

## **The Smart Choice Is Requiring Masks**

We can save lives *and* save our local businesses, but to do it we have to be smart, disciplined and work together to stop the spread of COVID-19.

It's clear that some of our leaders have misunderstood the nature of the threat. On February 26 our national leader told us that there were only 15 US cases and within a few days that would fall to zero. Four months later we have 2.3 million cases and 122,000 dead.

On May 12 our state leader said, "We are clearly on the other side of this pandemic," and soon lifted the shelter-in-place order. Less than a month later a Yale University public health scientist and epidemiologist stated that Arizona's epidemic "exceeds Brazil and Peru to be one of the hardest-hit regions in the world."

It's all around us, in Kingman, in Flagstaff, in Maricopa. Yavapai County Health Director Leslie Horton warns that we have to "remain vigilant with our approach, not let our guard down."

It's been clear from the start that masks are effective. New Zealand, Slovakia, South Korea and other nations that required masks and pursued testing and tracing have effectively minimized deaths and stopped the spread.

Our economy cannot recover until we stop the virus. Sadly, misinformation and political posturing turned the effectiveness of masks into a political issue. We have to stop arguing about masks and start wearing them.

We have to come together on this as a community. I applaud Mayor Mengarelli and Supervisor Brown for recommending masks, but the reality on the ground here is that many are not listening. People obey speed limits and stop at red lights both because it's safer and because of the consequences for breaking the law. The safer choice now is to call for mandatory mask use in public places, as most of Arizona has done, including the Northern Arizona mayors of Clarkdale, Flagstaff and Sedona.

By holding large events like the rodeo and the July 4 parade, we are encouraging tourists to come to town and adding to the vulnerability of those in the service industry. Sanitary measures at the rodeo grounds may help, but increasing human density in Prescott inevitably increases the spread of the virus, and a bigger outbreak here will further damage our economy.

Mayor Mengarelli says, "we can't shut the town down," but the rodeo and parade are not the town. They are important to our cultural identity, but not essential. As a Whiskey Row business owner I recognize their economic importance, but human life is more important than that. We have to face the reality that we're already shut down, and we can work together to get through this crisis sooner. We need some patience and discipline.

We will have to make sacrifices to defeat this disease. I would much rather it is the inconvenience of wearing a mask and postponing our community celebrations than having our families losing loved ones and our businesses continuing to struggle.

Recommending the public use of masks is better than disputing their value, but taking the next logical step and requiring them would help us stop the spread of this disease, return sooner to a vibrant economy, and save lives.