

From the Desk of the President

Safety For All Requires Unity & Citizenship, Not Partisanship

Having taught high school science for more than 25 years in rural Kansas, I have profound respect and admiration for Kansas educators. As a youth, I was fortunate to be raised with a sense of duty and pride in my community. These values motivated me to serve my community as I worked to earn the honor of becoming an Eagle Scout. Later, while serving my community as a trained first responder and firefighter, I witnessed tragedy and suffering. I learned that, in so many instances, the harm we do to ourselves and even unintentionally to others, is avoidable with simple precautions and when we unite together to take steps necessary to keep ourselves and our neighbors safe. Today, as the President of Kansas NEA, I'm writing to all of my fellow Kansans with an appeal.

Keeping each other safe and healthy during a pandemic requires just a few things. First, we must tune out the constant stream of disinformation and misinformation. Instead, let us trust the medical experts. Opinions and beliefs form the spirit from which we act. Yet, medical experts give us a bright beacon to guide our actions because conclusions based upon exact science are valid whether we believe them or not. No amount of background noise can alter facts, but can only influence how we react to them. History has taught us time and again that when we refuse to acknowledge fact-based science, we do so at our peril.

Second, we must expect our elected officials to set aside partisanship and act in the best interest of all Kansans. I- like so many of my colleagues and neighbors- am a longtime Republican. When it comes to managing this crisis in our state, I look to elected leaders who seek the guidance and recommendations of medical experts, consider the impact of policies on all Kansans, and who decisively execute a plan cultivated from those efforts. President Trump openly praised Governor Laura Kelly for the 'fantastic job' she has done to listen, plan, and act decisively, without partisanship, to keep all Kansans safe. I agree with his assessment.

I am saddened that it appears several elected leaders from my political party are focused on strategies designed solely to obstruct and thwart our Governor's efforts. These same leaders offer no plan other than their intention to block our Governor, even when the health, well-being, and lives of Kansans are at stake. I believe in local control and the principles of checks and balances on the power of our elected leaders. For many years, emergency management powers needed for use in times of crisis have been available to the Kansas Governor, regardless of their party affiliation. It strikes me as sharply hypocritical that a partisan effort to strip Governor Laura Kelly of emergency management powers has been led by those who are unable - or perhaps unwilling - to propose any substantive alternative solutions to the crisis we face. Returning to "business as usual" is not a plan unless your goal is to grow the pandemic in Kansas.

Third, and finally, we must all set aside convenience and consider the needs of our fellow Kansans, our neighbors. A clear lesson we're learning from school district officials who have ignored the recommendations of medical experts in states such as Georgia, Florida, Texas, Tennessee, and others is that we can't locally control a global pandemic. The COVID-19 virus doesn't recognize borders or boundaries, opinions or politics,

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mascots or marching bands. Wearing a mask and social distancing when a gathering is unavoidable are proven to be effective measures to slow the spread and ultimately ease the suffering of friends, family, and neighbors.

If you live in an area of Kansas where only a few cases of infection have been confirmed, count yourself lucky. Then, activate your sense of citizenship and do what is right to show that we are all working to defeat this pandemic together. Wearing a mask may be inconvenient, but what are we teaching our children if we demonstrate that we are not willing to do our part to keep everyone safe?

I feel deep disappointment when I see one of our state's top elected officials, the Speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives, put partisanship ahead of safety for all. By God's grace, Speaker Ron Ryckman Jr. was able to secure a hospital bed during his battle with this virus, because hospital beds remain available when we work together to control this disease. When, as reported recently, Speaker Ryckman returns to our Statehouse, conducts maskless meetings, and discloses his infection status only to his Republican allies, we're teaching our children a lesson in reckless selfishness. We're teaching them that our duty to keep each other safe as fellow Kansans takes a back seat to partisanship.

As a Kansan, my appeal to you is this: Ask questions, think critically, and tune out the background noise. Most importantly, unite- even when inconvenient- around an effort to keep us all safe. We will not contain the spread of this disease when we put our status as Democrats, Republicans, or Independents above our responsibility to protect our fellow Kansans' health and well-being.



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