

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Mask decision should be a local one

The heavy hand of government has always been one of those peculiar aspects of American democracy that often leave voters scratching their heads.

No better example of that is the recent decision by Gov. Kate Brown to institute a mask mandate for all students this fall.

The governor's heart is in the right place — she wants to protect voters — but her heavy-handed dictum takes away a key component to democracy — local control.

There isn't any doubt now that coronavirus — and its variants — are dangerous and have the capacity to kill people. The science is clear — coronavirus is a clear and present threat to Americans and the best way to eliminate the danger is through vaccinations.

In the end, though, the decision to get vaccinated is a personal one. The same line of logic is central to the current upheaval regarding the mask mandate.

The governor's school mask decision takes away the very important element to our democracy of local control and sends — we are sure — the unintended message that the school officials we trust to educate our children are not capable of making sound, safe decisions regarding students.

A lot of local parents are up in arms over the governor's decision and have exercised their constitutional right to let area school district officials know it. Just last week, our neighbor, Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen, issued a missive where he called the mask mandate "unconstitutional." While this is not the space to argue the constitutionality of the governor's decisions, Bowen's letter to the governor represents the prevailing mood among many people.

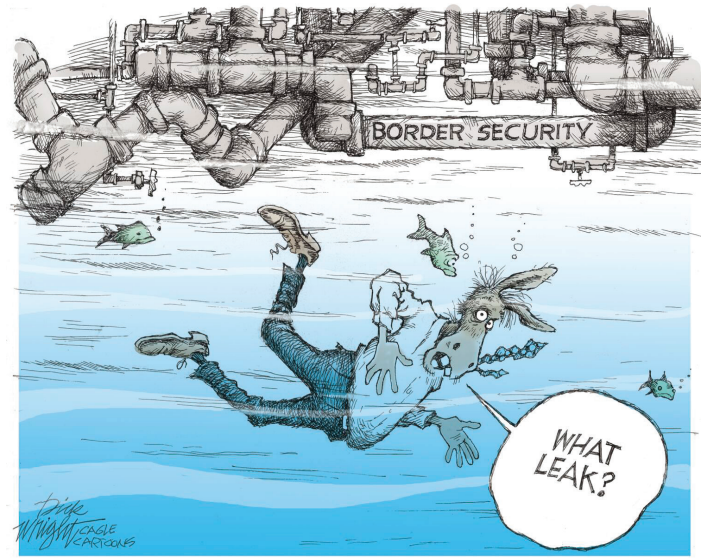
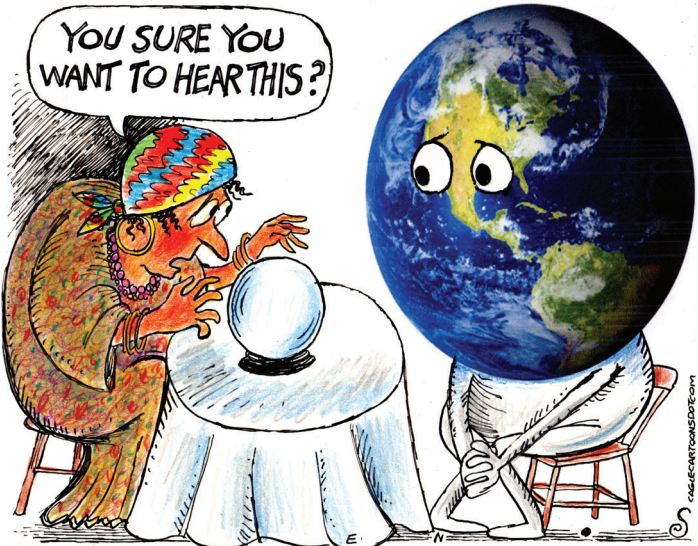
Brown's move is also a head-scratcher because about a month ago she lifted most coronavirus restrictions and, essentially, passed key decisions on the virus back to area school districts. That was a good, and right, move.

The counter argument is, of course, that coronavirus cases are spiking here at home and across the state. Therefore, the logic goes, to stop the spread our schools must ensure everyone wears a mask. That is indeed a good argument. It carries a lot of weight and should be evaluated carefully by officials in every county.

Yet, that decision needs to be done at the local level. The final decision should be made with input from citizens, elected and appointed officials and school district representatives. If, in the end, the prevailing consensus is to mandate masks in schools, then so be it. It will be a decision made by the people with boots on the ground who understand the unique aspects of their region.

The people caught in the middle — our students and school officials — don't deserve to be.

The mask decision should be a local one. Period.



LETTERS to the EDITOR

School officials would have 'ignored' threat until state stepped in

What a crazy world we live in! "COVID-19 cases increasing in Wallowa County at fastest rate of pandemic" (Chieftain, Aug. 11). While on the same front page is the article of the Wallowa County School officials decrying the state requirement forcing them to require masks for schoolchildren.

While educational curriculum is properly controlled by the district, the safety of our children is another issue entirely. These children under 12 have no approved options for COVID protection beyond masking and social distance. Do these same officials really believe that requiring children to mask while in school is an infringement of the officials' rights? This variant of COVID-19 has proven more dangerous to all, including school children. The officials are responsible for the safety of our children while in their care. They appear to disagree with a mask requirement at school. Without a defined mask policy the children will mimic their peers and

proceed as if indestructible. If these officials cannot see this as a "safety issue," perhaps they are in the wrong vocation.

In the midst of a pandemic these officials would have ignored a threat to children until forced by a state mandate. What a crazy world.

**David Ebbert
Enterprise**

Submission to authoritarian maneuver robs our children of liberty

With all due respect to the writers at the Chieftain, I have to voice my disagreement with the conclusion that "... smaller districts can't stand to lose \$75,000 or more in fines ..." (for being out of compliance with state mask mandates).

It is incredibly challenging to stand firm in the face of backlash, especially when finances are involved, but the reality is that by submitting to yet another authoritarian maneuver to maintain power over our children, we are robbing them of something far more precious:

their liberty. We are showing them that there is a price we are not willing to pay for them to have the freedom to see one another's faces and interact with peers, teachers, germs and the world unencumbered by face coverings, which have still not been shown to provide any substantial COVID risk reduction in this age group.

This is to say nothing of the negative effects masks have on kids: "mask mouth" (receding gums, halitosis and cavities) as a result of more bacteria and fungi retained in the mouth of mask wearers, exposure to more virulent pathogens like E. coli, staph and strep that sit on the mask near the mucous membranes all day, and the dehumanizing social effects stemming from the inability to process facial expressions. (For more info read "Masking Children: Tragic, Unscientific and Damaging" by the American Institute for Economic Research, 3/10/2021)

Suggesting there is too great a cost to pay for the welfare and liberty of our children stands in sharp contrast to Patrick Henry's cry: "but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

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