

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

Statement regarding today's BOS mask mandate vote

PIMA COUNTY- We received a thoughtfully written and factually detailed memorandum yesterday from Ms. Leshar that employed a term that stood out for me: *universal indoor masking*. If there were any certainty that a mask mandate imposed by this Board of Supervisors would achieve that result, I would vote for it in an instant. Unfortunately, ever since the pandemic began, there has been an ugly bevy of falsehoods, fears and resentments about masks fed to our citizens by some in leadership positions who should be forever ashamed of their ignorance and selfishness. As a result, although I firmly believe that each of us should be wearing masks when we are in group settings, I am certain that a sizable number of Pima County residents will defy or ignore any mandate we may enact today.

The previous Board of Supervisors put a mask mandate in place in the summer of last year and it stayed in effect until we repealed it this spring. The responsibility for enforcement of that mandate fell on those who work in our restaurants, stores and other public accommodations. If a new mandate is put in place today, it will be their charge, not ours, to enforce it as well. The demonizing and politicizing of mask wearing has grown more angry and intense in the seven months since the last mandate was repealed. I have heard and read frank testimony from the people who will have to enforce any mask mandate about the abuse they suffered last time. They will likely deal with even worse behavior if we ask them to again take responsibility for enforcing our decisions.

I wish I could be more hopeful. There have been numerous instances during the pandemic when we have rallied together and done the right things to protect each other, especially the weakest and most vulnerable among us. Masks, however, have become a divisive symbol of how we have failed as Americans to unite behind a common set of facts about this virus and how to confront it. That failure attests to why we lead

the world in the number of infections and deaths, even though we are the richest nation in history and one of its most innovative.

I am willing to ask, beg or pray that all of you wear masks when necessary to protect yourselves and each other. I am not willing to tell you that you must wear masks because I know that many of you will choose to ignore or defy that mandate. The people who will have to deal with your choices are not members of this Board, nor do they work for county government. I am absolutely unwilling to ask those workers to deal with the consequences of any defiance or ignorance of a new mask mandate, so I will be sadly voting against this item.

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