



Katy Purcell White <kathryn.purcellwhite@oesu.org>

Fwd: Support for vaccine mandate

1 message

Emilie Knisley <emilie.knisley@oesu.org>
To: Katy Purcell White <kathryn.purcellwhite@oesu.org>

Fri, Jan 14, 2022 at 1:09 PM

He is from Ryegate

**Emilie B. Knisley, M.Ed., CAGS, CAEL
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Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future. —John Fitzgerald Kennedy

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Richard Balzano** <richard.balzano@yahoo.com>

Date: Fri, Jan 14, 2022 at 12:36 PM

Subject: Re: Support for vaccine mandate

To: Emilie Knisley <emilie.knisley@oesu.org>

I was not aware of a hearing. I would normally be inclined to attend and voice our concerns, but I'm not thrilled about sharing a small space with a group of people--especially a clown car of unvaccinated conspiracy folks. It seems prudent to allow people to voice their concerns via zoom or in writing? Will this option be available?

To these ends, such a public meeting presents an awkward paradox under the current circumstances, if/when those who voice their concerns the loudest can sway change in their favour. The sick, vulnerable, cautious, and socially responsible are inclined, or bound, to avoid such events, and thus their voices go unheard and/or underrepresented, while those that deny science and continue to perpetuate our failing public health response are more likely to attend in person, to voice their concerns, and have a better shot at moving the meter. A remote hearing levels the playing field.

But please, do pass our sentiments along. I imagine we aren't alone in our disposition. Please send the prior email, and this one as well. If I were attending, I would say the following:

The United States has the worst covid response in the developed world at this time. The virus is spreading and people are dying, thrown to the wolves of the economy and "business as usual." Historians will reflect on this period as one in which a public health crisis became politicised, wherein deliberately misinformed conspiracy theorists monkey-wrenched institutional responses to the public health crisis. That we are allowing, or even entertaining, people with no medical training/education to shape the trajectory of a *public health response* is abysmally unintelligent and a major institutional failure.

The phrase "we are only as strong as our weakest link" has never been more relevant. Imagine, if you will, several people on an emergency life raft floating aimlessly in the Pacific. They can argue and negotiate over which way to paddle or how best to collect drinking water with no acute existential risk. If someone suggested poking a hole in the life raft, first because they didn't believe drowning was real, and then because they didn't need a raft to float, those opinions could not be

entertained. They present an acute and obvious danger to the health and safety of others. Drowning is real and the raft is needed, whether or not someone believes it. Covid is also real, and masks and vaccines are keeping (some of) us alive and healthy. Those who deny science and reject public health initiatives are not trying to poke a hole in our raft--they've already let the air out. They have made a suicide pact with society; some don't even realise it, while others profess a value system in which rampant covid-related deaths are an acceptable consequence in exchange for personal freedoms. By allowing this ignorance and self-destructive lunacy to occupy part of the dialogue (let alone alter the trajectory of public health), we are validating it. Perhaps we have reached pluralism's breaking point?

As people invoke "personal freedom" to defend the right to remain unvaccinated in the workplace, it becomes clear that freedom-loving Americans are confused about what individual freedom actually is. Sociologist Orlando Patterson wrote "the book" on slavery (*Slavery and Social Death*), and he once outlined the differences between individual freedom and sovereign freedom. Individual freedom was defined as the ability to do what one wishes as long as one did not infringe upon the freedoms of others; in other words, you cannot directly or indirectly do harm to others. Sovereign freedom was defined as the ability to do as one wishes even if it infringes on the freedoms of others; examples of sovereign freedom include owning slaves, exploiting labour, polluting water and public natural resources, etc. Needless to say, we in the U.S.A. have a long history mistaking sovereign freedom for individual freedom. Resisting safety precautions and spreading pseudo-science during a public health crisis infringes on the freedoms of others--it is not one's individual freedom/liberty to do so, but rather it is a sovereign freedom that one is imposing on all she/he encounters. Just because she/he cannot understand that, or chooses to ignore it, does not negate the life-threatening consequences. This is not about personal/individual freedom, it's about an ugly selfish form of sovereign freedom, lacking in conscience and social responsibility.

That this is a politicised rejection of public health recommendations is evidenced by the weakness and inconsistencies in their arguments. Often it is framed, and even sincerely believed, to be altruistic, but the veil of altruism is quite thin. Will we see this level of scepticism towards big pharma the next time universal healthcare comes up as an election issue? Likely not. We see "my body, my choice" invoked over vaccine mandates, but do these same people apply "my body, my choice" to *Roe v. Wade*? Rarely, if ever.

Some believe they are looking out for teachers's rights. It seems libertarians have all of the sudden become labour advocates on behalf of teachers who wish to remain unvaccinated. Subscribers to free market principles might get tripped up when the process is outlined in free market terms: if an employer creates a policy, as is the employer's right, the employee can choose whether or not she/he wants to continue to work there. Sadly, many American companies are not inclined to impose vaccination mandates, but medical and public institutions gravitating towards responsible public health compliance are instituting mandates. According to free market principles, the constituent-consumer can choose to participate at her/his discretion. Free marketeers can place their kids in private schools that follow rogue pseudoscientific health standards (if the law allows it), but community members should be able to send their children to a safe public school.

People in our community inverted this argument during the mask-mandate days, saying that safety-conscious pro-mask parents were free to send their kids to (hypothetical) private schools that mandated masks. Their angle has always been one of denial. First, it was that covid wasn't real. Next, it was that masks didn't work. Now, it's the assertion that vaccines don't work, and that mandates infringe on individual rights. Its "I met a person who met a person who knew a doctor that said..." It's incoherent. And yet people with no comprehension of scientific method fashion themselves advanced epidemiologists these days. They'll cite inconsistencies with past public health crises, incapable of comprehending that all medical crises are unprecedented; the emergency itself, and the science and technology available to address it, and a host of

circumstances relative to that moment in time are, are always different. Subsequently, so is the response. A lack of precedent or mirror image comparison doesn't negate the present response.

The conversation about how to respond to this virus should be taken up by qualified health professionals, not peripherally informed skeptics. We as a nation and a community need to stop being polite. We need to stop treating pseudoscience as an equal and opposing argument that deserves to be heard. We need to stop allowing pseudoscience to influence the health and safety of our community, our public institutions, and especially our public schools.

So let's move forward with a mandate at BMU, and let's view this as an opportunity. Any staff/faculty who chooses not to get vaccinated without a **valid** medical excuse can move on. Good riddance. They're apparently not that smart to begin with, and their destructiveness might inspire students to do the same.

Regards,

Richard M. Balzano

On Jan 14, 2022, at 9:20 AM, Emilie Knisley <emilie.knisley@oesu.org> wrote:

Richard,

Thank you for reaching out. Is this something you would like me to share with the OESU Board? They plan to take this topic up on Tuesday evening at 7 pm. This could be part of their correspondence on the matter, but since it is not addressed to them I thought I would check in.

Regards,

Emilie B. Knisley, M.Ed., CAGS, CAEL
Superintendent

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On Thu, Jan 13, 2022 at 5:38 PM Richard Balzano <richard.balzano@yahoo.com> wrote:

We wholeheartedly support the vaccine mandate. In fact, we are a bit shocked it wasn't instituted when vaccines became available.

Any staff/faculty that isn't vaccinated already without valid medical reasons shouldn't be working in a school—they're not that smart to begin with. Good riddance.

Regards,

Richard M. Balzano