

OPINION

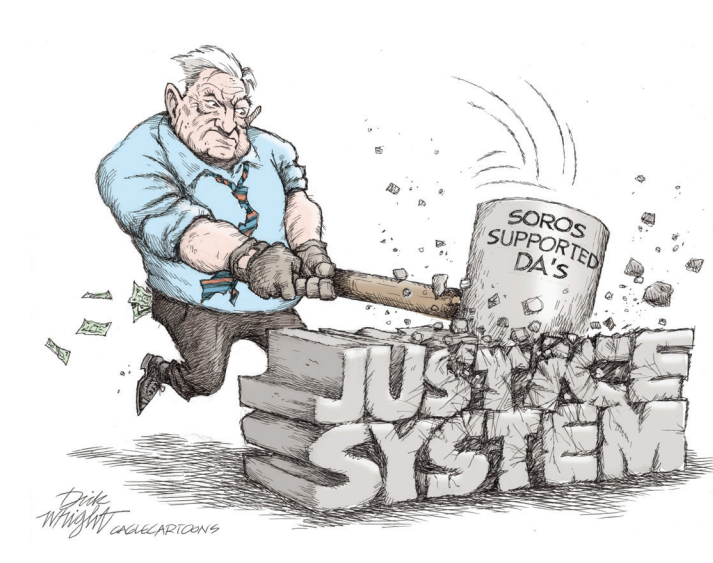
VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Schools' compliance is the proper move

It's one thing to mandate masks. It's an entirely different matter when fines are being doled out for noncompliance. Yet that is the exact route the state of Oregon has taken. On July 29, Gov. Kate Brown required that all K-12 schools are required to have pupils within their walls wear masks this fall. That news itself was tough enough to swallow. Then, the Oregon Health Authority took it a step further. Beginning Aug. 12 — that's tomorrow — schools that do not comply with the new mask mandate can face a fine of up to \$500 per day, per incident.

It sounds all too much like the mandate in the Affordable Care Act that required a citizen to sign up for health insurance or face a fine. This makes the decision for local school boards who want to advocate for local control that much more difficult — comply, or face a fine. All three local school districts have agreed to comply, though, and it's the right move to make. Though, from a financial standpoint, they almost have to. Just one incident a day could cost a school between \$2,000-\$2,500 per week. That is \$8,000-\$10,000 each month. Strictly as an example, Enterprise and Wallowa are both set to have around 150 school days this year. If they were found to be in violation each day, even just once daily, that could amount to more than \$75,000 in fines.

Love them or hate them, masks are a good idea in the school setting for now with cases creeping up again. No, students have not been getting sick from coronavirus at nearly the rate as adults or the elderly, but some recent reports seem to indicate the delta variant — the most prominent one in the U.S. currently — is having a more severe impact on the younger population. But it is not a good idea to, in this instance, strip away the local authority that was just given to the counties. And then to go a step further and say you're going to fine dissenters? It feels like that crosses a line. Everyone is tired of the rules. Tired of the masks. Tired of coronavirus. Tired of the hospitalizations. Tired of all the politicization of this 18-month mess of mayhem. But these smaller districts can't stand to lose \$75,000 or more in fines, either. As much as this publication would like the control to stay local — and believes that is the correct move — this is an instance where, at least for now, it is best for the districts of Wallowa County to comply with the rules and mask students and staff.



LETTERS to the EDITOR

Public money should be spent in a sensible manner

I am writing in response to Boyd McAvoy's letter, "Money for proposed road would be better spent improving Wallowa Lake Dam." Mr. McAvoy is right that public money should be spent in a sensible manner, which is why I was proud to see the Legislature reauthorize \$14 million for the Wallowa Lake Dam refurbishment during the 2021 session. It was a long time coming and so is a second emergency evacuation route for the south end of Wallowa Lake. This issue has been discussed for many years, but the recent fire events have shown the seriousness of having solid evacuation plans and infrastructure. Ensuring an alternative evacuation route for the south end of Wallowa Lake could save lives and help expedite evacuations during an emergency.

I understand the concerns of Lake Shore Drive residents and property owners about traffic on their road if it becomes accessible from both directions. That is why I think this proposed right of way should be used only in emergencies with access determined by the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office.

Like with the dam, I know that a compromise and plan can be made that will yield a strong benefit to the community.
Evan Bryan Joseph

Politics is a way to discuss country needs

Many people these days tend to think that the word "politics" is a dirty word and that it is OK to cast aspersions on anyone's ideas that may be different. Actually, the word "politics" in my dictionaries means the science or activi-

ties of government. It is a way of discussing or conducting policies regarding government.

Now, in the USA, a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, it is the duty of every citizen to be involved in discussion regarding our government. Thus, to be loyal citizens, we ought all to be engaged in discussing the kind of country we want to live in.

That brings up what we mean by discussion. Discussion is the process of sharing one's ideas with others and listening in turn to their ideas. Discussion is not arguing or debating. It is definitely not using labels or pejorative terms to show disdain for someone else's ideas.

In other words, politics is a way to discuss respectfully with each other about what is needed for our country. Politics is only a dirty word when made so by the speaker.

Evelyn Swart Joseph

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Unsigned or anonymous letters will not be published.

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