

EDITORIAL

Waiting on masks

The day when Baker students walk into their schools with nothing to obscure their smiling faces (or frowning, perhaps, depending on how the morning has gone) will be a welcome sight indeed.

But we're not ready for that day.

Not with the COVID-19 infection rate at its highest level during the pandemic in Baker County.

Masks offer limited protection, to be sure, against the virus. But combined with vaccination, they absolutely reduce the risk. And that's particularly important with students. Although they are much less likely to get seriously ill if they're infected, those younger than 12 also aren't yet eligible to be vaccinated. Baker students had to wear masks last school year, too, and even though elementary students were in class four days per week for most of the year, the district had just 36 total cases among students and staff. Masks undoubtedly contributed to that relatively small infection rate.

When new case numbers plummeted in June, the district responded by relaxing mask requirements for the Summer Academy. Unfortunately, the subsequent surge in cases statewide, a trend exacerbated by paltry vaccination rates in many places, including Baker County, prompted Gov. Kate Brown to mandate masks when classes start next week.

The governor needs to be prepared to drop that statewide requirement as soon as the current surge abates in some counties, even if it remains rampant in others. Ideally, that will happen before the leaves start to turn.

But in the meantime, having students wear masks is a minor hassle, and one that's worth the trouble to ensure students are in classrooms. A vastly worse scenario would be to forego masks and then have major outbreaks in schools that could return Baker to the awful situation that prevailed in the spring of 2020, with students trying to learn while sitting in front of a computer.

The return of masks is especially annoying because it seemed, just a couple months ago when infection rates were dropping fast, that this school year would be different from the start. But we lost the momentum we had gained against the virus.

Until we reverse that trend, some of the symbols of this long national nightmare will persist, including, unfortunately, masks.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald



Your views

Doctor provides great information about COVID-19

Thank you, Dr. Schott, for your article in the Baker City Herald on August 19! The information you provided regarding COVID-19 and the effects in this community may help people who are on the fence about being vaccinated change their minds. We all, at some point in our lives, will go to the doctor or an emergency room to address a particular need. We rely on that doctor's education, training and experience to address whatever problem we are experiencing. Yet with COVID, too many people rely on misinformation from social media or "news" organizations. We all, at some point in our lives, understand the need to consult with experts who have knowledge about a particular problem that we as individuals don't have. Relying on experts to deal with problems beyond our personal knowledge or expertise is universal. That same understanding should apply to COVID-19 and now the delta variant. Doctors in our community, our state and across the country are providing information based on science, research, education and expertise. We

should give thought to our reliance on experts throughout our lives to deal with problems and apply that same reliance now on experts to guide us through this crisis. Information that people can rely on to correct the misinformation prevalent on social media sites is easily obtained. We just need to look at the credentials of the source. The physical and economic health of all of us depends on people doing what's needed to protect themselves and others. Let's hope we do.

Randy Crutcher
Baker City

Let's congregate and encourage each other

America is in peril. We must recognize our peril, decide what to do, and act.

America is enduring a genocide and a mass illusion of fear and danger. COVID-19 is no more than a nasty common cold, curable by strengthening immune systems with Vitamins C and D, zinc, raw garlic, healthy food, and hydroxychloroquine.

We the people are separated from each other. Because of our separation, communities, families and economies

are dying. American freedom is won when Americans congregate, decide what to do, and act. During the American Revolution we met in taverns and churches and chose to rebel against the British crown. During slavery and the civil rights movement, we congregated in churches and sang and preached our way to freedom.

The Constitution is the supreme law of our land. The First Amendment protects the right of the people peaceably to assemble. No government, from the US Senate to the smallest city council, from the CDC to a state governor, may abridge our freedom to assemble.

"Shelter in place" tried to end our right to assemble. Fortunately, my church continued to meet. We allowed God's love to move our lives. We hugged, smiled, spoke, shared potlucks, and sang our way through 2020 and 2021. None of us died. What my beloved church did, Americans must do: congregate, talk, and act, at school board meetings, churches, cafés, city councils, music events, online events, taverns, streets. When we congregate we encourage each other. Armed with courage, we act.

Lindianne Sarno
Baker City

Letters to the editor

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- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the

accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.

- Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be

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- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814

Email: news@bakercityherald.com

Vietnam. Afghanistan. Time to break the cycle

By DAVIDA. SUPER

The rapid collapse of the Afghan government has lessons to teach us, if we will listen. Many of these are lessons we could have learned from the Vietnam War, but we did not.

In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, the enemy was very real. The Viet Minh began as a nationalist response to the abuses of French colonial rule but upon taking power in the north showed themselves fully committed to the totalitarian ideology that killed and imprisoned tens of millions of people. Their close allies, the Khmer Rouge, perpetrated one of the most staggering genocides since World War II. Their ascendancy sent untold numbers to brutal "reeducation camps," where many died.

The Taliban, similarly, began as a reformist reaction to the endemic corruption and civil strife that followed the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. This promise won them widespread support against the country's unloved warlords. But once in power, they turned out to be just as heedless of human life as their predecessors, imposing a maniacal, distorted version of Islamic law, stripping women and girls of their basic civil rights, and oppressing adherents of other strains of Islam. They also provided a safe haven to the al-Qaida terrorist movement in the years before the Sept. 11 attacks.

In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, tens of millions of innocent people were subjugated to brutal regimes they had no plausible chance to remove. The case for humanitarian intervention was compelling.

Ours, however, were not true humanitarian interventions. Although we paid lip service to freeing the people of Vietnam and Afghanistan, our primary goals were strategic and self-interested. In Vietnam, we wanted to check the spread of communism, to stop one more domino from falling. In Afghanistan, we wanted to avenge the 9/11 attacks and debilitate al-Qaida.

We could have accommodated both humanitarian and strategic aims: Neutral, honest governments responsive to their respective people's wills could have checked the spread of communism in Vietnam and expelled al-Qaida from Afghanistan. Unfortunately, in both countries we wanted governments responsive to our wishes rather than those of the people.

We selected an authoritarian president for Vietnam, who had his rule confirmed in a fraudulent referendum. We then greenlighted a military coup against him. Corruption was rampant, and the regime imprisoned and tortured thousands of its non-communist opponents. By the time the U.S. forces withdrew, few Vietnamese had much regard for the regime, and it quickly fell.

So, too, in Afghanistan, we imposed our choice for a president, micromanaged allocation of power in the post-Taliban government, and orchestrated deals with the same despicable warlords whose abuses had originally given rise to the Taliban. We looked the other way when the regime perpetuated itself with a series of tainted elections. And the aggressive but unfocused "anti-terrorism" campaigns

we demanded alienated the Afghan people by attacking villagers not engaged in violence. As we have seen this summer, once our troops were gone, virtually nobody had any stake in the regime's survival.

In both countries, we also were myopic. We placed all our faith in the regimes we had installed without strong efforts to develop offsetting power centers and the robust civil society necessary for liberal democracy to survive. We acted in Vietnam as if only communists could oppress their people. Similarly in Afghanistan, we obsessed about radical Islam as the only enemy worthy of consideration, ignoring the corruption and strife that gave rise to the Taliban's sway in the first place.

Indeed, once we deposed the Taliban we quickly lost interest in favor of the invasion of Iraq. By the time we refocused, the regime that the U.S. installed had irretrievably destroyed its credibility.

Sadly, we are repeating these mistakes on a much grander scale in the Middle East. Obsessed alternatively with fighting Sunni Muslim extremists and countering Shiite Muslim Iran, we act as if corrupt authoritarian regimes like that of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi are the only alternative.

Just as the corrupt regimes we backed in Vietnam and Afghanistan never achieved popular support or staying power against the communists or radical Islamists, the regimes we are backing in the Middle East will not provide a long-term defense against radical Islamic groups hostile to human rights, the

preservation of Israel and other U.S. interests.

Even more importantly, the dichotomy between authoritarian strongmen and radical Islamists is just as false in the Middle East as it was in Afghanistan (as was the dichotomy between strongmen and communists in Vietnam). Westerners would never accept such a limited array of choices, and we should stop believing the dictators who insist self-interestedly that people in their region have lower aspirations.

Our true allies in the Middle East are secular democrats, just as they are in other parts of the world. A bitter irony is that these secular democrats are being suppressed by the very authoritarian regimes we keep supporting. Secular democrats, who believe in open political discourse and peaceful protest, are far more vulnerable to repression than conspiratorial radicals hiding in the shadows. Even among Islamic parties, the repressive regimes disproportionately target moderates willing to engage in the democratic process.

We should take a clear stand for democracy, condemning the recent coup in Tunisia, conditioning aid to Egypt on respect for human rights and engaging with a much broader range of leaders and communities in these countries. We cannot afford to see the desperate last days of the U.S.-backed regime in Kabul repeated in Tunis, Cairo or Riyadh.

David A. Super is a professor of law and economics at Georgetown University Law Center.