

## OPINION

### VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

# Mask mandate thrusts schools into spotlight

Last week, our school-age children and youth were once again thrust into center of the coronavirus 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 the move creates new questions about local control.

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 coronavirus 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 in our collective effort to provide our youths with the best education possible.

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

Last week, Intermountain Education Service District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill said the new mask mandate puts schools "in the crosshairs" 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.

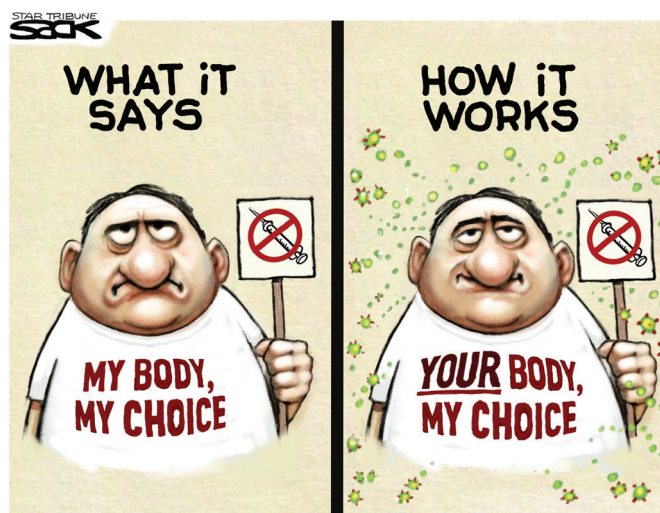
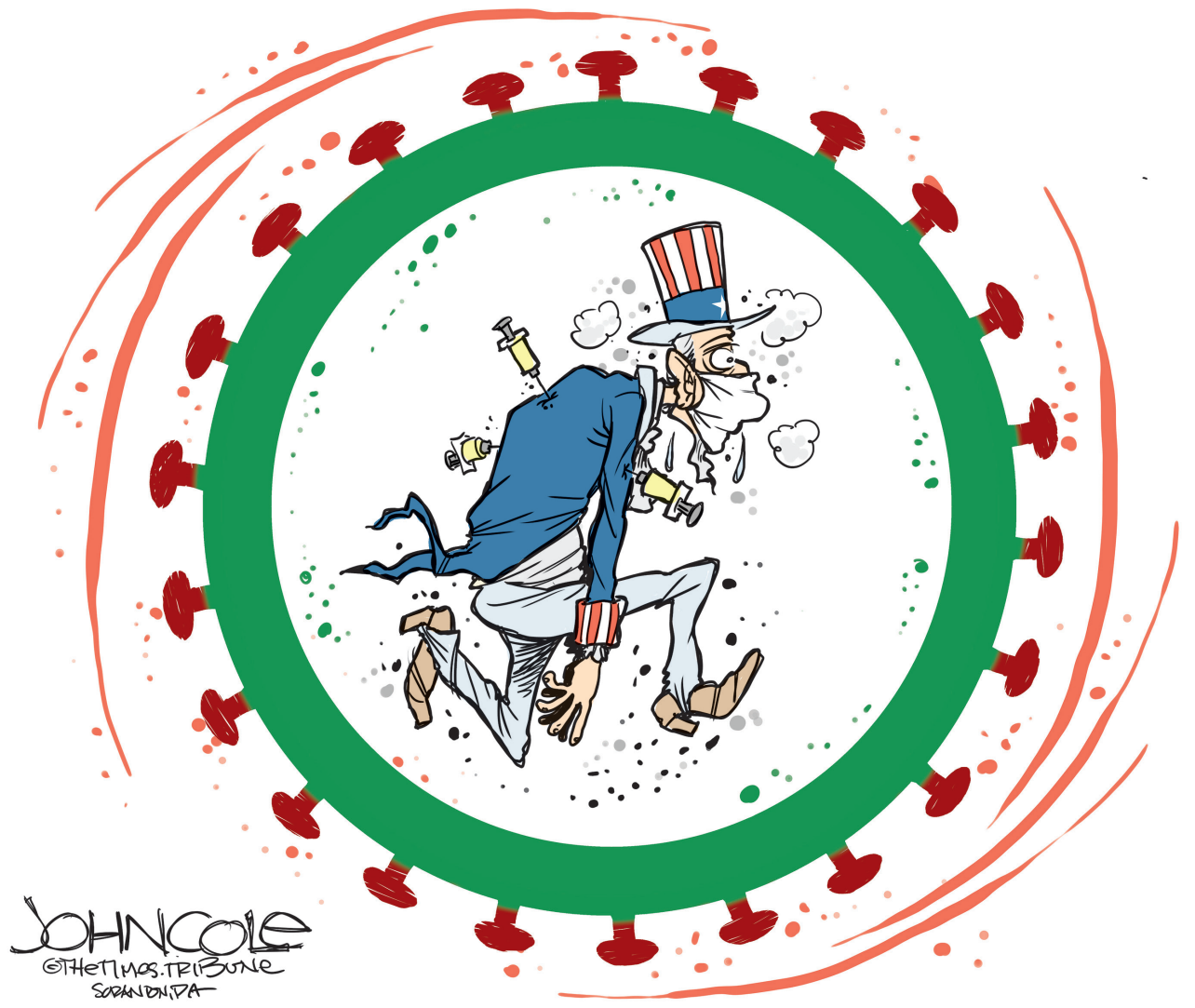
As a community, regardless of where we stand on vaccinations and masks, we should work to be as helpful as possible to our local schools.

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 to ignore her mandate.

That means trying to push them into the center of a political/cultural debate about coronavirus and vaccinations is wrong and won't solve the basic problem.

Our students and their teachers should not be in the middle of this debate. However, as cases climb, and vaccination rates continue to lag, we now face a new coronavirus crisis. No one wants to return to the draconian restrictions instituted by the governor last year. 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 coronavirus challenge.



### LETTERS to the EDITOR

#### Money for proposed road would be better spent improving Wallowa Lake Dam

The present proposal to build new road segments (joining the Lake Shore Road) for possible fire evacuation of state park visitors has neither common-sense planning or local support. A fraction of the proposed project money should rather be spent on a reliable first-alert system and evacuation plan using both lanes east side of the lake.

It would much better serve our agricultural community and residents to plan and raise finances to improve the Wallowa Lake Dam, a proposal that has been pushed aside for almost 20 years. Failure of the lake dam would be catastrophic to the towns of Joseph and Enterprise.

Boyd McAvoy  
Joseph

#### GOP letter decrying Cuban dictatorship merely crocodile tears

On July 21, our congressional Representative Cliff Bentz, along with many of his GOP colleagues, signed a letter to

"Leaders of Democratic States" decrying the Cuban dictatorship and calling upon our allies to support the impassioned pleas for democracy by that island's beleaguered population. Unfortunately, the crocodilian nature of the tears shed by Republicans for oppressed Cubans has been revealed by GOP actions here at home.

Mr. Bentz and his colleagues chose to support Trump's Big Lie of a stolen election by voting against certifying Joe Biden's electoral win. They then refused to endorse a bipartisan investigation into the Jan. 6 terrorist attack on the Capitol incited by their leader. Even worse, their party has passed laws across the country to suppress voting rights and enable partisan bodies to overturn elections. Republican lawmakers seem to believe that they will have a hard time holding or gaining power unless they rig the electoral game and crush democracy in the U.S.

It appears obvious that the Trump cult, whether through its congressional wing (the GOP), or its paramilitary wing (the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, etc.), has no goal beyond the termination of our tradition of fair elections so that in 2024 they can turn Trump into America's Fidel.

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