



Is It the Truth?

World Economic Forum – Davos, Switzerland

Palace Schatzalp – January 19, 2026

Steve Bender – Chairman, United States Green Chamber of Commerce

Good evening.

We live in the most informed era in human history and yet, we have never been more uncertain about what to believe.

Every day, we carry in our pockets more computing power than entire nations once possessed.

We can summon any fact, any image, any voice in seconds. And still, a quiet question shadows nearly every headline, post, and video:

Is it the truth?

That question is no longer philosophical.

It is economic.

It is social.

It is existential.

The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report identifies misinformation and disinformation as among the most severe threats facing the world today, not simply as a cultural problem, but as a systemic risk.

A risk to markets. A risk to institutions. A risk to stability itself.

Because when people no longer know what to trust, they stop trusting everything.

And when trust erodes, Democracies strain, Capital hesitates. Progress slows.

Truth, it turns out, is not just a moral value.
It is infrastructure as essential as energy, data, and capital.

And when that infrastructure collapses, everything built on top of it becomes fragile.

I am the Chairman of the U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce, a capitalist, an environmentalist, and a proud Rotarian.

I believe in markets.
I believe in innovation.
I believe in growth.

The U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce exists to help businesses make decisions when certainty is scarce and noise is everywhere.

We turn science into strategy and evidence into action, connecting entrepreneurs, investors, and policymakers to data that is measurable, verifiable, and real.

Through our Global Sustainability Solutions team, we have identified nearly one thousand verified innovations.

Through our Global Environmental Policy Database, we consolidate more than half a million environmental policies worldwide, so leaders can learn from what works rather than start from scratch.

In an environment where sustainability claims are easy to produce and hard to verify, we serve as infrastructure for trust, separating signal from distortion and evidence from assertion.

We focus on facts, not ideology, because when evidence is clear, markets work.

And when sustainability is grounded in data, it reduces risk AND supports profit.

This model is not new. Chambers of commerce were first established in 1599 in Marseille, France, across generations, they have translated evidence into action at the local level.

Because the next economy will be built on credibility earned through evidence, not slogans.

Markets only function when trust is real.

Trust is as essential to democracy as it is to commerce. When people believe decisions are bought rather than earned, confidence collapses, regardless of party, ideology, or geography.

That is why my Rotary Club supports a nonpartisan initiative called *Democracy in a Box*, a practical framework to help communities reduce the corrosive role of money in politics and restore confidence that voices matter more than dollars.

It is not about left or right.
It is about legitimacy.

We also helped sponsor a program called *Agents of Influence*, a game designed to teach young people how to recognize misinformation, think critically, and navigate a world shaped by algorithms.

It won a seventy-five-thousand-dollar prize from the Aspen Institute. and later earned a one-million-dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

This is what it looks like to treat truth as infrastructure:
To build it.
To fund it.
To scale it.

If a local Rotary Club can help seed that kind of impact, IMAGINE what the leaders in this room can do.

Next April, at EarthX's 15th Anniversary, we will launch a bold new global platform called

The Environmental Xperience—a three-day event at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, Texas.

It will showcase more than two hundred projects from over one hundred countries, each grounded in data, science, and measurable impact with CNN as our Strategic partner.

Why EarthX?

Because it is the one environmental event intentionally built to bridge the political divide.

EarthX is nonpartisan, neither liberal nor conservative.

It gives voice to the middle seventy percent of humanity who simply want practical solutions and a better future for the next generation.

The Environmental Xperience will function as a living ecosystem, where business leaders, policymakers, scientists, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and students work side by side.

It will feature:

- Mini-conferences and hands-on workshops
- Myth-busting forums that separate evidence from noise
- Design-build competitions
- Focused tracks on energy, AI, finance, chambers and more

We will also launch a special event this year called The Davos Xperience, where we invite everyone from this room and Davos to attend, speak and share ideas.

It is designed to, turn truth into action.

There is a simple ethical framework that has guided business leaders for nearly a century. It comes from Rotary International. It is called the Four-Way Test:

- Is it the truth?
- Is it fair to all concerned?

- Will it build goodwill and better friendships?
- Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

It was created during the Great Depression—not by philosophers, but by business leaders trying to restore confidence in commerce.

In the age of artificial intelligence, those four questions may be more relevant than ever. We have entered an era where reality itself can be manufactured.

AI can generate voices that never spoke, images that never existed, and narratives that feel more real than reality.

In the past, truth had friction.
Lies took time.
Deception required effort.

Today, falsehood can be produced instantly, globally, and convincingly.

This is not just a media problem.
It is a business problem.

When customers cannot tell what is real, they do not just question news, they question brands. They question claims. They question institutions. They question US!

In that environment, TRUST becomes the scarcest asset on Earth.

And scarcity defines value.

We are entering an era where the costliest business risk is not operational, it is perceptual.

Trust is no longer a soft metric.
It is a balance-sheet item.

At the same time, governments around the world are reducing funding for independent research and scientific institutions.

But”

The laws of physics do not negotiate.
Data does not vote.
Reality does not respond to ideology.

Without credible research, we do not have markets.
We have speculation.

Without shared facts, we have noise.

That is why institutions committed to evidence matter more than ever.

Four institutions I have relied upon recently represent a new category of leadership, companies that do not argue ideology but build credibility into the systems we depend on.

Project Drawdown does not argue ideology, it ranks what works, turning climate action into an evidence-based business plan.

Archimat brings truth into the built world, using data and materials science to ensure what we construct aligns with what the planet can sustain.

Carboreal – A Finnish environmental company providing scientifically verified Nordic carbon units and forest-based climate solutions, turning carbon claims into measurable, trusted action.

BCaster – A Helsinki-based digital media platform that ensures brands use authentic, rights-cleared human stories, restoring credibility in a world saturated with synthetic content.

These are not advocates.
They are infrastructure.

In the coming decade, the most valuable companies will not be the fastest or the biggest—they will be the most credible.

Every business will face a choice: treat truth as a compliance box, or as a strategic advantage.

Trust is resilience. Without it, consumers retreat, employees disengage, investors hesitate, and communities fracture.

Business has always been more than transactions; it is a promise.

In the age of AI, that promise must be renewed.

Our challenge is not a lack of information. It is a lack of certainty. And certainty is the foundation of commerce.

This is the work of the U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce. We strengthen trusted institutions. We work alongside existing chambers while helping launch new Green Chambers where leadership is needed.

This year, we aim to expand into fifty additional countries and help launch five new independent national Green Chambers

I invite you to help shape this next phase.

Because markets do not move on claims alone, they move on confidence.

In the end, stable markets, trusted institutions, and long-term growth all depend on shared facts.

The next competitive advantage is not speed, it is credibility.

And the most powerful question in every boardroom will be the same one that opened this talk:

Is it the truth?

Because in a world where reality can be engineered, truth becomes a choice.

Not as partisans.
Not as spectators.
But as builders.

Builders of trust.
Builders of solutions.
Builders of a future grounded in what is real.

The future will be shaped by those who choose truth.

Let's not let this conversation end here. In the days ahead, I hope we keep refining these ideas, challenging them, strengthening them, so that by next April, we arrive in Dallas, not just with thoughts, but with real solutions.

Because in a world where reality can be engineered, truth becomes a choice.

And the future will be shaped by those who choose it.

We have the tools to build the most prosperous era in human history.

We also have the tools to dissolve the very trust that prosperity depends on.

The difference will not be made by technology.

It will be made by leadership.

And leadership begins with a question simple enough for a child, and powerful enough for this room:

Is it the truth?