OPINION

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OUR VIEWS

Public health in La. takes a step backward with vaccine order

With the official word last week that Louisiana's Department of Health would end mass vaccination events and ban its staff from promoting seasonal vaccines, our state took another step backward.

Retreating from longstanding, common-sense measures to keep Louisianans safe from disease and protect public health is a bad idea on its face. And it's particularly disturbing coming from a physician, state Surgeon General and former U.S. Rep. Ralph Abraham.

Abraham had previously telegraphed his opposition to promoting vaccinations late last year when DOH said it would shift away from offering "paternalistic guidance" and toward "a more informative approach aimed at enabling individuals, in consultation with their doctor, to make better decisions for themselves." But last week's official directive to state workers still hit hard, as it came on the same day the U.S. Senate approved the nomination of noted vaccine skeptic Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

Abraham coupled the order with a letter questioning public support of COVID vaccines and claimed that "public health agencies at the state and federal level have viewed it as a primary role to push pharmaceutical products."

That's a cynical way to describe policies aimed at safeguarding the overall good while not interfering with individual rights or privacy.

Certainly, there were missteps during the unprecedented, deadly pandemic that became clear in hindsight. Science does not claim to be perfect.

But the rapid development of COVID vaccines saved lives and helped our country get back to normal. And vaccines such as the ones public health agencies have long promoted — for seasonal flu, for example, as well as RSV and mpox — have done immeasurable good.

Even more discouraging is that the DOH directive comes in a season in which Louisiana has already experienced spikes in flu and RSV cases.

We're also already seeing more parents opt out of childhood vaccination in our state. That's alarming because a vaccine's overall success relies on widespread usage that can produce "herd immunity," which is the point at which a disease has trouble spreading to larger populations, including those who are most medically vulnerable.

Given these challenges, we were glad to see U.S. Sen. Bill Cassidy, a physician, speak out about the order's practical effect.

"Advertising the benefit of vaccines and where to get them helps parents improve the health of their child," he said. "Removing these resources for parents is not a stand for parents' rights. It prevents making health care more convenient and available for people who are very busy."

This paper had urged Cassidy to fall back on his medical training and experience and vote against confirming Kennedy. We were disappointed that he chose not to, but we think he's exactly right here.

Like Cassidy, Abraham is speaking not just as a governmental official, but as someone with medical expertise. We'd hope he'd use his platform and his official powers to bolster public health, not undermine it.

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YOUR VIEWS

U.S. is reaping what the voters asked for

The new world of the U.S. has begun. Remember seeing our Capitol building and legislators assaulted, trashed and smashed by insurrectionists on Jan. 6, 2021? These criminals, 1,500 of them, have been pardoned and exonerated for their crimes against our country. Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and QAnon are now free to pursue their ideology.

The roundup and deportation of illegal immigrants, costing taxpayers millions of dollars, has now begun. Expect menial job workers for picking crops, cleaning streets, etc. to be gone. Therefore, expect grocery prices to skyrocket. And, by the way, why haven't we encouraged these illegals to become legal citizens? Most of them are just quiet, hard-working people. Proposed tariffs on Mexican and Canadian products will cause other items to skyrocket in price.

DEI workers are being eliminated. Paring down government by dismantling federal jobs means thousands of workers will be eliminated, throwing these people into unemployment. So expect unemployment to skyrocket.

President Donald Trump ranted about the Department of Justice being weaponized. Isn't that what he's threatening now? Isn't that called hypocrisy?

Since the wealthiest 1% of our country already had taxes reduced, the rest of us taxpayers will now pay for our government's normal expenses. Expect many social services (Medicare, Medicaid, libraries, education) and perhaps the military to be cut to pay for government.

I desperately want our country to succeed, but after watching Trump in action and seeing his nominations for high cabinet positions, I am not optimistic. Most of these cabinet posts are not being filled by quality or even qualified people. Welcome to the new world that is now the United States. Is everybody happy?

ELENE MILLER
Metairie

EV charging stations signal progress, not an agenda

Regarding the misplaced ire of a few about the placement of a charging station at a public library, what a shame that some have so little to keep themselves busy besides poking their little stick at every sign of progress. The fact is that most Americans prefer the idea of clean energy. Inherently, there is nothing clean about combustion engines.

Entergy is establishing EV charging sites across its service areas, as is every utility in the nation. Why? Because there is considerable demand for clean vehicles and better networks for charging. As these innocuous plug-ins begin to appear again and again at locations both public and private, it would benefit those with heads in the past to begin looking to the future — when these same people probably will be maligning local entities for not doing enough to facilitate broad networks of charging stations at spaces public and private alike.

In a 2024 study, the Pew Center found that 30% of Americans favor buying an electric vehicle — or roughly the same percentage of all eligble voters who voted for Donald Trump in the most recent election. I would suggest more, not less, of these partnerships (as this simple, single charging station was likely federally funded under a nationwide program to build out charging networks in places such as this). Folks upset about popular projects of progress like this example typically represent their agenda — looking backward by stumbling forward and trying to find another person or institution to blame for the most inevitable of all forces, change. (Look it up — it's in your local library.)

ANDREA ROMERO
New Orleans

Louisiana can't afford to lose federal dollars

So let me get this straight. Gov. Jeff Landry and the state agencies and nonprofits were scrambling to figure out what to do about President Donald Trump's funding freeze. After all the kowtowing our elected Republican leaders have done to Trump, he rewards them by stopping all federal funding. The joke's here somewhere, and it's on them.

Louisiana is eighth in the nation in receiving more federal dollars than its citizens pay in taxes. The state receives $1.88 for every $1 paid in taxes. We're talking about money from our personal tax dollars. The so-called red states, such as Louisiana, are the ones who benefit most from federal grants and loans. Contrast that with New Mexico, a so-called blue state, that receives only 85 cents.

Federal assistance to police, infrastructure, schools, children with disabilities, disabled veterans, suicide prevention, Medicaid (the bulk of which goes to nursing homes) and other things that we rely on every day could face cuts to federal aid. Who can afford a higher tax bill to make up the difference? Trump disavowed even the slightest knowledge of Project 2025 during the campaign, yet all of his actions so far are straight from its playbook. Furthermore, one of the authors of Project 2025, Russell Vought has been confrmed as budget chief.

What will the administration do with the trillions of dollars it saves from the spending freeze, you ask? Use it to give huge tax cuts to the ultra-wealthy is the answer. Write your senators and representatives about your opposition to the freeze or buckle your seat belts. The future for Louisiana is looking grim.

KATHY HIGGINS
Metairie

Insurance companies know climate change is real

If hurricanes are not as frequent or destructive as a recent letter writer claims, why is it impossible for many coastal residents to obtain home insurance? Or fire insurance in California? Insurance companies are experts at calculating risk, and they seem to disagree with the author.

The climate is changing. We need to take that seriously.

TODD HOLLEY
New Orleans

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