LISTSERV

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What is Really Behind the Mask?

Please allow me to say right off the bat that I am not picking sides in the great mask debate. I am simply amazed at the amount of division the issue has caused in our society. It seems that each and every day brings a new story about arguments or incidents over the issue. Some of these have become quite severe and violent.

A *Washington Post* article relates a story where a passenger reportedly knocked out a flight attendant's teeth following a dispute over wearing a mask. While not every airline incident resulted from mask issues, the Federal Aviation Administration reports that the vast majority of cases involve refusal to follow the federal mask mandate.

The *Post* goes on to say that the FAA reported about 2,900 instances of unruly passenger behavior in the five months since January 1, 2021 and roughly 2,200 of those involved passengers who would not wear a mask. Potential violations were identified in 446 cases, and the FAA has started action in several. This represents an astounding increase. As the *Post* recounts, the FAA investigated a total of only 1,548 unruly passenger cases in the decade between 2010 and 2020.

One such incident reported by the FAA involved a passenger on a flight from Montana to Alaska who refused to wear a mask, became unruly and caused the crew and passengers to return to Montana before proceeding. Three passengers who disrupted flights in January face civil penalties of between $14,500 and $31,750, according to the FAA.

As a result, the FAA reports, airline "no fly" lists have grown dramatically. One airline reports a list containing 1,200 names, and three others list 830, 750, and 542 names respectively.

This problem is far from isolated to air travel, however. WESH-TV in Orlando, Florida reports that a man spit on a security guard at Disney World after being asked to wear a mask. He reportedly told the guard to "leave him alone" while taking a step forward and spitting on her. He then proceeded to walk calmly into the park. This hasn't been the only such incident at Disney World. The *Orlando Sentinel* reports that a "mostly maskless family" allegedly attacked an older man at Disney World in October after the two groups got into a fight. In another incident, Disney World personnel asked a family to change masks because they weren't wearing the right kind; they switched but returned with one of them maskless, who started an argument with park officials.

The AP reports that when a patron in a suburban Houston fast-food restaurant was asked to wear a mask, he became angry, confronted the manager and ended up stabbing him. In another Texas case, a woman was arrested following disputes over wearing a mask inside a bank and an Office Depot location on the same day. ABC News reports a patron at a "dollar store" allegedly wiped his nose and mouth on an employee's shirt after being asked to wear a mask, and a Michigan father of eight was killed at a retail store following a dispute over mask wearing.

Such confrontations, according to ABC, seem to be on the increase since official mask regulations and ordinances have been relaxed or disappeared but where stores or other businesses continued to request mask wearing.

Despite all these stories, folks, is it really about mask wearing? Or is the country (or world) becoming increasingly intolerant in general? I tend to think it is the latter. Masks aren't the only subject over which we seem to be having issues. It just seems in many sectors of society people are becoming argumentative and even incorrigible.

I belong to an alumni group for my high school alma mater, a school my entire family has graduated from. Recently, a member posted an interesting article about a fellow alum running for Congress. The post started: "This is not intended as a political post, and I am neither supporting nor opposing the candidacy. I simply thought you (the

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group) might find it interesting to hear what a fellow grad is up to." It took no less than ONE post for the issue to become political. The very first response was "I'm not voting for him," followed by "How dare you bring up politics in this forum. That's what we are trying to stay away from." A couple of authors then tried to support the post explaining that it was simply an announcement about something "positive" a fellow grad was doing. "I don't see it as positive," growled one responder. Finally, the well-intentioned author removed the post after he began getting personal insults directed at him. The writer was simply attempting to pass on an informative, positive piece about one of our old friends. "I apologize for believing we could discuss this in a civil and cordial matter," he said explaining why it was removed.

I find this just a plain shame. It was a wonderful piece about a man from a disadvantaged background earning a football scholarship to the University of North Carolina, and then going into education when his pro football career did not work out. A great story turned into a ridiculous argument. Do people simply refuse to be happy for someone they perceive as having different views from their own? It certainly seems that way.

I believe the "anger problem" stems from a couple of areas, perhaps first of all in what we see in our leadership. When was the last "uncontested" presidential election? By that, I mean when did the election loser graciously admit defeat and congratulate and pledge help to the winner? Ha! Instead we are shelled with a bevy of unfair accusations.

Daily news reports about squabbling and failure by our leaders to work together have become so commonplace that people don't even pay attention any longer. Citizens see this and tend to back the leader of their "choice," carrying those arguments into the street, stores and schools. Bickering and backstabbing has become common place nearly everywhere.

"I like that idea, but I can't support it because "the other side" came up with it." "I am not supporting it because of who brought it up." "I'd vote for it if somebody else introduced it." I have heard all of these statements on several occasions. It seems it has all become about "winning" and getting your own way. "Progress? Oh yeah, I'm for that. We'll only achieve it if so and so is kicked out."

Another area contributing to the frustration seems to be the "instant gratification" and selfishness contained in our desires. Too many people, if they don't get what they want when they want it, aren't willing to wait their turn. I saw a woman cut to the front of a grocery line recently because she only had three items. It wasn't even the express lane. When folks addressed her, she obnoxiously retorted "I only have three items. You can wait that long." She was a young able-bodied woman who apparently felt she was entitled to go to the front of the line because she didn't feel like waiting like everybody else. "I'm in a hurry," she grumbled.

Gunplay has erupted in arguments over a parking space, or a position in a ticket line. People are going to jail for contempt of court because they mouth off to the judge in disrespect. Where are these attitudes coming from and what can we do to get rid of them? Aren't we all in this together? A wise old adage of "We will have to agree to disagree on that issue" seems to have become laughable. Compromise is considered week, and too often things seem to be "My Way or the Highway."

Finally, it is unfortunately quite likely that frustration has built up over lockdowns, pandemic restrictions and business closings. More people have been out of work, out of a job and forced to stay home. Frustration is boiling over, and people seem to be at a tipping point. "I've been locked up over a year and you can't tell me what to do! Leave me alone!!!"

It appears to me the "great mask debate" is an example of the way our society is leaning as a whole. It seems all of the perceived selfishness, self-centered "me-first" type of thinking might be the underlying cause of the mask debate. And, because of that something so important upon which we should all be working together has become an even more divisive focal point.

All of this finally brings me to the point and closing of this article. We should be thankful that we have a forum here in our online listserve where we can discuss issues, exchange ideas and have civil discussions. We are all on the listserve and the Water Cooler to help each other, and we have done so in many areas with a collegial and congenial spirit. In my humble opinion, this is what the world needs more of today. We need more forums where people simply want to help each other get by, help each other get better and in turn make our little corners of the world better. In doing so, don't we help make the world a better place?

I know it has worked that way for me. I have had a difficult time of it for about the past two years, but much personal and legal help has come from my colleagues on the listserve and Water Cooler. You folks are my friends and always seem willing to help. Why can't it be that way more often?

I would encourage anyone to join or participate in a group such as our listserve where one can find support, healthy and sometimes vigorous (but respectful) discussion where we end up shaking hands at the end of the day. Joining such a group helps one enjoy the positive mental health aspects of happiness and each other's company.

The Prosecution rests, your honor…