



Politics and healthcare. Historically not the easiest subjects to discuss with friends and family alike. But here we are, after 130,000 Americans dead in just a few months, we are in perhaps the greatest health crisis of our lifetimes. A death toll greater than U.S. combat deaths in the Korean, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq wars all combined! Given this rising death toll, we must ask ourselves now how best we can prevent this spread in our community.

I have heard from many of you. Each feels strongly about their stated positions. The current debate centers on the use of masks. To mask or not to mask? This is a fair question. Let me state from the outset that I do not believe that Okaloosa County will mandate the use of masks, but I also believe that each of us, acting with reason and common sense, can make the best decisions that affect the common health of our community.

Unfortunately, from the beginning of this pandemic we have received inconsistent guidance from federal bureaucrats and healthcare experts alike. Especially at the beginning, they were as much in the dark about how to combat this virus as any of us. But where do our leaders stand on the issues of wearing a mask today?

Speaking on Fox News just last week, President Trump said: "I'm all for masks." When asked whether he would wear one, the president said: "If I were in a tight situation with people I would, absolutely." He later added that he also wears a mask when the situation warrants it.

That sounds like common sense to me.

Vice President Pence? He stated recently that "we encourage everyone to wear a mask in the affected areas. Where you can't maintain social distancing, wearing a mask is just a good idea, especially young people."

Well, that's just it. With Covid-19 cases surging in Florida, our state is now squarely an "affected area." And now, our duty according to President Trump and Vice President Pence, is to start wearing masks. Not for ourselves, but for our

fellow countrymen who may be elderly or have an underlying disease that could place them at grave risk if they contract Covid-19.

This is a tough virus. It continues to mutate, and there is much we do not know about it. Even our foremost experts continue to shift guidance on how to best combat the virus. But what we do know for certain is that Covid-19 is highly contagious. While we hope for a vaccine, we now realize that the illness does not confer long lasting immunity. While we have had eight deaths in Okaloosa County, the infection rate continues to climb. The concern is that too many infected at once will overwhelm our local health care system.

Unlike the early days of the virus, we now have the advantage of knowing some of the ways that are effective at combating it. And one of those things, according to President Trump and Vice President Pence, not to mention every health expert and doctor with any credibility, is to wear a mask while in crowded areas.

I'm writing today to ask you to seriously consider wearing a mask when you are out in the public, for your own protection and those of others. Masks are effective and will help mitigate the spread of Covid-19. Although the County is not ordering anyone to wear a mask based on government mandate, I am pleading with you as a fellow citizen in a free society, to use common sense and reason. Wear a mask to help protect the most vulnerable among us.

We are a patriotic community. Cases are similarly increasing among our base personnel and this is impacting the mission. It is also affecting contractors who can utilize our bases. Those defending our country cannot stop their mission to protect themselves and their families against this virus. But that doesn't stop our own military personnel from being affected by the behavior in the community and specifically community spread. Acting individually, we can make a difference for the residents of Okaloosa County, whether your neighbor is an airman or an elderly citizen.

The vast majority of people who actually catch this disease will survive and be just fine. But this is about the small percentage of those in our community who are vulnerable, the elderly and the vulnerable. So on their behalf I urge you to make this short term sacrifice for the good of all your neighbors in Okaloosa County.