

EDITORIAL

Governor, photos & masks

As the governor of one of just six states that still require people to wear face masks in most indoor public places, Oregon's Kate Brown has ample reason to be scrupulous with her personal mask-donning habits.

More scrupulous, certainly, than she was while attending an event in Washington, D.C., recently. Brown posed for group photographs in which none of the subjects was wearing a mask.

An adviser to the governor said Brown "remained masked during the event except when giving her acceptance speech, eating or taking pictures with attendees." The adviser also noted that attendees were required to show proof of vaccination.

But the indoor mask mandate that Brown has imposed in Oregon has no exception for vaccination status, so that requirement at the event the governor attended doesn't excuse Brown for exhibiting a clear double standard.

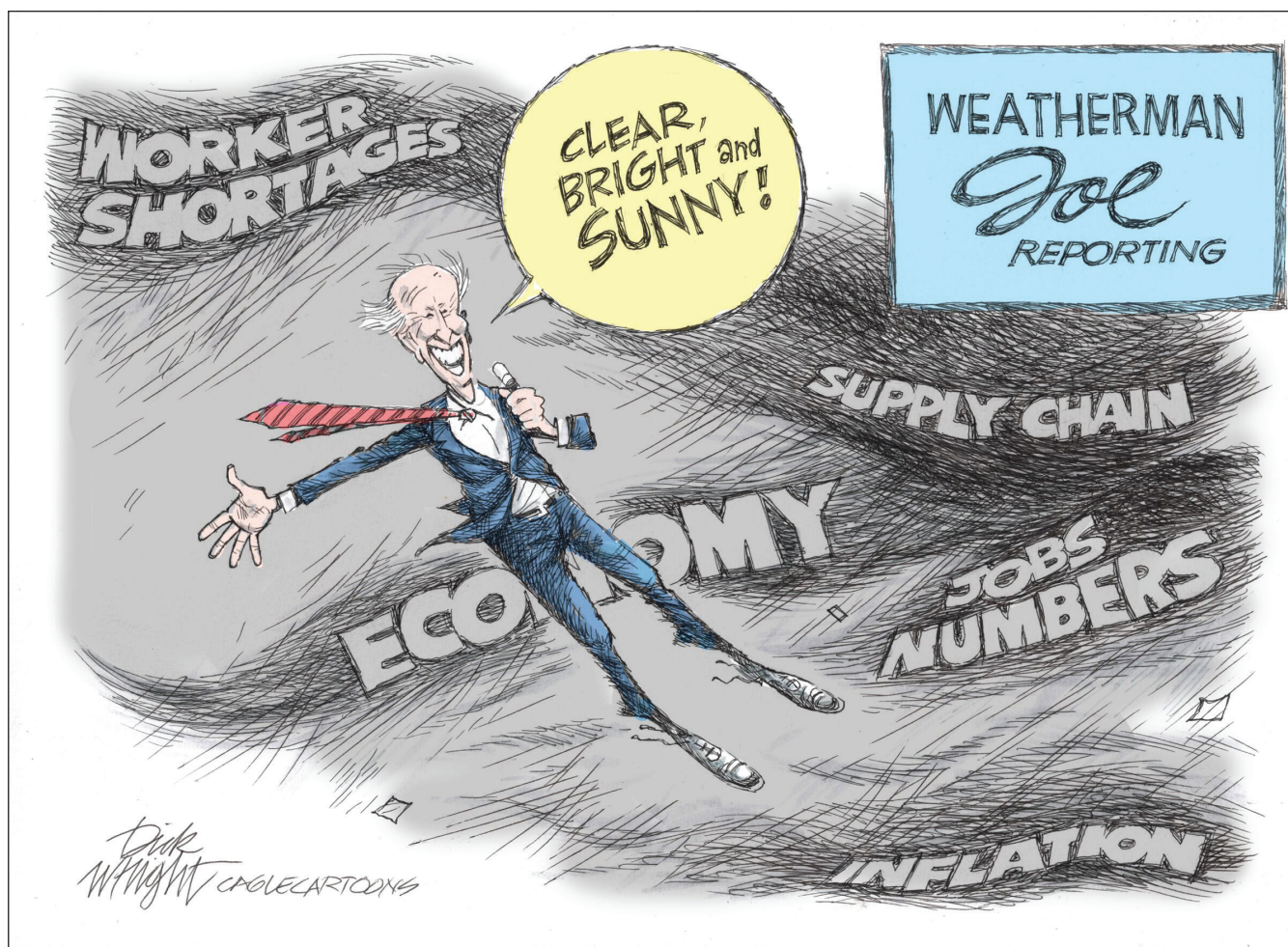
A photo of a maskless governor is not egregious hypocrisy.

But Brown's willingness to skirt the mandate that she expects her constituents to comply with diminishes her credibility at the very time she is looking to extend that mandate beyond its current expiration in February 2022.

If Brown and other state officials intend to continue a policy that the vast majority of states have concluded is no longer necessary to protect their citizens, then she ought to demonstrate, by her own actions, the importance of that policy.

In the meantime, residents in Baker County and elsewhere who haven't already been vaccinated against COVID-19 should do so. It's a proven way to protect us against the worst effects of the virus.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Russia tests Western military resolve

Editorial from St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

Vladimir Putin wants the world to forget what happened in 2014. That's the year he amassed troops at the Ukraine border to assist Russian-backed separatists fighting the Kyiv central government. They wound up shooting down a Malaysian jumbo jet, killing all 298 aboard. Also in 2014, Russia staged the conditions for Putin's illegal seizure and annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

Putin wants the world to forget 2014 in order to argue that NATO, not Russia, poses the greatest threat to world stability. It's precisely because of Russian expansionism that NATO is weighing Ukraine's entry into the trans-Atlantic, mutual-defense pact. Putin is trying hard to portray Russia as the victim when, in fact, it is the clear aggressor. He's in the process of amassing an expected 175,000 Russian troops near Ukraine's border. The Biden administration warns that Russia is

preparing to do to the rest of Ukraine what it did to Crimea.

Why should folks here care about stuff happening half a world away? It matters because these are the real ingredients of a major, full-blown superpower military confrontation. At a minimum, a Russian invasion would provoke massive new economic sanctions — even more punishing than the ones still in force against Russia since the 2014 retaliation.

New sanctions would likely target Russian gas exports to a heavily dependent Europe, prompting severe global economic repercussions. Russia could be expected to launch an all-out cyberattack on Western computer networks. Putin also has demonstrated his willingness to use ground-based weaponry to disable communications satellites or simply blast them out of the sky, as occurred on Nov. 15 when a Russian anti-satellite missile test scattered 1,500 pieces of debris into the same orbits used by U.S. spacecraft and the International Space Station.

Russian leaders have a history of siz-

ing up their American counterparts and calculating the most opportune moment to go on the offensive. They seem particularly prone to test U.S. resolve during Democratic administrations, such as the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan under President Jimmy Carter. The Crimea seizure and Russian deployment of troops to prop up the dictatorship in Syria made President Barack Obama look weak and ineffectual.

Russia seems unimpressed by more threats of economic sanctions. But it does understand clear U.S. statements of a willingness to use military force, if necessary, to bring Moscow to heel, as occurred during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

It's unquestionable that Putin is testing U.S. and European resolve. If President Joe Biden hopes to restore his international stature and recover from last summer's disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal, he must make clear in his phone conversation with Putin that a NATO response won't be limited to economic sanctions.

'The Beatles: Get Back' leaves me wanting more

Peter Jackson has fulfilled my dream as a nearly lifelong fan of The Beatles, and I'm furious at the man for doing it.

Jackson has whetted my appetite, but it's an insatiable hunger that neither he, nor anyone else, can ever begin to satisfy.

Little wonder, then, that I harbor a certain antagonism for the director despite my gratitude for the gift he has bestowed on all fans, the committed and the casual, of this most famous, and best, of all rock groups.

I am, to be clear, indulging in hyperbole by claiming to be angry at Jackson.

Disappointed, sure.

But that's not Jackson's fault.

And my regrets in no way diminish what he has accomplished with his nearly eight-hour documentary, "The Beatles: Get Back," which debuted over three consecutive days starting on Thanksgiving.

It was a revelation.

Watching it was one of those experiences that so drastically revamps your thoughts about something familiar that, in the minutes and the hours of afterglow you can't be quite certain that your subconscious hasn't presented you with a particularly vivid dream.

"Get Back" is also a milestone in the history of a band to which millions of words, and thousands of images, have already been devoted.

I'm not sure I've ever sat for so long looking at a television and been so utterly unaware of the time passing, of how the quality of the light streaming through the windows had changed since I sat down.

To write that I was engrossed in this documentary fails to convey the level of absorption.

I have in the intervening days listened to several of my favorite Beatles-related podcasts, all of them hosted by people whose knowledge of the group is so encyclopedic that my own, by comparison, is that of the second-grader against the amassed wisdom of a tenured professor.

And even these experts, who I expected would quibble with Jackson on the sorts of pedantic details that interest only the most insular of snobs, were, in some cases, moved to tears by what they had watched.

Jackson assembled his documentary from 50-some hours of film, and something like 150 hours of audio recordings, all made during January 1969 while The Beatles were working on the project titled "Get Back."

The initial plan — egregiously optimistic, as it turned out — was to record John, Paul, George and Ringo as they worked on songs for a new album and also prepared for a TV special and their first live public performance since August 1966. That's when The Beatles, fatigued by the demands of touring, and feeling stifled by the inability to even hear themselves play against the cacophony made by thousands of hysterical fans, stopped performing concerts.

They gave up the stage for the recording studio.

At the London studio owned by their record company, EMI, The Beatles, with the able assistance of producer George Martin, assembled the densely layered songs that made up 1967's "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," "Magical Mystery Tour" and, the following year, the two-LP "The Beatles" — far better known as the White Album.



JAYSON JACOBY

But the January 1969 sessions, which started at Twickenham Studios and then moved to The Beatles' own Apple Corp. studio, were different.

The idea, aptly expressed in the title of Paul McCartney's song, "Get Back," was that the group would eschew the studio trickery that enlivened such tunes as Lennon's "Strawberry Fields Forever" for the more basic approach they used to record earlier albums.

Which is to have the four musicians in one room, playing together.

This is precisely what Jackson gives us.

For hours, in glorious, rich color, with high-fidelity audio.

"The Beatles: Get Back" is not a glimpse into the creative process. We don't get brief looks behind the curtain.

There is no curtain.

The experience is immersive, almost bewilderingly so.

We are invited into the studio, so close to these artists that it seems we ought to be able to smell the tea and the cigarette smoke (an entire field's worth of tobacco goes up in ashes in this documentary; it's a wonder that lung cancer didn't get them all), to feel the reverberations of Ringo's kick drum.

Among the magical aspects of music is that someone must create its melodies by employing the relatively modest palette of 12 notes.

(I don't mean to shortchange the

lyrics, of course — John, Paul and George certainly didn't.)

And it seems to me that all music fans must at some point ponder how certain of their favorite songs came to be. This yearning surely must be greater for The Beatles than for any other group.

It was, then, riveting to watch, for instance, as McCartney introduced not only to his bandmates, but in effect to the world, songs such as "Let It Be" and "Get Back."

These tunes are ingrained in our culture after half a century that it can seem — and in particular for someone like me, born in 1970, the same year The Beatles broke up — that they have always existed.

Except now I have seen what amounts to their births.

I have watched McCartney extract those peerless melodies from his fertile mind, his fingers playing across the frets of his bass or the keys of a grand piano with the carefree casualness unique to true genius.

And yet, even as I marveled at the effortless musicality of each of these men, even as I appreciated even more than before the scale of their talent, paradoxically they seemed so much more human and less like fictional, which is to say mythical, characters.

This, perhaps more than anything else, is Jackson's greatest achievement.

By immersing viewers in the humanity (and the humor) of these four men he has, it seems to me, actually embellished their already extravagant legend.

I still marvel at what they created, still feel intense gratitude that their songs exist, available at any

time to enrich my life as only the finest works of art can.

But now I have also seen them at work.

And work it surely was, their toil no less because they were assembling songs rather than, say, buildings.

I have shared, in a small way, their joy at their own creations, and I believe anything that makes a person feel closer to the art he loves can only enhance that love.

Which brings me back to my beef with the esteemed Mr. Jackson. As I watched, and reveled in, "The Beatles: Get Back," I was unable to banish the thought, hopeless though I knew it to be, of what it would be like to watch The Beatles put together what to me are their greatest songs and albums.

Many of the tunes included in "Get Back" ended up on the 1970 record titled "Let It Be."

It's a fine album.

But to my ear it falls short of at least five others — "Rubber Soul" from 1965, the aforementioned "Sgt. Pepper's" and the White Album, "Abbey Road" from 1969, and the greatest of them all, 1966's "Revolver."

Alas, none of those recording sessions, or any others in The Beatles' career, was documented, aside from an occasional snippet of film or still photographs.

"The Beatles: Get Back" must, then, remain unique.

I am eternally grateful to have had even that singular experience.

But I'll never stop wondering what it would have been like to watch the creation of a masterpiece.

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