

# West Plains Daily Quill

## An open letter to the community

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For most of us, 2020 has been a pretty rough year. We continue to feel the pressure, anxiety, and insecurity that comes with the unknowns of a global pandemic.

On Aug. 24, at the West Plains City Council meeting, an ordinance requiring masking in public spaces was defeated by a margin of 3-2. As a community, we need to reconsider the importance of widespread masking because our area is experiencing dramatic increases in infections, hospitalizations and sadly the death toll is now in the double digits.

The lives of our elderly family, friends and neighbors are worth protecting, and people whose immune systems are compromised or who have pre-existing conditions deserve to live. Our local businesses cannot afford another shutdown, and most people in our community cannot afford the loss of income that comes with a 14-day quarantine. Our local health providers and hospital are overwhelmed and cannot keep up at this pace. Above all, none of us want to lose someone we love.

Since some of us choose not to wear masks in public, and this is an issue that concerns public health and welfare (in the same way restaurant inspections, water testing and contact tracing are overseen by local government), it is time for our local government to serve its purpose and protect the public.

The consensus among scientists is that infected people who wear masks greatly reduce the odds of infecting others. It is also widely accepted among scientists that when the infected and uninfected both wear masks, transmission is reduced even further. Add in social distancing and we have a perfect cocktail for decreasing infections and untimely deaths.

However, in order for it to work, masking and social distancing must be done by all of us; has to be done consistently, and cannot be relaxed for the foreseeable future. We all want our lives to get “back to normal,” but without lowering the rate of infections in our community, the more out of reach that “normal” will get.

None of us likes wearing a mask, but for some of you, the idea of requiring the use of masks in public, or even on private property, evokes passionate feelings about the impact of such a requirement has on your personal freedoms. I get it. These feelings are valid, and I initially felt the same.

I was conflicted when deciding whether to help introduce a masking ordinance. I knew that scientists were advocating for widespread masking, but forcing people to mask seemed like an

overreach. However, after a lot of research and soul searching I came to understand that personal freedoms are not unlimited, and it is sometimes the role and responsibility of the government to limit them, specifically when an individual's actions puts the safety and freedom of others at stake.

For those of you who may feel conflicted, like I did, consider the words of Thomas A. Firey, Milton Friedman, and Thomas Jefferson; all men who love America and who have all advocated for limiting government in the personal lives of Americans.

For example, in a recent blog post, Mr. Firey of the Cato Institute says:

“In policy terms, SARS-CoC-2 is a negative externality: a cost involuntarily foisted on others. Limited government can (and in many cases should) address negative externalities, subject to such restrictions as that the resulting policies do not infringe on protected rights and do provide net benefits to society. Requiring the wearing of masks appears to be such a policy; it certainly seems at least as legitimate as largely uncontroversial public decency laws requiring the wearing of some clothing when in public.” He goes on to say, “mask policy should be left to local governments... At the local level, policymakers are more responsive to citizens and the ordinances can be better tailored to address specific circumstances – including, perhaps, cases where there is no community spread and no need for masks ([www.cato.org/blog/no-joe-governors-shouldnt-require-everyone-wear-mask-when-outside?queryID=760a270d8b7bd1650670f03684125d82](http://www.cato.org/blog/no-joe-governors-shouldnt-require-everyone-wear-mask-when-outside?queryID=760a270d8b7bd1650670f03684125d82)).”

In his book, “Capitalism and Freedom,” Friedman writes:

“These then are the basic roles of government in a free society: To provide a means whereby we can modify the rules, to mediate differences among us on the meaning of the rules, and to enforce compliance with the rules on the part of those few who would otherwise not play the game.

“The need for government in these respects arises because absolute freedom is impossible. However attractive anarchy may be as a philosophy, it is not feasible in a world of imperfect men. Men's freedom can conflict, and when they do, one man's freedom must be limited to preserve another's — as a Supreme Court Justice once put it, ‘My freedom to move my fist must be limited by the proximity of your chin.’”

Lastly, in his 1801 inaugural address Jefferson says:

“A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government; and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.”

What all of these smart, patriotic men are saying is that a free society requires a government that will protect personal freedoms for all of us.

In West Plains, we are facing the threat of a new virus that can spread by people who may not even know they are infected. The goal here is to keep folks out of the hospital, save lives, and keep people employed.

Wearing a mask, whether mandated or by choice, protects you from infecting others, therefore protecting the most fundamental and celebrated aspects of American society for all of us: The right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Please, for all of us: Wear a mask, social distance, keep gatherings small, and wash your hands.