



COUNTY OF LAKE

Board of Supervisors

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PRESS RELEASE **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

“The answer is not fear, it’s preparation.”

County Insights from Moke Simon, Chair of the Board of Supervisors

LAKE COUNTY, CA (May 22, 2020) – Creating Public Policy, particularly in times of unusual challenge, can resemble the refining processes of an iron worker. Heat and pressure, appropriately placed, take raw materials and give them form. Not every effort is a forward step, but flexibility and care are rewarded.

The Monday (May 18) and Tuesday (May 19) meetings of the Lake County Board of Supervisors featured meaningful debate, and public tensions that reflected the uncertainty and consequence of the moment. Out of struggle came signs of progress toward thoughtful reopening of local businesses. In wrestling with real differences, a sense of direction emerged.

Board Chair Moke Simon offered some insights on a week of hard-won progress.

“There is nothing I think about more than how deeply many Lake County residents are hurting right now, as result of COVID-19,” related Simon. “We can’t stand for one more business to permanently close their doors, one more family to see a dream fade from view. But moving too quickly [to reopen] could have dire consequences, and set us back even further. We have to be fair, and look at all of the different angles of this. People are engaged, and [providing] some really good feedback, and that is a big help, but these are challenging times, and the right answer for one [group] often [carries] risks for others.”

On Thursday, May 21, a Local Variance to the State’s Stay at Home Order took effect, allowing many Lake County businesses to reopen or expand their services. A new Public Health Order requiring face coverings in public spaces and businesses was also issued this week, following much debate. A move thought necessary by many public health officials around the State of California, and intended to facilitate greater social movement in Lake County’s communities, it has nonetheless been controversial.

During Tuesday’s meeting, District 2 Supervisor, Bruno Sabatier, offered, “Government sometimes places itself outside of normal orders. We have to not do that; we have to be in line with what we’re asking people to do... [We have] to calibrate it appropriately for ourselves. We want to do the right thing, and businesses want to do the right thing, also.”

District 4 Supervisor, Tina Scott, was a calibrating voice, and noted face coverings would facilitate opportunities for business owners: “We need to think about this... [and] ensure we’re not delaying reopening.” This proved to be prophetic, as State leaders and Public Health Officials continued to indicate optimism this week that those Counties accelerating their reopening will have expanded opportunities in the weeks to come. Appropriate precautions are necessary to keep COVID-19 activity stable as business

and other activities resume, and epidemiological stability is a requirement for reopening to continue to progress.

At the same time, Scott strongly advocated masking should not be an indefinite expectation, which struck a chord with District 5 Supervisor, Rob Brown, who further challenged his fellow Board Members, asking, "What are we shooting for here? When does this end?"

The Board ultimately approved a safety protocol for County offices that included face coverings as a key strategic element, and, while divided on the topic, affirmed support of the Public Health Officer, Gary Pace's, masking mandate, while asking that it be reviewed every 30 days, coincident to renewal of the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration.

A balanced approach to educating business owners and the community regarding the need for face coverings was recommended; none of the Board members had any desire to see already-burdened business owners and residents face criminal penalties or fines, unless it was truly an egregious case.

Simon well encapsulated the rationale for the Board's policy direction:

"As a Board, we are trying to create a level playing field, where all residents have appropriate opportunity to exercise their freedoms and have the best possible life they can," stated Simon. "It's reasonable to strongly recommend those who face more significant risk do their best to stay at home, but there are exceptional situations. When we wear a mask, it helps other people stay safe; that's worth some inconvenience, for sure."

Lake County's strong moves toward reopening come against a backdrop of four new confirmed cases, and in anticipation of Memorial Day Weekend, historically a holiday that sees visitors flood to Clear Lake. Simon offered the following:

"We're still facing real risks from COVID-19. There's a reason the Governor hasn't lifted the ban on non-essential travel. There's a reason they're talking about professional [sporting events] happening with no people in the stands. There's a reason that businesses that are reopening look a lot different than they did before.

"The answer is not fear, it's preparation. It's staying focused on doing what we need to do to keep moving in the right direction. It's taking a long-term view. It's honoring Memorial Day while maintaining physical distance from those outside of your household, knowing precautions now may mean a friend of yours is still around to celebrate once the pandemic has passed.

"I've said this before, but now is still not the time to visit Lake County. Each county in California, and each of our communities, is trying to reopen the right way. Staying home except to [engage in permitted] activities, and staying close to home, to keep the virus from spreading, is essential right now. Please do your part, and be safe!"

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