

## Chris Taggart

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**From:** Rebecca Jones <rfd.rmjones@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 24, 2020 12:14 PM  
**To:** Public Health Department; Ravalli County Commissioners Office  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Reopen Ravalli County Fair 2020

Greetings -

I am writing in opposition to the decision to close this year's Ravalli County Fair to the general public in response to the ongoing presence of coronavirus in the county.

It is widely believed in the medical community nationwide that the virus is airborne, that contagion is particularly abetted by close gatherings of people indoors and that wearing a thin piece of cloth over nose and mouth is effective in preventing infection. Outdoor recreation is recognized as a vastly safer activity which can be paired with socializing to achieve healthy living, both physically and mentally, and our Fair provides an outdoor venue for the majority of its offerings. Optional masks may be worn to access the indoor displays and presentations.

I have just read 3 articles in the 7-22-20 issue of the Bitterroot Star authored by Michael Howell regarding the coronavirus situation and local issues and responses. Taken together they are an interesting snapshot of the current pandemic environment here in Ravalli County.

Regarding the statement by the Ravalli County Sheriff, I believe it is reasonable of the RCS to decide not to enforce Governor Bullock's mandate of public masking, as I also believe that these resources are better employed in responding to more urgent public matters throughout the county. That said, our erstwhile Ravalli County Health Officer Carol Calderwood's decision to resign from her position after this statement by the RCS smacks of pouting. She just cancelled this year's Fair, so does she consider the RCS statement an affront to her program to keep Ravalli County business and social activity suppressed, citing "public health"? Why cancel the entire Fair when it is widely-recognized that outdoor activity (and most of the Fair activity is held in open air) and mask-wearing (for those who believe that it is more than a talisman) would be sufficient to provide a wholesome, healthy community event?

I am also weary of histrionic complaints such as voiced by Fair superintendent Joy McClure, quoted as countering an argument against cancelling the Fair by saying "You are asking us to risk our lives". I, too, volunteer at the Fair every year as a member of the Bitterroot Back Country Horseman's club, which has for years sold tickets direct to the public in the kiosks at each of the 4 gates. I had been planning to fulfill my two 4-hour shifts again this year, despite my age of 66 years arguably putting me at greater risk than the general public for coronavirus complications.

Perhaps Ms. McClure has compromising health factors that raise her personal concerns, and I fully support anyone's decision to wear a mask in public, no questions asked. But to put fear of dying of coronavirus into some perspective - and taking a step back from panic is always a good idea - I advise doing some research and not just looking at daily journalism headlines (which have an existential interest in stoking irrational fear). Go to the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>), the insurance industry, which has a keen interest in accurately assessing health risk factors (<https://www.iii.org/fact-statistic/facts-statistics-mortality-risk>) and reputable independent organizations that are closely following the coronavirus developments worldwide (<https://ourworldindata.org/mortality-risk-covid>). It wouldn't take a calm, open-minded person very long to realize that they risk their lives multiple times more just driving to the grocery store on a 5-mile stretch of Eastside Highway.

Which doesn't argue for adopting a cavalier disregard for infectious agents present in the community. But I submit it does argue for fewer shrill cries to shrink our community life to fit the shadow under the wings of Death. And I believe that informing oneself from reputable - how about "science-based"? - sources enables better personal health decisions and a necessary tolerance for the personal decisions of others.

I urge you to reopen this year's Ravalli County Fair as originally planned and provide our community the healthy, convivial and uplifting local event it has come to rely on every year.

Sincerely,  
Rebecca Jones  
Hamilton, MT

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