

OUR VIEW

Mask mandate puts schools into spotlight

Last week, our school-age children and youth were once again thrust into the center of the COVID-19 pandemic when Gov. Kate Brown ordered new mask mandates for K-12 students.

Our students shouldn't be there. Nor should our teachers and administrators.

Yet, they are. And while it is disappointing and creates new questions about local control, the governor's decision was the right one — for now.

Still, the new mandates potentially push students and teachers and administrators into the middle of what is essentially a cultural/political debate regarding vaccinations and the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is also the risk that many parents — for various reasons — will keep their students away from education centers because they do not agree with the mask mandate. If so, that doesn't help local school districts' efforts to provide our youth with the best education possible.

Another piece that complicates this new paradigm is that children younger than 12 are still ineligible to be vaccinated.

Last week, Intermountain Education Service District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill said the new mask mandate puts schools "in the cross-hairs" of an issue that has polarized America. He rightly was concerned about how much more pressure will be placed on teachers and school administrators to enforce a new mask requirement.

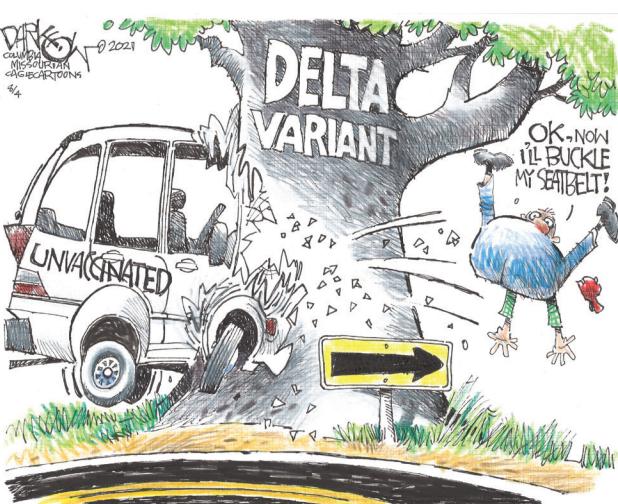
Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney's suggestion that communities will need to work together to support students was probably the best advice for a situation that continues to be complicated and frustrating.

As a community, regardless of where we stand on vaccinations and masks, we should work to be as helpful as possible to our local schools.

We need to remember that the teachers, superintendents and other school officials are not responsible for the mask mandate. They, like all state agencies, must obey the orders of the governor. They don't have the option of ignoring her mandate.

Our students and their teachers should not be in the middle of this political/cultural debate about COVID-19 and vaccinations. However, as cases climb, and vaccination rates continue to lag, we now face a new COVID-19 crisis. No one wants to return to the draconian restrictions instituted by the governor last year in the state's efforts to curb the spread of what has proven to be a deadly virus. We must all work hard to ensure we do not.

Meanwhile, we must give our local school districts, teachers and administrators all the help we can as they struggle to work through yet another COVID-19 challenge while simultaneously educating our children.



Infrastructure bill is key to reducing rate of climate change



CHUCK LEBOLD
OTHER VIEWS

Recently we have witnessed infrastructure weaknesses and failures associated with a changing climate and new cyber technologies adding credence to a call for a comprehensive updating and refining of our definition of what should constitute our infrastructure.

We have dams failing due to more frequent extreme weather events, bridges way past design life and with insufficient design capabilities, and electrical grid failures due to inadequate design standards when subjected to extreme weather events — all with life-threatening consequences — plus failures of major infrastructure systems due to our lack of cybersecurity, and large-scale coastal restoration due to sea-level rise coupled with more intense storms.

Upgrading our rail systems to handle high-speed rail transportation and siting of large-scale renewable energy sources will require involvement of informed citizens on a scale not seen in recent memory. We have large grassroots organizations becoming more active but need help from elected officials in the form of public information programs and calls to action.

The infrastructure bill currently being considered by Congress is offering a different way of thinking about what America needs to function and thrive in today's world and into the future.

Two main goals of this bill are to move us toward a more sustainable and just economy and to address threats to our national security through a transition to clean renewable energy. These goals will help justify and guide our decisions on budget priorities especially as criteria evolves for the design of effective projects to alleviate the potential impacts of global climate change.

The scope of elements contained in this bill are far wider ranging than in previous bills. This new more comprehensive mix of elements attempts to provide resources necessary for implementation of additional considerations meant to correct or alleviate existing social and environmental inequities and help transition away from fossil fuel as our primary energy sources.

The debating of this bill holds value not only in creating well-reasoned and defensible projects in function and scope but, in my view, holds a larger value by illustrating in a practical manner the complex nature of a national infrastructure capable of meeting the above listed goals.

The urgency of this transitioning from fossil fuels requires a responsible citizen to become part of the debate through dialogue with your elected officials. We will be responsible for the "heavy lifting" if we are to adhere to the recommended trajectory of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reductions set forth by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Our elected leadership, at all levels, has not shown the will to

address Climate Change (CC) in any significant manner. These delaying tactics have not only positioned us so that appropriate actions will be more radical than if we had begun the transition 40 years earlier, but also, in light of recommendations provided by the IPCC regarding urgency, have severely limited our ability to compromise on time frames. You will frequently hear many actions described as "radical," but keep in mind that the more important descriptor is "appropriate."

Considering America's economic development and current global ranking (No. 1) I feel we have an obligation to assume a leadership role in the global effort to reduce the rate of human-induced climate change. My hope is that we "baby boomers" acknowledge our role in the problem and invest money and our influence in the solutions that will provide a livable future for our children.

In closing I ask you to review the infrastructure bill and, as you encounter seemingly disassociated projects or elements, think about how they may be related in the context of redesigning our economy to be more just and sustainable. I feel this little exercise will help you provide informed feedback to your elected officials. This is an "all-hands-on-deck" effort with no time for delay.

Chuck LeBold, of Union, is a retired civil engineering technician with concerns regarding the potential impacts to Union County from human-induced climate change.

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