

OUR VIEW

# Commissioners make right decision

The decision the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners made last week to reinstate mask requirements for county employees and for residents visiting county buildings, was the right one.

The decision was unfortunate, at least in the sense it was probably inevitable, judging by the way the COVID-19 cases are surging in the county.

The county decision means all its employees put on facemasks anywhere outside their workspace and when someone visits their desk. Also, people who attempt to enter the county courthouse without wearing masks will be denied access.

At first glance the decision may seem almost routine in this age of COVID-19, but it also should show just how critical the surge



A sign Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021, on the door of the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton, advises courthouse visitors of the mask requirement for county buildings.

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

is. That's because a county courthouse is one of the most visible and relevant structures of democracy in Amer-

ica. Residents should expect to be able to have access to a place where the people's business is conducted.

But the COVID-19 outbreak is extremely serious and, so far, apparently out of control. Cases in the

county are climbing at an alarming rate. The situation is made even more frustrating, because there are ample supplies of COVID-19 vaccines available. In short, there now exists a tool that is safe and effective that can protect residents from the infection, yet the county is in the middle of an outbreak with no end in sight.

Of course, the government can't — and should not — be in the business of forcing people to get a vaccine. However, when cases of COVID-19 surge — as they are now — that means there will be consequences such as new mandates for county employees and new rules on access to the courthouse.

The commissioners made the right decision. In fact, they made really the

only decision they could in a situation we now face as a county.

While the new surge in COVID-19 cases may seem to be surprising to many, the fact is the virus never really disappeared. The lifting of state restrictions at the end of June did not signal a victory over the virus. What it did mean was the threat level — because of the availability of vaccines — was lower than in the past.

No one wants to go back to restrictions or to the constant donning of masks, but until the virus case load diminishes, that may be the only way to try to stop the spread.

The commissioners made a good decision. We just hope such decisions don't become the norm in the future.

COLUMN

## Future leaders cultivated at county fairs

County fair season has arrived in Oregon. This month, generations will come together to celebrate the hard work of those involved in programs like 4-H and FFA.

I was once one of those young people whose life was changed by FFA. As we begin our annual celebration of agriculture's next generation, I want to recognize FFA's work and the young leaders it has mentored and changed.

I grew up on a small farm in Iowa that belonged to my grandfather and then my father. I learned at an early age the importance of hard work and the responsibility that comes with caring for animals and the land.

While my career aspirations never included coming back to the farm, with the love of agriculture that my father had instilled, I didn't have to be convinced to join FFA when my high school's vocational agriculture instructor stopped at the farm one summer day.

"I believe in the future of agricul-

ture, with a faith born not of words, but of deeds ..."

More than 40 years have passed since my instructor made us memorize the FFA Creed during our freshman year in high school, but the words still ring true as an inspiration to those of us who wore the blue and gold jackets.

The creed is about learning the history of agriculture, learning the values that we all shared, and glimpsing a vision of a future agricultural system that we could help shape. These are still relevant in my world today.

FFA provides a glimpse of the future that motivates you to try new things, take on new challenges, and succeed in ways that you could not have imagined.

Our chapter frequently hosted state and national FFA officers. To meet these fellow students — who were confident, articulate, and shared a passion for agriculture — was an inspiration.

So you set your goals, worked, and learned how to handle success and defeat. Once I got the chance to serve as a state FFA officer, I learned what it was like to work as a team — to share ideas, compromise, and work in service of others.

I didn't return to the farm, but thanks to FFA I have enjoyed a career in service to agriculture. Today, serving CropLife America, I feel that I am still pursuing FFA's creed's vision of "better days through better ways."

As agriculture technology continues to be challenged, I believe it is imperative that all of us speak with passion about the public interest we serve. Just as I learned in FFA, we must continue to work as a team to share ideas, find solutions, and continue working in the service of others.

FFA is dedicated to education, providing learning opportunities in the classroom, supervised experiences, and developing leadership skills that help drive personal growth. All of these learning opportunities work together to provide a well-rounded education to our young leaders.

It is during this key time on the farm that we should be grateful, as a nation, for what FFA provides in shaping the face of American agriculture and the next generation of teachers, lawyers, scientists and problems solvers.

Chris Novak is president and CEO of CropLife America.



Chris Novak

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Letter: Don't be a fool — get vaccinated

I have one word for those of you that have yet to get a vaccination, fools! I can also add self-centered, selfish, sheeple and Kool-Aid drinkers to that. If you don't understand the Kool-Aid drinkers, look up Jonestown as you are headed in the same direction, dead!

Umatilla County, once again, has the "honor" of being the hotspot when it comes to COVID-19 for Oregon. Why? Because too many of you out there think, "I don't need no stinking shots." Well, you're in the same group as the actor in "Treasure of the Sierra Madre" saying, "I don't need no stinking badges." There is a good chance you will end up like he did, dead!

COVID-19 is not a joke, it is not a government conspiracy, there are no nanobots being injected so they can track you (there are enough satellites up above now, they can track anytime they want, you paranoid fools). What you are doing is subjecting your family and friends to a greater risk of catching this disease and possibly dying from it, thanks to your being too self-centered to consider anyone but yourself. Do you believe that if you catch it and end up passing it along and therefore possibly killing a friend or family member, it's not your fault? Good luck on lying to yourself for the rest of your life. I hope you can sleep at night knowing you killed someone because you were so selfish.

Mark Severson  
Hermiston

COLUMN

## Returning to the classroom is a big deal

Before talking about plans for the 2021-22 school year, I want to take a moment to recognize what our students and families have been through.

This will be the third consecutive year that our educational process has been disrupted by COVID-19. That's a significant amount of time for a K-12 student — nearly a quarter of the school years they will spend in public education.

When this process is disrupted, it affects everyone. It stunts academic and social growth and puts additional burdens on families. It forces us to accept less than the

best. It leaves everyone frustrated and divides the community.

For the educators and staff in our schools, that's heartbreaking. Our entire mission is the equitable education of Hermiston's youth, and to see so many losing opportunity and growth has been the most difficult part of the past 18 months.

It's why we're taking our return to the classroom this fall so seriously. It's not ideal, but the restrictions we'll be working with on the first day of school are far better than the virtual and hybrid learning environments we've been through.

The balance between local and state control has gone back and forth and is currently leaning toward the Oregon Health

Authority (OHA) and Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Because we are still in a "state of emergency" under the governor's executive order, the OHA has the authority to set guidelines to protect public health.

Since children are required by state law to attend school, and COVID-19 is still prevalent in our state and community, OHA will require students, staff and anyone else in school buildings during the school day to wear mask or face shield at school to reduce further spread of the virus.

There are some exceptions: masks can be removed while eating or drinking, playing a musical instrument, playing sports where wearing a mask could cause a hazard, or when a staff mem-

ber is alone in a private office or empty room.

As the situation changes, so will this rule. It's our goal and the stated goal of the ODE for control of these policies to return to local districts, and we're already planning for how we will implement our own balance of safety, access, and equity. To ensure the health and safety of our students, staff, and their families, some level of precaution will be in place.

We do still have local control over voluntary, noneducational programs, including sports, activities, and other extracurriculars outside of the usual school day. We also retain the ability to set our own protocol for the district office, board meetings, and other non-required gatherings, where masks

will not be required but caution will be urged.

Ultimately, our best way forward is to significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19. We're tired of talking about it and tired of living in it, but there are still many people vulnerable to the virus — including those 12-and-under students in our district who cannot yet receive the vaccine.

We are looking at the bright side. We are returning to the classroom in a few short weeks for what we hope to be the first complete in-classroom school year since 2018-19. We have a lot of work to do, and we're excited to get to it.

Tricia Mooney is superintendent of Hermiston School District.

### CORRECTIONS

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Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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