

EDITORIAL

States can manage wolves

For all of the gnashing of teeth and worries about the impending decline of Idaho's wolves, any predictions of their demise are greatly exaggerated.

Last year, the Idaho Legislature modified the law related to hunting and trapping wolves. Since it's the state's job to manage them, such laws were well within the purview of lawmakers.

Wolf advocates said the legislators were threatening the state's 1,500 wolves and any efforts to reduce that number would mark the beginning of the end for the predators.

In the year since the law was passed, not much has happened. The state's wildlife managers keep tabs on the wolves that have taken up residence in Idaho. What they found is — drum roll, please — the wolf population is about the same as before.

The wolf population peaks in the summer, after the pups are born. After that, any deaths are counted. The Idaho population's annual low point is about 900 in the early spring, before the next batch of pups is born.

State wildlife managers say that if for some reason the population began to decrease too far, they could make mid-course adjustments.

That's the sort of thing wildlife managers do.

Montana's Legislature passed similar legislation. For the vast majority of the state the new hunting and trapping rules had little impact on the overall wolf population. However, they found that some wolves from Yellowstone National Park had a tendency to drift outside the park and were killed by hunters and trappers.

When wildlife managers saw this, the hunts in that area were called off. The Yellowstone wolf packs will no doubt rebuild.

There is a concept that continues to be circulated about wolves: They are timid creatures that need the help of man to survive in the wild. Environmental groups use that concept to build a case for protecting wolves, and raising money.

Unfortunately for them, wolves are robust, smart and reproduce rapidly. Idaho started with 35 wolves imported from Canada in the mid-1990s. Now the population peaks at 1,500 each year, even with hunting, trapping and culling wolves that attack livestock.

Similarly, the wolf populations in Washington state and Oregon are healthy, yet the way they are managed has frustrated many ranchers.

Idaho and Montana have shouldered the responsibility of managing wolves in those states. They are held accountable and able to make changes as needed to maintain the health of the wolf populations without sacrificing the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers.

Our hope is that, some day, political leaders in the nation's capital, Washington state and Oregon will allow wildlife managers to do the same statewide.

The last thing any of those states need is for the federal government to take over all management of wolves. Idaho and Montana have demonstrated that it's not needed, or wanted.

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COLUMN

Keeping a valued friendship despite disagreeing on masks

BY KERRY LESTER KASPER

In the sad reality that is middle age, I have lost more friendships than I ever thought possible. Abdications to an ex. A move from the suburbs to the city, a change in jobs. Doing a generally poor job keeping up with real and meaningful connections amid the daily chaos of being a working parent during a prolonged pandemic.

So it's through this lens that I have found that one of my very best friends today is an anti-masker, someone who I thoroughly disagree with on the subject and yet still cling to tightly because I can't bear to lose another important bond.

My relationship with — I'll call her M — started long before COVID-19, when we happened to run into one another with newborns strapped to us in slings. Her daughter was three months older than mine, a long, chubby baby with adorable little tufts of black hair. Mine was tiny and feisty, a ferocious eater making up for lost time.

Motherhood — a continual state of second-guessing for me — was and continues to seem completely natural to M. She breastfed, with ease, while we had a first coffee at a pretentious local pastry shop. She knew how to get her tiny little wonder to sleep for hours on end — I, meanwhile, felt helpless and close to tears consulting books about the "healthy sleep habits" of "happy children."

Then, we started to run, sometimes so early it was before sunrise, a jog that efficiently covered 5 miles and the stresses of the week all in one.

When COVID-19 struck, she became one of my only outlets outside my own home.

As we navigated the beginning stages of lockdown, I'm not sure either of us had strong views — other than a perpetual state of uncertainty and a shared sense of frustration over the lakefront running path's closure.

But what solidified over time was an assurance that I had her back and she had mine, a commitment that grew even as it became increasingly clear we were on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

I find bottles of soy sauce and almond flour on our stoop when I'm running low. When her washing machine broke, ours served as her local laundromat.

Yet, one recent Saturday, the day after a group of parents won an injunction against masking in schools, I caught my breath, reading her text: "Would you sign a petition for (the girls' preschool) to be mask optional? (Totally OK if not)."

I promised that I'd dig through the research and let her know but did so with the sinking feeling of an impending breakup.

As a longtime journalist, life exists for me in a perpetual shade of gray. It drives my lawyer husband, who sees everything in black and white, nuts. There's all too often one more fact, one more study, one more comment, that keeps me considering exactly where right and wrong lie.

And with COVID-19 — while I tend to place my confidence in our national experts — the increasing distrust and anger over continued restrictions among those in M's camp befuddles me. What am I missing? How could this otherwise perfectly reasonable person feel such anger over the rules I've trusted the powers that be to implement?

What I do know, for now, is that we ultimately come down on opposite sides of the seriousness of the virus and the right of a government to restrict or deny access to citizens based on personal health choices. I worry about unwittingly passing on a deadly infection and that my unvaccinated toddler could be the one to develop a rare, serious form of COVID-19.

M worries about the social and emotional developmental ramifications for masked children and likens the requirement of having to show her vaccination card at a local restaurant to being asked to give an intensely private medical exam in public.

I'm fully cognizant that we each come to this debate from a place of fortune — that our spouses and children are healthy, that neither of us has lost extended family members to COVID-19.

As our school moves to a "mask recommended" state in the coming weeks, our cards will be on the table — her daughter unmasked and mine masked until a vaccine is available.

When I told her about this column, I had a good hunch about what her response would be before she even sent it. "I'm honored."

I am, too, for a connection that is based on such trust despite disagreement.

I'm not sure our little ones will be able to comprehend why they will all of the sudden look different from one another in class. But I hope, like their moms, that they'll be able to look past it for the sake of friendship.

Maybe someday, our politically polarized nation can, too.

Kerry Lester Kasper is a freelance journalist and senior writer for Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights who lives in Lincoln Park, Illinois.

OTHER VIEWS

Compensate the wrongly convicted

Editorial from St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

Gov. Mike Parson raises an interesting, but not terribly well-informed, point about how Missouri's criminal justice system works. Recently in a radio interview, he questioned why the state should be the one to compensate wrongfully convicted prisoners when county prosecutors are the ones responsible for sending innocent people to prison.

It's a fair question. County prosecutors are the ones who receive criminal cases and weigh whether there's adequate evidence to win a conviction. County prosecutors act as agents of the state in criminal cases, and it's because they're acting on the state's behalf that they have the power to send a person to a state prison.

In an interview last week with Kansas City public radio, Parson was asked about compensation for wrongfully convicted people like Kevin Strickland, who spent 42 years in prison for a triple murder he didn't commit. He was freed in November but didn't receive a dime in state compensation.

"Who is responsible for that, if there is a responsibility party?" Parson asked. "I just think, to say: OK, all the taxpayers in the state of Missouri are responsible for that. ... If he was wrongfully convicted in a county or in a city, what responsibilities do they have to that?"

County prosecutors have authority to decide which cases to pursue, and they are responsible for abiding by all state laws concerning prosecutorial ethics. If they hide exculpatory evidence or ignore credible information pointing to another person's guilt, state law should ensure they are held accountable. At the same time, newspapers across the state have been telling Parson for years that strong witness testimony pointed to Strickland's innocence, yet Parson was uninterested and repeatedly refused to pardon him. In the end, it was Parson who made the decision to keep a wrongfully convicted man in prison. To quote Parson, "Who is responsible for that?"

The Legislature should be asking whether counties deserve to foot at least part of the compensation bill, but lawmakers first must

establish that wrongful conviction — regardless of how it is affirmed — is government's responsibility to correct with generous compensation. Missouri currently allows a pittance in compensation, and then only when DNA testing proves innocence.

Texas, where Republicans hold a supermajority, ranks among the most generous in the country when it comes to compensating the wrongfully convicted. Why? Because Texas conservatives believe in personal responsibility, and they extend the concept to the state when it's the state that has committed a wrong. When any person is wrongfully deprived of liberty, Texas conservatives embrace the concept of compensation with gusto. Texas pays \$80,000 per year of wrongful imprisonment — DNA or not.

Before quibbling about who covers the cost, Parson should start by acknowledging that the wrongfully convicted deserve to be pardoned, and that they deserve full and fair compensation for having been robbed of their freedom. That's the conservative thing to do.

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Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.