

EDITORIAL

Sheriff Ash's
refreshing letter

Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash has many commendable attributes — he has a knack for finding missing people, to cite one noteworthy example — but he hasn't previously been known for his writing acumen.

He should be.

The letter that Ash authored recently is a refreshingly reasonable assessment of the pandemic, and in particular the issue of state mandates and local decision making.

Ash's one-page letter, which was posted on the Sheriff's Office's Facebook page on Aug. 29, is especially welcome as a contrast to the divisive missives that some of his fellow sheriffs have recently written.

In the opening paragraph, Ash emphasizes that the Baker County Sheriff's Office has not, and will not, enforce Oregon mandates on masks and vaccines.

"We are not responsible for enforcement of Oregon Health Authority rules," Ash wrote.

This is true. Although, as far as can be determined, neither Oregon Gov. Kate Brown nor other state officials have actually asked county sheriffs to enforce mask and vaccine mandates. Oregon's Occupational Safety and Health division, for instance, is tasked with enforcing the mask mandate for indoor public spaces.

In any case, it's understandable why Ash would let his constituents, many of whom are not pleased with one or both of the mandates, know that their sheriff's office won't be involved in enforcement.

Ash also writes that he favors local control, citing Baker County schools' success in having in-person classes for much of the previous year (for elementary students, in the Baker School District) without significant COVID-19 outbreaks.

In those two areas, Ash's letter is similar to ones written by some of his colleagues, including Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen.

But beyond those topics, the letters differ dramatically.

Ash writes that he supports, in addition to local control, "science, and common sense." He doesn't deny that COVID-19 is a serious disease.

"This spike in cases and hospitalizations is supported by real-time local data," Ash wrote. "I believe our county health department and county physician have our best interests at heart in making recommendations and providing guidance for our community. These are our own local experts who are a reliable source of information as we make our individual health decisions."

Those local experts, notably Dr. Eric Lamb, the county's public health officer, have urged county residents to be vaccinated.

Bowen, by contrast, uses his letter, which he addresses to Brown, to castigate the governor for "overreaching mandates," "bullying threats," "mindless orders" and "mindless dictates." Bowen accuses Brown of caring "nothing about our children or the people of Eastern Oregon."

Bowen does, however, refer to Brown as "ma'am," an ostensible courtesy that seems not merely out of place, but downright silly, in the context of his otherwise nasty screed.

Ash, by contrast, seeks not to inflame the divisions that the pandemic, and Brown's executive orders, have spawned.

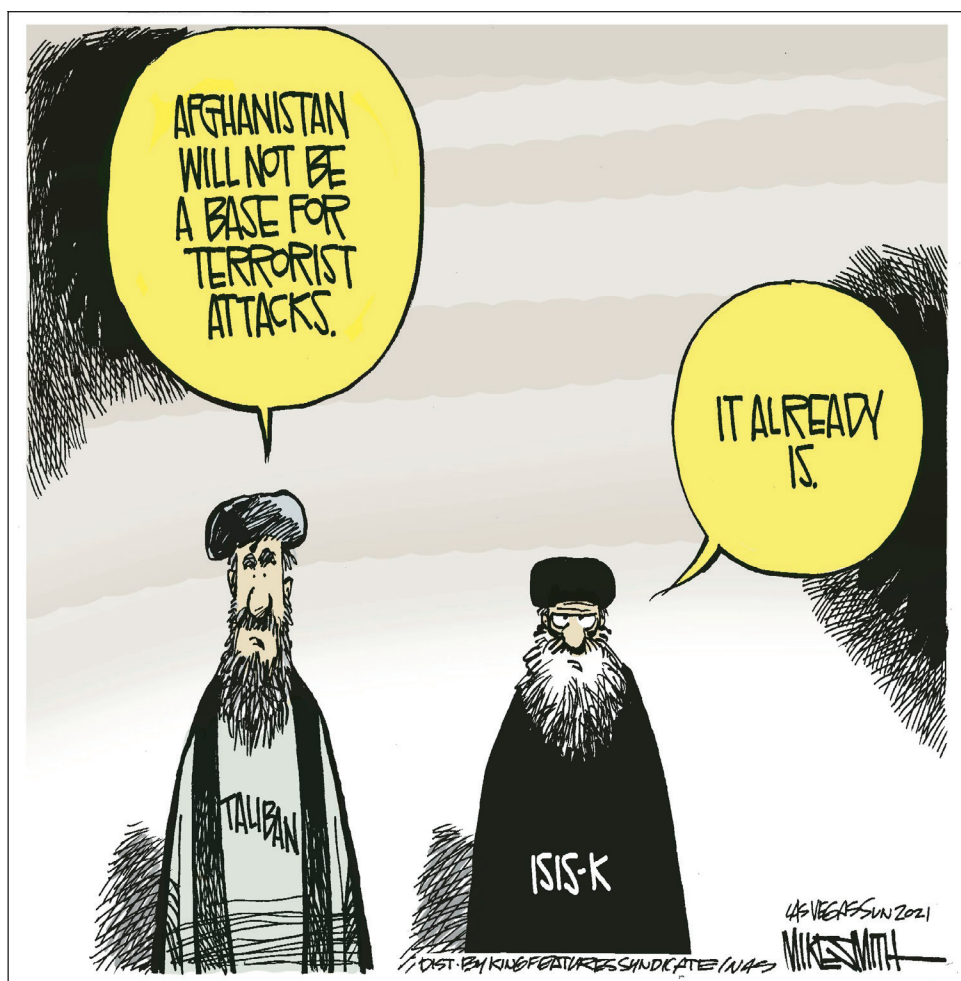
"As Sheriff, I represent everyone, and I hate to see how residents are being divided over these issues," Ash wrote. "I believe that in spite of our differing viewpoints we all want to do what is best for our community. We breathe the same air. We visit the same stores. Our children go to the same schools. We are all still in this together. I ask that we don't attack those whose decisions may be different than ours, and to please take responsibility for staying home when you are sick. Real people around the world and in our own community have lost loved ones or are experiencing long-term health effects. My thoughts and prayers go out to them."

It's no great feat to write a letter criticizing the governor.

Writing a letter to your constituents that urges them to be compassionate and careful requires more circumspection, more thought.

Sheriff Travis Ash deserves considerable credit for writing such a letter, and introducing a welcome tone of moderation into an atmosphere of anger and bitterness.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

City shouldn't use tax money for a lawsuit

Baker City is in state-wide news yet again. This time, we're going to sue the governor. At taxpayer's expense?

I got a bone to pick about that. If you want to sue, it needs to be financed by private donations from interested parties. No need to be picking the taxpayer's pocket for what is essentially a private agenda and does not represent the beliefs of everyone in town. Cause there are two tribes in Baker City nowadays. Split along political beliefs. With one party living in denial of both the virus and the science needed to fight it.

I would say the Republican party, but the Republican party is dead ... Killed by pod people who call themselves Republicans but are in reality followers

of Donald Trump. It's the Trump party now. If there's any true Republicans left out there, you better start pushing back ...

And finally.

If the town council spent as much time fighting the virus as they do state government, we might actually move forward in this pandemic and make these restrictions go away ...

Through science, not lawsuits.

Dan Collins
Baker City

Three recent letters were a breath of fresh air

I want to give a huge Thank You to Mary Tomlinson, Rick Rienks and Ritha Wilcox for their letters to the editor published Aug. 28. Finally a breath of fresh air from

three people, only one of them I know personally. I have had different people from time to time ask me to write more letters, and I always answer the same. "You get tired of talking to a tree or a brick wall," and that is why I pretty much keep to myself in my golden years. However as of late I read what some of our so-called community leaders pass on as their warped sense of truth and expect any intelligent person to agree with them.

Now today my faith has been somewhat restored with just three letters which I would encourage all citizens to read. Now I'll go back to my garden patio which is always refreshing to the mind, flowers, birds and solitude. Peace and love to all of you who still believe in science.

Bill Ward
Baker City

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- 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 published.

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

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Student laments what she's missed during pandemic

By Sidhi Dhanda

I don't know what most of the kids in my grade look like. I've never gone to a high school dance. My last "regular" school year began in the fall of 2018; that was seventh grade. This week, I start 10th grade.

I have watched many movies about high school. Not one was about a kid eating by themselves at a desk while another student 6 feet away also eats alone. And I've yet to see a movie about students who are only allowed into school every other day.

On a Friday in March 2020, my French teacher looked up from her computer and said we wouldn't be coming to school on Monday. My first thought was, I hope this lasts for two weeks instead of just one. I could use a vacation.

Adults told me school would be back in a week, maybe two. Now, 18 months and two unusual school years later, I am looking for the stash of masks I wasn't supposed to need for sophomore year.

This past school year I was scheduled to attend school in-

person every other day between September and April. But there was not a lot of consistency. School sometimes would go virtual for a few days, a teacher would be out, or schedules would change because of positive coronavirus cases or exposures, or updated regulations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, state or school district.

My in-person school days started with me putting on the mask that I would wear until 4 p.m. I got on the bus at 6:46 a.m. Even in a Massachusetts winter, my bus still had to have all the windows open. I was not allowed to sit with anyone, so I listened to Spotify to pass the time.

My first class began with the national anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance over the PA system, and then the speaker would remind me to sanitize and wash my hands.

Classes were quiet. I don't think anyone knew how to act. There was no chatter before or after class, just silence. We didn't have lockers and we weren't allowed to hang out in the hallways. There were school officials

stationed around the building to make sure we complied.

More than once I would be looking forward to seeing a friend but would get to school and that person wouldn't be there. Those who tested positive for the virus, or were close contacts of someone who had, had to either quarantine or show negative tests to come back to school.

If a teacher had to stay home, I had to spend that class period in study hall instead. A few times there were so many teachers out that more study hall space had to be created to accommodate all the students whose classes were missing a teacher.

I went back in person full time in April. A friend and I made a bet about how many coronavirus cases there would be in the first week. I won. I guessed there would be at least 15 cases. We hit that by Wednesday. Fortunately, cases dropped after a few weeks.

That first day with all students back, the number of people in the building doubled, class sizes doubled, and space between desks halved. This followed all COVID-19 protocols, but it was

still scary. Going to school meant the possibility of getting seriously ill. The good thing was the eerie silence in the building disappeared. Talking was back.

The COVID-19 pandemic has robbed me of memories. I worked so hard in eighth grade French class, and it took away my spring class trip to Quebec. It canceled my eighth grade graduation trip to Washington. I didn't get a proper middle school graduation.

Losing the chance to make those memories was awful, but the day-to-day protocols in high school felt worse.

At robotics, I had to space 6 feet out from my teammates while working on a robot that was 18 inches tall and wide. One person would go to the robot and the others would step away. Jazz band rehearsal took up the entire auditorium — we weren't allowed to sit next to one another, so we had to spread out to play.

I wasn't allowed to high-five other teammates at cross-country practice after a long run or challenging workout. At the beginning of softball season, I had to wear a mask underneath my

catcher's helmet.

Hanging out with friends was entering the local cafe two at a time, ordering a muffin, walking to the town commons, and eating while sitting in a circle 6 feet apart from one another.

I am not anti-mask or anti-vaccine. I know life can go back to when there was no fear of getting sick, no masks and no social distancing. We have vaccines that allow for this.

I'm about to return to school in person every day, hopefully for the entire school year. As of now my school is not mandating vaccines, but my state just required that masks be worn indoors until at least Oct. 1. For now, the only certainty I have about my sophomore year is that the rules will keep on changing.

Adults tell me that the way my generation is handling the pandemic is inspiring. That's a wonderful compliment. But I'd rather have my regular life back.

Sidhi Dhanda is about to start her sophomore year at Hopkinton High School in Hopkinton, Massachusetts.