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Higgins: Continued border restrictions breaking US-Canada relationship & economies

Canada extends restrictions through Sept. 30

Congressman Brian Higgins, who represents the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, recently released the following statement in response to the Canadian government's notice it is extending current land border restrictions through at least the end of September.

Higgins said, "For communities living on either side of the United States-Canada border, the days stretching between Canada Day and Independence Day typically represent one of the busiest for cross-border travel. It

is a time to celebrate our shared bond, respect national traditions, and simply enjoy time with our friends and families on the opposite side of the border during the height of the summer. Continued hurdles to the free flow of people across the northern border are fizzling the fireworks border communities customarily enjoy this time of year. What now amounts to two-and-a-half years of border restrictions are breaking the U.S.-Canada relationship and our economies." His team said, "The statistics speak

for themselves. Restrictions and confusion are driving people to avoid the border."

It shared this Peace Bridge data: In May 2019, before the pandemic, 171,000 passenger vehicles crossed into Canada over the Peace Bridge.

In May 2022, just 101,000 passenger vehicles crossed the Peace Bridge into Canada - 70,000 fewer vehicles crossed the border from the U.S. into Canada at this one crossing during this one month alone. Higgins' team added, "The announcement from the Canadian government means Americans crossing the border must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, are subject to random arrival testing, and are mandated to load data through the ArriveCAN app within 72 hours of travel."

Higgins, who serves as co-chair of the Canada-U.S. interparliamentary group and the congressional northern border caucus, recently advocated for ending the ArriveCAN app along with border mayors and tourism agencies.

To fight online disinformation, University at Buffalo launches Center for Information Integrity

Initiative, which merges a broad range of STEM & non-STEM disciplines, will build multidisciplinary research teams, develop digital literacy tools and new teaching techniques

BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO

Siwei Lyu, a University at Buffalo Empire Innovation Professor of Computer Science and Engineering, clearly saw the problem. Misinformation and disinformation had so polluted social media platforms that untrained users in many cases couldn't distinguish fact from fiction, or just didn't care to do so.

But his background as a computer scientist could help restore truth to the top of newsfeeds.

Lyu's expertise in deepfakes, digital forensics and machine learning could stop online disinformation at the source before its damaging effects could further erode trust across the social media landscape. This was a technical problem that demanded a technical solution. It was simply a matter of deploying the algorithms he helped develop as authentication instruments capable of countering the opposing algorithms responsible for spreading lies.

But the journalists on the front lines of digital media didn't embrace Lyu's technical innovations. They knew that identifying fakes wasn't enough. Users could unwittingly spread sensationalized fiction and bogus accounts with curatorial algorithms that amplified fakery by targeting those who (turning the aphorism on its head) might find fiction stranger (more entertaining or believable) than truth - and it doesn't take much to turn a fundamental truth into a spicy online falsehood.

"The truth isn't always the most interesting thing on social media. Truth is essential, but it can sometimes be boring," says Lyu, who began to see more broadly the problem's complexity.

Online disinformation is as much a human problem as a technical one. Its roots reach into social, cultural and psychological realms, according to Lyu, extending upon the wisdom expressed in a classic article from the journal Science titled "The Tragedy of the Commons," which stressed that not every problem under discussion has a technical solution.

In the case of disinformation, technology plays a critical preemptive role, but it can't provide a complete solution on its own without input from other diverse fields.

Technology by itself in this case is a lever without a fulcrum.

"Up to three or four years ago, I was holding tightly to the belief that technology alone was the solution to combating misinformation and disinformation," Lyu says. "But hearing from those journalists was the initial motivation for me to work with people outside my domain in ways that combine technical expertise with disciplines that understand the human factors required to solve this problem."

And today Lyu is conducting that work with a multidisciplinary team of researchers at UB's Center for Information Integrity (CII). Lyu and David Castillo, professor of romance languages and literatures, serve as co-directors.

The center's executive committee consists of:

Mark Frank, professor in the department of communication and director of UB's Communication Science Center

Jeff Good, chair and professor of the department of linguistics

Matt Kenyon, associate professor in the department of art

E. Bruce Pitman, professor in the department of materials design and innovation

Jessie Poon, professor in the department of geography

Rohini Srihari, professor of computer science and engineering, and an adjunct professor of linguistics

Jennifer Surtees, associate professor of biochemistry and co-director of the Genome, Environment and Microbiome Community of Excellence at UB

CII is a collaborative platform for research across the university. Similar centers exist around the country that address either the social impacts of disinformation or media reactions to the problem, but UB's center will take a convergence approach.

Convergence research often focuses on a specific challenge that requires answering scientific questions with an understanding of history in the context of existing societal needs. Its intense integration of disciplines is deeper than a multidisciplinary perspective. Convergence reshapes paradigms and produces new frameworks or even new disciplines that can further help address goals.

"It's the right time for a center like CII, and UB is the right place to bring this expertise together," Lyu says.

New Center Fighting Old Problem

The association of disinformation with social media can create the inaccurate perception that the problem arrived with the digital age. But that's not so, according to Castillo.

"This problem is as old as humanity," he says. "There are moments of historical acceleration, including the early modern period, which includes the emergence of the printing press

culture and mass media. The current age of inflationary media has created a new pattern of acceleration of misinformation and disinformation, which is tied to the emergence of social media.

"We can learn from those historical iterations of the problem."

While technology works to detect shams, the center can explore and understand why fakery is appealing.

"We need to figure out and explain to people why this is so attractive," Castillo says. "We need psychologists and media experts, but we also need to understand the economics of the problem. Misinformation and disinformation are profitable commodities for social media companies because they increase audience size, which translates into greater advertising revenue."

"The business model relies on how many people follow a trending topic, not the integrity of the trending topic they're following. Often times, what's false has more audience potential than what's true."

Improving users' awareness is critical, according to Lyu. Greater awareness can inoculate users from misleading information. It's a new preemptive approach, rather than a technical forensic approach.

"I think the key lies in users being aware and mindful of falsified information on social media," he says. "The solution lies largely in the hands of users, and teaching that, in my opinion, is more important than government regulation or isolated technical solutions."

The center has taken the lead on a multi-institutional deception awareness and resilience training program (DART) that's working to develop research and educational platforms

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