

## Chris Taggart

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**From:** Kathleen Harder-Brouwer <kharderbrouwer@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 22, 2020 7:19 PM  
**To:** Chris Taggart  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Statement for Fridays mtg RE: Public Health

As medical providers in Ravalli County, we are committed to the health of our patients and community as a whole. It is because of that commitment that we feel the need to speak out about the health care crisis facing our county. Covid-19 is a highly contagious illness, a novel viral infection that is sweeping the country (as well as the world). As a novel virus, we are learning new things about it daily and are challenged to keep up with its spread. We are just beginning to understand how to care for those infected with Covid-19, what medications might be helpful and what vaccine can protect us in the future. For now, we know that the best way to fight Covid-19 is to avoid getting the infection in the first place. This is front line management of any epidemic or pandemic. The reduction of viral spread will save lives. Despite what is being repeated in social media and some television news outlets, the use of masks saves lives. Medical providers are taught to base the advice they give to patients on evidence of benefit and lack of harm. There is clear, compelling scientific evidence that the use of masks prevents the spread of this virus and causes no harm. To say otherwise is to lie. We cannot understand why anyone would want to perpetuate these lies. We feel that those who are denying the science are trying to politicize public health. And that is as big a tragedy as this pandemic. While we agree that it is not the place of the Ravalli County Commissioners to “enforce the Governors Directive” (Press Release, 07/16/20) on mask usage, this press release reveals that they have no interest in supporting the directive, which is based on science, or the actions of the Public Health Department. We rely on our elected officials to make decisions based on what is in the best interest of the majority. Masks are in that best interest and this press release legitimizes a fringe element’s attempts to make public health a political issue. And now, because of this lack of leadership, we have lost our county public health officer during a time when the position is more important than ever. Dr. Carol Calderwood has consistently made decisions that better the health of the citizens of this valley. From her difficult decisions during the pertussis (whooping cough) episode to the hard work in this situation, she has shown what it means to value the public health. We particularly take offense to the statement of chair Chris Hoffman in this weeks Ravalli Republic, in discussing having the County Sanitarian as the public health officer: “A doctor is preferable, but his education and training will do for the time being”. If there ever was a time when the education and training of a physician should be the commissions main priority, it is now. We do not expect to change the mind of those who deny science and want to politicize this situation. But we can no longer stand by in silence. Our biggest hope is that enough residents will wear masks and do the right thing so that they save everyone, even those who do not care to help save others. And if our community is overrun, if our hospital is overwhelmed, if we run out of ventilators and if our friends and neighbors start dying at the rates that are projected, it will forever be on the heads of those who denied science and failed to support public health. That will include the Ravalli County Commissioners.

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