

Biden says he'll ask Americans to wear masks for first 100 days

By Alexandra Jaffe
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden said Thursday that he will ask Americans to commit to 100 days of wearing masks as one of his first acts as president, stopping just short of the nationwide mandate he's pushed before to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The move marks a notable shift from President Donald Trump, whose own skepticism of mask-wearing has contributed to a politicization of the issue. That's made many people reticent to embrace a practice that public health experts say is one of the easiest ways to manage the pandemic, which has killed more than 275,000 Americans.

The president-elect has frequently emphasized mask-wearing as a "patriotic duty" and during the campaign floated the idea of instituting a nationwide mask mandate, which he later acknowledged would be beyond the ability of the president to enforce.

Speaking with CNN's Jake Tapper, Biden said he would make the request of Americans on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20.

"On the first day I'm inaugurated, I'm going to ask the public for 100 days to mask. Just 100 days to mask — not forever, just 100 days. And I think we'll see a significant reduction" in the virus, Biden said.

The president-elect reiterated his call for lawmakers on Capitol Hill to pass a coronavirus aid bill and expressed support for a \$900 billion compromise bill that a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced this week.

"That would be a good start. It's not enough," he said, adding, "I'm going to need to ask for more help."

Biden has said his tran-



Mark Makela/Getty Images-TNS

Joe Biden removes his face mask before delivering a Thanksgiving address at the Queen Theatre on Nov. 25 at Wilmington, Delaware.

sition team is working on its own coronavirus relief package, and his aides have signaled they plan for that to be their first legislative push.

The president-elect also said he asked Dr. Anthony Fauci to stay on in his administration, "in the exact same role he's had for the past several presidents," as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the nation's top infectious-disease expert.

He said he's asked Fauci to be a "chief medical adviser" as well as part of his COVID-19 advisory team. Fauci told NBC's "Today" show on Friday, "I said yes right on the spot."

Regarding a coronavirus vaccine, Biden offered begrudging credit for the work Trump's administration has done in expediting the development of a vaccine but said that planning the distribution properly will be "critically important."

"It's a really difficult but doable project, but it has to be well planned," he said.

Part of the challenge the Biden administration will face in distributing the vac-

cine will be instilling public confidence in it. Biden said he'd be "happy" to get inoculated in public to assuage any concerns about its efficacy and safety. Three former presidents — Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton — have said they'd also get vaccinated publicly to show that it's safe.

"People have lost faith in the ability of the vaccine to work," Biden said, adding that "it matters what a president and the vice president do."

In the same interview, Biden also weighed in on reports that Trump is considering pardons of himself and his allies.

"It concerns me in terms of what kind of precedent it sets and how the rest of the world looks at us as a nation of laws and justice," Biden said.

Biden committed that his Justice Department will "operate independently" and that whoever he chooses to lead the department will have the "independent capacity to decide who gets investigated."

"You're not going to see in our administration that kind of approach to pardons, nor are you going to see in our

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administration the approach to making policy by tweets," he said.

In addition to considering preemptive pardons, Trump has spent much of his time post-election trying to raise questions about an election he lost by millions of votes while his lawyers pursue baseless lawsuits alleging voter fraud in multiple states.

Republicans on Capitol Hill, meanwhile, have largely given the president cover, with many defending the lawsuits and few publicly congratulating Biden on his win.

But Biden said Thursday that he's received private calls of congratulations from "more than several sitting Republican senators" and that he has confidence in his ability to cut bipartisan deals with Republicans despite the rancor that's characterized the last four years on Capitol Hill.

Trump aides have expressed skepticism that the president, who continues to claim victory and spread claims of fraud, would attend Biden's inauguration. Biden said Thursday night that he believes it's "important" that Trump attend, largely to demonstrate the nation's commitment to peaceful transfer of power between political rivals.

"It is totally his decision," Biden said of Trump, adding, "It is of no personal consequence to me, but I think it is to the country."



Ellen Morris Bishop/Wallowa County Chieftain, File Photo

Morgan Anderson and her 12-dog team start the 200-mile race in the 2020 Eagle Cap Extreme sled dog race. The 2021 race has been canceled.

Sled dog race canceled

By Bill Bradshaw
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — The 2021 Eagle Cap Extreme sled dog race, originally scheduled for January, has been canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the ECX website.

"After considerable discussion with medical professionals, community leaders, and several key volunteers in the Eagle Cap Extreme family, we made the difficult decision to postpone our 2021 races," the website states. "We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and look forward to resuming with the 2022 race."

Dr. Randy Greenshields, president of the ECX board of directors and co-owner of the Double Arrow Veterinary Clinic, said the board decided on Nov. 23 to cancel next month's event because of concerns over keeping people socially distanced. He said organizers have been busy getting the word out to all the mushers and volunteers.

"We had a lot of volunteers who were pretty uncomfortable with (holding the ECX)," he said Wednesday, Dec. 2. "We'd already planned to cancel events where people were in close proximity."

He said although distancing wasn't a problem for the mushers, it would've been for spectators and anyone attending the awards banquet and people in warming tents and eating and sleeping areas.

"It was just real difficult to keep people spread out," he said.

Communications were another problem. Given the terrain involved in the race, cellphones aren't usable and ham radios are used, again crowding people together.

"There would be too many people in close proximity to do it very safely," Greenshields said.

Information on the website already has been changed to reflect plans for the 2022 race. Greenshields said some of the mushers who planned to compete next month said rather than refund their entry fees, the ECX organization should just hold onto the fees until 2022.

Central Oregon officials want younger students in class

By Suzanne Roig and Jackson Hogan
The (Bend) Bulletin

On the day the state put 25 counties in the extreme-risk category for spreading COVID-19, a group of Central Oregon policymakers sent a letter urging Gov. Kate Brown to allow elementary students to return to in-person instruction.

Their request comes at a time when the county's chief health officer admitted that Deschutes County was in the pandemic deeper than it had hoped to be, said Dr. George Conway, Deschutes County Health Services director.

"It's continued to steepen really since not long after the Fourth of July. There was a slightest lull and we continue to steepen every day,

particularly after Halloween, and we are very concerned about getting into a further surge, in the aftermath of Thanksgiving," Conway said during a Zoom press briefing Thursday morning. "We're continuing to rise, and in the past week they rose very sharply."

Central Oregon, the state and the nation are facing burgeoning numbers of positive cases and a death toll that continues to rise. On Wednesday, more than 2,800 deaths were reported in the United States, the most ever reported in a single day since the pandemic began in early March. Los Angeles issued a stay-at-home order. And New York City was pushing ahead for more elementary students to attend in-person instruction.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday warned that it will be rough for the country with large numbers of cases and deaths from COVID-19.

Amid such ominous warnings, the 19 signatures on the letter to Brown and Oregon Department of Education Director Colt Gill pushed for more screening and testing and to allow elementary students to return to in-person instruction on Jan. 4.

Bend Mayor Sally Russell said Thursday that now is the time for everyone to re-double efforts to curtail the spread of the virus so that the youngest students can return to the classroom.

"We all understand the huge risk to our really young people in not getting them back into an educa-

tional environment where they can socialize with each other," Russell said. "It also affects disproportionately those households that need to work outside the home.

"We all know that when people follow the guidelines, we can lower the prevalence of the disease in our community."

According to the statewide metrics for reopening schools, counties with more than 30,000 people need to have fewer than 50 cases per 100,000 people in order to have in-person instruction.

The letter was also signed by five of the seven Bend-La Pine School Board members: Julie Craig, Carrie Douglass, Shimiko Montgomery, Caroline Skidmore and Amy Tatom.

Douglass said Thursday that recent data has shown distance learning results in learning loss for some students.

She said she's heard anecdotally that staying away from school has hurt student's mental health.

"As data piles up showing the negative impact of distance learning on our students, we believe we need to prioritize getting our students back in school," Douglass said in an interview.

Douglass added that reopening K-5 schools is being emphasized over middle and high schools because not only are younger children less likely to transmit COVID-19, but distance learning has extra challenges for students who need adult supervision.

Study: Ocean conditions, not dams, reduced salmon runs

■ Report, paid for by the Bonneville Power Administration, concludes that river conditions had little effect on fish survival

The Associated Press

LEWISTON, Idaho — A controversial new study challenges long-standing science that pins salmon declines in the Snake River Basin on dams.

The Lewiston Morning Tribune reports the work by British Columbia scientist David Welch puts the blame for poor returns of adult Snake River spring and fall chinook salmon on conditions in the Pacific Ocean instead of the dams. The study argues that chinook runs from California to Alaska have suffered similar declines.

Welch's work, funded by the Bonneville Power Administration and published in the journal "Fish and Fisheries," argues that since chinook runs in rivers with pristine

freshwater habitat and those with highly degraded habitat have suffered similar declines, the problem must be in the ocean.

Welch and his colleagues looked at data from chinook runs up and down the West Coast of North America and worked to establish and compare smolt-to-adult return rates for each of the runs.

Welch and his colleagues found that since the late 1970s, chinook returns have generally declined by about two-thirds in much of the study area and that the survival rate of chinook that return to the Snake River is nearly identical to the survival rate of those that return to undammed rivers in the Puget Sound.

Efforts to recover the fish

"I'm not looking to stir the pot for no reason. I think there are some serious public policy questions."

— David Welch, Canadian scientist who looked at reasons for declining salmon runs in Snake River Basin

should concentrate on the ocean and not on freshwater, Welch told the newspaper.

"I'm not looking to stir the pot for no reason. I think there are some serious public policy questions here," he said.

The study is being trumpeted by supporters of the four lower Snake River dams and critiqued by salmon advocates and some scientists who have long



Bureau of Land Management

A salmon migrates up the Columbia River.

argued the dams should be breached.

Charlie Petrosky, a retired Idaho Fish and Game research biologist who has written several papers on delayed mortality, said he has concerns with Welch's work. Petrosky thinks the study sets up a false dichotomy between

freshwater and the ocean.

"All of the studies I have been involved with show (smolt-to-adult return rates) are a function of both," he said.

There is ample evidence that the Snake and Columbia dams have a negative impact on salmon and steel-

head, he said.

"There is undoubtedly very broad-scale ocean patterns — warming oceans — that are definitely not good for survival," he said. "But to brush off the effects of what happens as fish are migrating through an altered system I think is very misleading."