



Governor Brad Little

Opinion

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Biden's vaccine mandate is not the solution

By Governor Brad Little

Americans are deeply divided on COVID-19 and the response to it. Public health has turned political, there's no doubt about it.

But the situation playing out in hospitals across the country isn't up for debate.

There are more patients in need of critical care in Idaho than ever before in our state's history. As a result, medical care is now limited for anyone who needs it, whether they have COVID-19 or not.

We've taken many steps to alleviate pressure on the system. Just in the past few months:

- Idaho expanded access to monoclonal antibody treatment, which is one more tool that's helped hundreds of Idahoans with COVID-19 avoid a trip to the hospital.
- Between mobilizing the National Guard, deploying a military medical response team to North Idaho, contracting with the federal government, and other steps, we added hundreds of medical and administrative personnel in our hospitals.
- We directed millions of dollars to primary care and urgent care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, and hospitals to relieve staffing shortages and free up hospital beds due to the surge in patients.
- We cut red tape to get retired and inactive nurses back in the workforce more easily.
- We made COVID-19 testing more accessible in schools to minimize virus transmission.

All these actions have helped, but the end of the pandemic can only come if more people choose to receive the vaccine.

However, President Joe Biden's plan to punish America's businesses with his vaccine mandate is not the answer. It is an unlawful act of unprecedented government

overreach. Businesses should be left to make decisions about the management of their employees.

Idahoans do not like being bullied into submission by the federal government. Biden threatening Americans into compliance damages a country already divided. He is breeding a level of resentment and distrust of government that will take generations to heal. His actions simply are not good for our country, now or in the long term.

I have resisted putting in place statewide mask mandates and vaccine mandates all along because COVID-19 mandates from high levels of government do not work to change behavior in places where people hold fiercely independent values. Idaho has leaned on a more localized approach with these decisions, consistent with the law.

Consider the State of Washington. Governor Jay Inslee is quick to blame Idaho for stresses in Washington's health system yet Spokane County and the surrounding area on his side of the border continue to be hot spots for virus activity with relatively low vaccination rates, despite Governor Inslee issuing vaccine mandates and mask mandates.

Here in Idaho, we have been working to build confidence in the vaccine by sharing the message about its safety and effectiveness.

The most compelling evidence is this fact – since May when the vaccine was made widely available, 90-percent of new COVID-19 cases, COVID-19 hospitalizations, and COVID-19 deaths in Idaho are unvaccinated.

The disease is not afflicting just the elderly and health compromised. Those falling ill with COVID-19 are younger than ever before.

Unfortunately, we have reached a point in the pandemic where we all know someone who has died or become seriously ill from this aggressive disease. Please consider your risk in not receiving the vaccine. Your loved ones want you to be safe and healthy.

In the meantime, we will continue to do what we can to expand capacity in our hospitals and support our healthcare professionals. These friends and neighbors on the frontlines of our war with a disease will be forever remembered for their sacrifices and getting us through this troubling time.

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