are now the same ones that, in this situation, appear to be giving users exactly what they want.

But closeness to a situation is not the same thing as authenticity or objectivity, Ahmed and Brookie said, and the wave of misinformation flooding social media right now underscores the dangers of conflating them.

**‘Be very cautious about sharing’**

Despite giving the impression of reality and truthfulness, Brookie said, individual stories and combat footage conveyed through social media often lack the broader perspective and context that journalists, research organizations and even social media moderation teams apply to a situation to help achieve a fuller understanding of it.

“It’s my opinion that users can interact with the world as it is — and understand the latest, most accurate information from any given event — without having to wade through, on an individual basis, all of the worst possible content about that event,” Brookie said.

Potentially exacerbating the messy information ecosystem is a culture on social media platforms that often encourages users to bear witness to and share information about the crisis as a way of signaling their personal stance, whether or not they are deeply informed. That can lead even well-intentioned users to unwittingly share misleading information or highly emotional content created with the intention of collecting views or monetizing highly engaging content.

“Be very cautious about sharing in the middle of a major world event,” Ahmed said. “There are people trying to get you to share bullsh\*t, lies, which are designed to inculcate you to hate or to misinform you. And so sharing stuff that you’re not sure about is not helping people, it’s actually really harming them and it contributes to an overall sense that no one can trust what they’re seeing.”

**ROUND 1 - MASS MEDIA**

Q1: Have you encountered mis/dis information online surrounding the Israel/Palestine conflict? What are some examples?

Q2: What steps should social media companies take to prevent the mis/dis information? What about steps that we can take ourselves?

Q3: Is social media a useful resource for news and current events, or should it be avoided?

Q4 : What have the Russia/Ukraine and Israel/Hamas conflicts shown us about war in the modern digital age?

**ROUND 2 - POEM**

Q1: The author repeats a similar phrase at the end of several stanzas. Why do you think he chose to do that?

Q2: Is there a line in this poem that particularly resonates with you? If so, what?

Q3: What do you believe is the theme of this poem?

Q4: Do you think most soldiers feel represented by this poem’s viewpoint? Why, or why not?

Q5: Do you believe that soldiers receive enough credit for service in today’s culture? Why, or why not?

**ROUND 3 - CURRENT EVENT**

Q1: How do you believe your educational experience would change if school consolidation occurred? Avoid stating your school’s name.

Q2: What impacts, both positive and negative, would your community experience if school consolidation occurred? Avoid stating your hometown’s name.

Q3: Are there any lessons, both positive and negative, to be learned from prior rounds of school consolidation?

Q4: Are there other issues with education in Indiana that you think could be addressed instead? If so, what?

Q5: To put it all together… Do you agree or disagree with the author’s point of view? What about the Indiana Chamber’s plan?

**ROUND 4 - CULTURE/SONG**

Q1: What differences are there between the Billy Joel and Fall Out Boy versions? Lyrically, musically, culturally?

Q2: What events of the last 30ish years should Fall Out Boy have included in his version that he chose to leave out? What did he include that maybe should have been left out?

Q3: Should reinterpretations of classic entertainment such as songs, movies, and TV shows be celebrated in today’s culture?

Q4: Why do you think redoes and/or sequels of older entertainment pieces are becoming more popular?