

STEVEN P. DINKIN A path forward

AS MASK MANDATE LIFTS, CONFUSION COMES TO CALIF.

It's a big week for Californians. On Tuesday, the state will officially reopen its economy, following a 15-month, COVID-induced hibernation. It's the day we bid farewell to mask mandates and other restrictions, like maximum occupancy rates. The four-tiered, color-coded system of assigning risk, by county, will disappear.

But is it really time to cheer? Gov. Gavin Newsom doesn't sound confident. As he drew the first batch of vaccine lottery winners on June 4, Newsom revealed that California's state of emergency will be continuing. "This disease has not been extinguished. It's not taking the summer months off," Newsom said.

Newsom and other state officials have long signaled that factors like virus variants and vaccination compliance rates could cause restrictions to be reinstated, if there were risks to public safety.

And caution may be wise. Despite initial success in fighting the pandemic, Britain is now coping with an increase in the

number of cases. The main cause appears to be the highly infectious virus variant known as Delta, which was first detected in India. The country's recent moves to reopen may also be playing a role.

That being the case, the state of emergency order is unlikely to expire anytime soon. It allows California to draw down resources and continue operating programs that are needed to deal with the effects of the pandemic. Often, emergency orders remain in effect after the peak of a disaster has passed.

The fact that the governor will continue to wield this control has angered the state's Republican leaders, who have long criticized his COVID-related decision making and directives as an abuse of power. Some of the kinder remarks label Newsom as a monarch and a tyrant, fueling an already virulent recall effort.

Somewhere along the line, the state of California became the state of confusion.

Without clarity at the top, how do we go about our daily business?

What do we do about the significant number of Californians who refuse to be vaccinated? A recent survey by the Public Policy Institute of California found that 14 percent of adult respondents said they would "definitely not get the vaccine." Another 7 percent said they "probably" wouldn't get it. That means one in five of our neighbors — about 5 million people — need some extra convincing, if they're convincible at all.

In our reopened economy, how will we identify these refusers, anyway? As it turns out, the state guidance is very specific — at least if you're fully vaccinated, like me. After June 15, we can go without a mask in most indoor settings or wear one, if we choose. But there's no guidance for unvaccinated people — just a recommendation by experts that they continue to wear masks indoors and out, where physical distancing isn't possible. Can we trust that they'll mask up?

Here's the bigger question: Why does it even matter? That question hits close to home for

me. My mother, who is in her 80s, will be visiting California soon. A reunion is being planned; already, an unvaccinated family member (who's in the refuser camp) has been told to stay home. It's causing some familial angst.

I shared this story with a friend who wondered why the family member was disinvited, since the rest of the group is fully vaccinated.

He has a point. The particular concerns of my family aside, the vaccine could well become our next weapon of polarization — as if we need another one. Because I've been jabbed twice, I'm better than you. I'm more responsible. I care more. It feeds into the irrefutable, all-American desire to feel superior.

Of course, this theory overlooks some legitimate concerns among refusers, including their religious beliefs.

Reopening will be no less confusing in our workplaces. Recently, we held a small, in-person meeting at the National Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC) — our

first such gathering since the pandemic started. Five of us met at a conference-room table, leaving an open seat between each person. We all wore masks.

Ten minutes into the meeting, we realized that we could be mask-free, as NCRC employees are required to be vaccinated before returning to work. Even still, there was a shared uncertainty. It was the elephant in the room. No one wanted to cause discomfort. So we addressed it in the way our organization knows best: We talked about it. Then the masks came off.

Guidance from the state is just that — guidance. It's not a cure-all. To navigate the new normal, Californians can start by having honest conversations with each other. They inevitably lead to the right decisions.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncronline.com

POTTER

FROM B1 hours. He plans to use proceeds from the event to raise money for his next big idea, the DeafBlindPotter training school for people with intellectual disabilities.

Crosby said he feels it's his mission to teach others about the healing properties of the art form.

"Through pottery, I realized I've got so much to live for. And I realized if I can help others live beyond their challenges, I will find joy in my life, too," he said.

Crosby's mom, Cherri Crosby, said her son was an active boy who played sports and never let his hearing disability slow him down. But when Crosby was 13, the overhead stadium lights went out during an evening soccer game and he suddenly realized he had no night vision. A few months later he was diagnosed with Usher syndrome and told that he would gradually lose all of his vision. Crosby said he ignored the doctors and carried on.

"It's been a journey for me. I didn't accept it when I was young. I just lived my life, got my driver's license and tried to forget about it," he said.

But at age 19, he lost his peripheral vision and had to give up his license. He went to a bible school in the Central California mountains and tried to hide his vision

loss from others until he tripped over a lawnmower and fell into the blades, then later ran into a chair in the cafeteria and suffered another bad fall.

"I started crying. It was an emotional moment. That's when I had to realize I really was deaf and blind," he said.

To adjust to his new life, he attended classes at the Helen Keller National Center, where teachers asked Crosby if he had any hobbies. He remembered how much he enjoyed throwing pottery on a wheel in art class at University City High School, so center teachers taught him techniques for making pottery without vision. Later, he took classes at Mesa College and then learned glazing techniques at San Diego State University. He said it took a long time to accept the vision-related imperfections in his work.

"Once I got over the need to be perfect, I started healing. Healing has been the most important part of the ceramic process for me," he said.

In his mid-20s, Crosby developed his artistic signature, which is three engraved horizontal rings on each piece that he makes. They represent joy, perseverance and character, while the piece itself represents hope.

At age 28, Crosby lost all of the clarity in one of his eyes, which led him to set aside pottery and focus on



Kelvin Crosby starts between 12-20 pieces of pottery a day and then continues work on 50-150 other pieces in various stages.

developing a new invention, Smart Guider, a lighted cane for people with low vision. That product was in the final development stages last year when funding dried up.

About the same time, a family friend named Michaela Harding asked Crosby if he'd teach her how to make pottery. He offered to pull his equipment out of storage and give her lessons if she'd let him take a few spins on the wheel to see what he could do without any vision clarity. The experience was a revelation.

"When I touched the clay, the healing started all over again. The next thing I knew, I was making 10 pieces a day," he said.

Michaela's older sister, Natalie Harding — a recent SDSU business school graduate — saw the work Crosby was doing and together they came up with the idea to develop a new pottery brand, DeafBlindPotter. Crosby built his own website and Harding began filming and posting videos on TikTok. The first video on Dec. 1 got 100,000 views overnight and now stands at more than

800,000. The third video has 1.4 million views.

Crosby's videos, which he now films and posts himself, are a mix of pottery tutorial and upbeat motivational speaking. He starts with a mound of clay that he sponges with water and then spins. He can't see if the clay is centered on the wheel, but can feel it if the vessel wobbles in his hands. If the top is crooked, he cuts it off. If it collapses, he shares that too, because everyone makes mistakes. He mixes tubs of ceramic glaze with his fingers so he can feel the consis-

tency required, and he dips the vessels in glaze with his bare hands so he can measure the depth of the color bands with his fingers. The process from mud to finished vessel takes about three weeks.

Crosby's "office" is a backyard shed at the home of his parents, Jerry and Cherri. Crosby's wife of 10 years, Abigail, drops him off six mornings a week on her way to work. He calls Abigail his "rock" because she keeps him grounded whenever his entrepreneurial dreams get too carried away. But Cherri Crosby said she believes her son will be able to succeed in making his pottery school, or any other dream, a reality. "If anyone can do it, he can," Cherri said. "He's an inspirational story for sure. He feels very blessed and feels like he sees better now that his eyes aren't working right."

In the weeks leading up to his June 27 auction, Crosby will be selling mugs, bowls and vases on the DeafBlindPotter page of a new e-commerce and interactive social media app called Auxxit. He will be livestreaming his potting marathon and the auction on on Auxxit. It will also stream on tiktok.com/@deafblindpotter and his YouTube channel (youtube.com, search "Deaf-Blind Potter"). His website is deafblindpotter.com.

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VIOLENCE

FROM B1 Several federal and local agencies working in San Diego County declined to specify how the strategy would be implemented here or if it would change what existing task forces are already doing.

The lack of detail about exactly how federal agencies might identify violent offenders has some community advocates concerned that the end result could be heavy-handed policing against people of color and in certain neighborhoods.

"Even if computers are doing the analysis, Black people will be overwhelmingly impacted negatively," said Geneviève Jones-Wright, an attorney and member of the city's Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention, noting that algorithms and data analysis are far from bias-free. "The entire idea is terrifying."

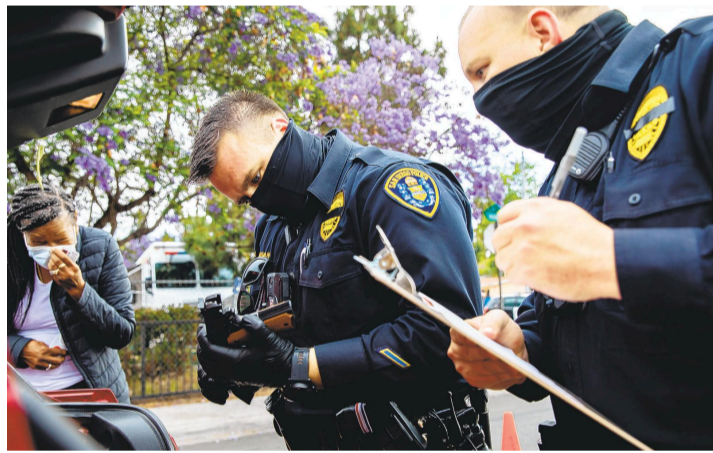
The city of San Diego was among several major metropolitan areas experiencing a rise in violent crime in the first three months of 2021, according to a survey by the Major Cities Chiefs Association.

Aggravated assaults rose to 1,008 in the first quarter — a 33 percent increase compared to the same period last year.

Rape showed a slight increase — 128 compared to 124 last year. That number is expected to rise as people increasingly mingle in social and dating situations post-COVID.

The number of murders, seven, was about on pace with the eight in last year's first quarter. By the end of 2020, however, killings in the city had risen to 56 total — 10 percent higher than in 2019. The trend was partly attributed to the growing accessibility of ghost guns.

Those guns are assembled at home from parts that often come in prepackaged kits. When sold that way, manufacturers aren't required by law to include



serial numbers, nor are buyers required to pass federal background checks. Sometimes the parts are manufactured with at-home machinery.

Last year, 210 ghost guns were recovered in the city, or 12 percent of the total. That was a 169 percent increase over ghost guns seized in 2019. So far this year, San Diego is on pace to surpass 2020's seizures, city officials said earlier this month.

"I am concerned about the rise in gun violence we are seeing this year," Police Chief David Nisleit said as he gathered with other civic leaders recently on National Gun Violence Awareness Day. "Raising awareness and collaborating with community organizations can help keep San Diego safe."

Last weekend, the Police Department also partnered with community groups in a gun buyback event, offering residents who turn in unwanted firearms gift cards or skateboards in return. The event yielded 64 firearms, including eight assault-style rifles, according to police.

Experts across the country are concerned that the opportunity for violence may also be amplified during the long days of summer as crowded spaces open back up and people continue to confront vestiges of the pandemic.

"There will be more opportunity for crime to happen than when everyone was sitting in the house. The effect of being so locked down

over the past year has affected everybody," said Cindy Burke, director of criminal justice research at the San Diego Association of Governments.

"Robberies are down, but people haven't been walking around on the streets," she added. "Will that go up?"

Still, Burke said it's often difficult to identify the exact reasons behind upticks in crime.

"You can't say one thing is causing another, but factors are all coming together making certain things more likely," she said. For example: "People suffering with mental health may be self-medicating and that could make them more prone to put themselves in a situation that could lead to violence," she said.

The DOJ's summer strategy to get on top of violent crime is part of a broader, long-term plan to reduce violence with a more community-centered approach that also aims to rebuild trust in law enforcement, according to a memo from Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco to U.S. attorneys.

"We have faced a national public health emergency that put people out of work, closed schools, created pressures at home, limited social services, impacted criminal justice systems, and generally disrupted social activity. We have seen civil unrest as people question the legitimacy of our institutions and the role of law enforcement in society," the memo states.

Officers Mark Sullivan and Mark Bellati examine a pistol during a gun buyback exchange at Encanto Southern Baptist Church on June 5. People were offered gift cards for turning in firearms.

KRISTIAN CARREON

SAN DIEGO

FROM B1 isting operations and grandfather them against changes to district boundaries."

Gina Austin, one of the leading attorneys for the local cannabis industry, said San Diego should follow the lead of other cities like Chula Vista, where dispensaries remain assigned to the district they were in when they received approval to open.

"That would be an easy solution for the city," Austin said.

The industry leaders said it's important for the city to solve the problem before the redistricting process is complete, which is expected in early 2022. District boundaries are redrawn every 10 years based on new census data.

The cap of four dispensaries per district was added to the city legislation in 2014 so that no individual district would face significantly more impact than others from the legalization of cannabis dispensaries.

In a recent opinion, Elliott said businesses with conditional-use permits have many legal rights, but expiration dates carry a lot of weight.

"If the permittee has incurred substantial expense and acted in reliance on the permit, the permittee has acquired a vested property right in the permit and is entitled to the protections of due process before the permit may be revoked," she wrote.

"It is unlikely, however, that this vested right to operate pursuant to an approved (conditional-use permit) carries beyond the expiration date in the CUP," she wrote. "Where a CUP has been granted and includes an expiration provision, the courts have determined that the permittee has agreed to be bound by the terms of the permit, including the expiration, and there is no implicit understanding that the permit would be renewed."

The three districts that have reached the cap are Dis-

trict 2, District 6 and District 8, so there will be a problem if redrawn boundary lines shift an additional approved dispensary into one of those districts.

Based on Elliott's opinion, it appears the city would renew the permits of the first four dispensaries in that district whose permits expire, leaving the dispensary that is unlucky enough to have its permit expire last as the one whose permit gets revoked.

The problem may extend beyond the three districts that have already reached the cap. Three dispensaries have been approved in both District 1 and District 7, with a fourth dispensary nearing final approval in each. And a third dispensary just received final approval last week in District 9.

Industry leaders also lobbied Friday for the city to consider creating a cannabis business improvement district, where dispensaries would tax themselves to raise money to fight the black market of illegal cannabis delivery services.

Rath said the goal would be to use the money to increase consumer awareness of legal facilities and to drive consumers out of the "perilous" black market.

The economic development committee unanimously approved creation of the business improvement district last November, but city staff have not followed through.

Mayor Todd Gloria's staff said Friday they have focused instead on efforts to create a citywide cannabis equity program, which would help low-income people and minorities break into the lucrative-but-expensive industry.

"That has been our priority, and that's kind of what we've directed staff to work on at this point," said Matt Yagyagan, Gloria's deputy director of policy.

Councilmember Chris Cate said the city can create an equity program and a business improvement district simultaneously.

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