

OPINION

IEWS FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE H-Z

OUTSIDE VIEW

Mask squabbles shouldn't mask other solutions

Houston Chronicle

A man who was asked to put on a face mask at a barbecue restaurant in Kansas City responded by showing the teenage employee his holstered gun as evidence of his "exemption" to the statewide mandate. An argument over a patron's refusal to wear a mask in a Michigan convenience store ended with the man stabbing a 77-year-old fellow customer and later being shot dead by police.

In Texas, GOP committees in eight different counties have voted to censure Republican Gov. Greg Abbott for his order requiring Texans to wear face coverings in the face of soaring COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths.

Really, people? This is like arguing over who gets the TV remote control while the house is on fire.

Health experts insist masks help prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization now recommend cloth masks for the general public. Nearly 40 states have face-covering mandates. And if you don't trust them, Walmart recently joined a slew of major retail chains and businesses in requiring customers to wear masks while inside their facilities.

The argument is over. Just wear the damn mask. All this wasted energy over masks threatens to distract all of us from the grim reality that more — more from us and more from our leaders — is needed. And urgently.

It has been nearly a week since Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, joined by Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, asked the governor for authority to impose a two-week shutdown to relieve pressure on area hospitals that are pushing capacity on ICU beds along with strains on staffing and protective equipment.

After a brief dip in numbers last Monday, Texas has continued to set records for COVID-19 deaths, including three days in a row of more than 100 as of Friday.

Abbott, however, is not hearing those pleas. Or if he is, he's not listening.

"It seems like I get this question a thousand times a day, and there seem to be rumors out there about a looming shutdown," Abbott told Houston's Fox 26 TV on Thursday. "Let me tell you: There is no shutdown coming."

We wanted to ask him how he could so blithely disregard the urgent requests from the mayor and county judge of the state's largest city and county, and home to its most alarming surge in COVID-19 concerns, but his office did not respond to requests from the editorial board for comment.

Abbott has said the answer is for everyone to faithfully follow his mask order, including the members of his own party, who call the mandate a violation of their constitutional rights.

"Many regions are running out of ICU beds," Abbott told the state Republican Party convention during a virtual gathering last week. "And deaths have almost quadrupled, reaching more than 100 in one day last week. If we don't slow this disease quickly our hospitals will get overrun and I fear it will even inflict some of the people that I'm talking to right now."

Abbott has called the mask mandate "the last best chance" to avoid a statewide lockdown.

But, he is only half right. Yes, the fight over the masks is foolish, and compliance would greatly help Texas get a handle on the outbreak. That's not enough, though — and even one of the governor's top medical advisers seems to agree. He said last week that the surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths in Texas is already bad enough to warrant lockdowns in at least the hardest-hit regions of the state.

"It's clear that the state has not been on a sustainable course and it's worth considering a regional approach," Dr. Mark McClellan, a physician and economist at Duke University and a former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said in a Tuesday interview with *Herald Newspapers*.

McClellan agreed with Abbott that if Texans were in perfect compliance with the mask order and other existing restrictions, they could suffice to reverse the surge. But perfect compliance is a fantasy, as the revolts within his own party show.

That's why Abbott must act. He needn't order the whole state to shut down. But he must grant Houston and Harris County's request for a two-week closing. Better yet, he could follow his own expert's advice for a regional shutdown in those areas in the danger zones.

Masks are great but they can't cover everything.

Do Black lives matter to Blacks?

Here we are, in the wake of continuing protests and violence across the country and I have yet to see anything that leads me to believe Black lives matter all that much, at least, not to Blacks. And that makes me truly sad.

Black bodies are piling up across the country and I don't see the Media or Black Lives Matter showing much more than indifference. I can't buy into a BLM legitimacy until there are reports of marches and protests at the cribs and in the neighborhoods of the Black, gun-wielding drug dealers and thugs who are killing the Black children and people of New York, Chicago, Atlanta, etc, etc, etc.....

Police officers, who had nothing to do with killing George Floyd, are assaulted and executed while Black miscreants prey on Black communities. I'm just not convinced how concerned I should be about Black lives as there seems little concern by Blacks about the rising Black-on-Black body count. I'm afraid I won't be getting on board until ALL LIVES MATTER.



MARK WHITTAKER

Mark Whittaker is a guest columnist and Canyon Lake resident.

If the premise is that we should be moving the dial towards equality, then that goal can not be achieved until every life matters. Period.

A lot of good intentioned people, of all colors, have thrown in with BLM without reading about their manifesto or history. These people are misguided and naïve to think there isn't a need to separate the BLM organization from a noble sentiment and a desire for racial equality. My life matters; your life matters; everyone's lives matter. If we can't matter together then there won't ever be any equality or peace.

In the current environment, should you express that opinion to BLM activists, then you are vilified and labeled a racist. I don't understand how insisting on more inclusion makes me bigoted or racist. I get the feeling that it's because I'm white, and isn't that racist? That's why, to me, the activists' braying doesn't matter. And someone is going to have to explain to me how those ranting, white children of privilege gave the right to call out Black police, guardsmen, and our military as murderous? Oh yeah, it's a right preserved by those same brave men and women holding the line against anarchy.

Given the current movement to defund police and replace them with social workers in domestic disputes, I can't help but conclude that the McAllen, Texas police department erred grievously in sending armed officers on a domestic disturbance call.

Apparently we should assume social workers would have risen to the occasion and fared far better than having their heads shot apart. Good luck with that.

Blue lives matter.

We have a gun problem in America. But, it doesn't come from NRA members, it doesn't come from the Second Amendment, and it doesn't come from lawful gun ownership. It comes from stolen and black market guns. It comes from New York City, where the plain clothes police squad charged with getting illegal guns off the street was disbanded. It comes from St. Louis, where a liberal Circuit Attorney targeted a lawful gun owner for defending his home from militant trespassers after they crashed a gate and stormed his private community.

How am I to believe Black lives matter if they don't matter first and foremost to Blacks? How can such a movement be taken seriously when only certain lives matter.

George Floyd was a man, killed by another man felled by men who abetted to stand for their oath to serve and to protect. We lose lives every day for various reasons, and no more, no less, either all lives matter, or no lives matter.

Voting by mail has problems

President Trump has said many times that voting by mail — which will play a big role in this November's presidential election — is vulnerable to fraud.

"There is tremendous evidence of fraud whenever you have mail-in ballots," Trump has noted. The November election, he added, "will be, in my opinion, the most corrupt election in the history of our country."

Democrats and many in the press have pushed back hard. Trump's claims are "false" and "baseless" and "preposterous" and "debunked," they said. Voting by mail is safe and reliable.

But the fight over fraud could be a distraction from a very real and serious danger of voting by mail.

The country has just seen some very troubling examples of massive dysfunction in elections in which voting by mail played a big role. If anything like that happens in even a few states in November, there would be big trouble.

Recently, *The New York Times* published a story, "3 Weeks After Primary, N.Y. Officials Still Can't Say Who Won Key Races."

The article outlined enormous difficulties with voting by mail in



BYRON YORK

Byron York is the chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

three congressional races — New York's 12th, 15th and 16th congressional districts.

"The absentee ballot count — greatly inflated this year after the state expanded the vote-by-mail option because of the coronavirus pandemic — has been painstakingly slow, and hard to track, with no running account of the vote totals available," he reported.

In the 12th district, the situation is absolutely crazy. There were 65,000 absentee ballots in the race. Only a few have been counted — the primary was June 23. But 1 in 5 — roughly 13,000 ballots — have been disqualified for various reasons. The leader's margin is 648 votes at the moment.

Of course, there are

lawsuits. One candidate has taken the Board of Elections to federal court, seeking an order that all ballots mailed by June 30 — one week after election day — be counted, whether or not they have a postmark. The losers, of course, will cry that voters were "disfranchised" by rules on when vote-by-mail ballots have to be received.

Now, imagine these problems in a presidential election, with the white-hot passions it will create. Say, just for the sake of argument, that there is not even a hint of fraud in the vote counting.

But if there are important areas where few votes have been counted three weeks after Election Day, where there is no way to track which votes have been counted and which haven't, and there is great confusion about how the job will ever get done — well, that will be a huge problem. Chaos could descend, with no resolution of the presidential election. In the absence of a reliable vote total, both candidates might proclaim victory. "Americans might spend Christmas wondering which self-claimed president-elect will prevail in court," warned *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page.

It is something to be deeply concerned about, whether or not one believes vote-by-mail is susceptible to fraud.

Recent primaries have shown beyond any doubt that it is susceptible to crippling dysfunction, and that is bad enough. (And of course, there are allegations of fraud — four men have been charged in connection with May's special election in Paterson, New Jersey, after hundreds of ballots were found in a mailbox there.)

Meanwhile, a new ABC News *Washington Post* poll shows the public has great doubts about voting by mail.

To the question "How would you prefer to vote in the presidential election — by mail or in person?" 59% of respondents said in person, while just 38% said by mail. Then pollsters asked, "Do you think mail-in voting is vulnerable to significant levels of fraud or do you think it has adequate protections against significant levels of fraud?"

Forty-nine percent said it is vulnerable to fraud, while 43% said it has adequate protections (7% had no opinion).

People are right to be worried. When someone tells you that voting by mail is nothing to worry about, be skeptical.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

NEW BRAUNFELS CITY COUNCIL

Mayor Rusty Brockman
mayor@nbtx.us
(830) 221-4959, opt. 4

District 1 Councilmember
Shane Hines
shines@nbtx.us
Phone: (830) 221-4959, opt. 4

District 2 Councilmember
Justin Meadows
meadows@nbtx.us
Phone: (830) 481-7764

District 3 Councilmember
Harry Bowers
hbowers@nbtx.us
Phone: (830) 221-4959, opt. 4

District 4 Councilmember
Matthew Hoyt
moyt@nbtx.us
(830) 221-4917

District 5 Councilmember
Jason E. Hurta
jehurta@nbtx.us
(830) 221-4959, opt. 4

District 6 Councilmember
James Blakely
jblakely@nbtx.us
(830) 221-4959, opt. 4

COMAL COUNTY SHERIFF

Mark Reynolds
(830) 520-3000
Web: co.comaltx.us/so

COMAL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT
co.comaltx.us/Commission

County Judge
Sherman Krausz
skrausz@co.comaltx.us
Phone: (830) 221-1105

Precinct 1 Commissioner
Donna Ecdston
oecdme@co.comaltx.us
Phone: (830) 221-1101

Precinct 2 Commissioner
Scott Haug
shaug@co.comaltx.us
Phone: (830) 221-1102

Precinct 3 Commissioner
Kevin Webb
webbke@co.comaltx.us
Phone: (830) 221-1105

Precinct 4 Commissioner
Jen Crowmower
crowmowe@co.comaltx.us
Phone: (830) 221-1104

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