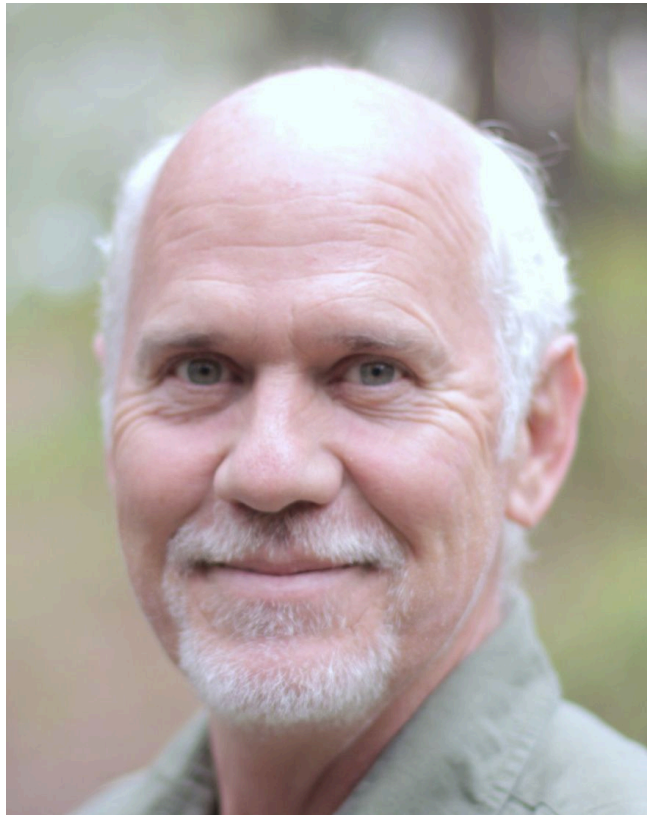

In My View: Course correction achieved

November 6, 2023



Any sea captain can tell you that on a voyage sometimes a course correction is necessary. If the easiest route will lead you into a rocky shoal, then it is best to reconsider your present course.

This is what the Board of Supervisors did at their October 24 meeting. After failing to decide an important issue at a prior meeting, they listened to the public and County staff. They learned and corrected their course.

Free Vaccine Program

The Bridge Access Program was “created to allow providers to continue to offer COVID 19 vaccinations to those who are 19 years or older and are uninsured” according to a Board Report from Ranell Brown, Director of Health and Human Services for Del Norte County.

Director Brown recommended that the Board of Supervisors approve participation in this program which will provide vaccines on request, at no cost to the patient or the county. It is estimated that there are about 2,200 county resident who are uninsured. This program provides them the choice to have free vaccines.

This request was scheduled on the consent calendar at the September 26 Board of Supervisors meeting. Normally this would have been adopted with about 17 other routine items by a single vote. However, Supervisor Dean Wilson requested that this decision be pulled off the consent calendar for separate discussion.

What the Hell?

When Supervisor Starkey made the motion to approve the program, she did not get a second to allow a vote. As they say the motion died for lack of a second. These are the basic facts as I understand them.

For more details I will pull quotes from a story in the Wild Rivers Outpost (9/26/23), “Del Norte Supervisors Deny Free COVID-19 Vaccines for the Uninsured; Motion to Participate In Bridge Access Program Dies.”

“Supervisor Wilson stated, without offering evidence, that he disapproved of continuing utilization of an experimental that has been proven to be ineffective as far as prevention.”

“It is by definition not a vaccine, though they call it that. There are and have been shown effective methods for treatment without having these shots being given and also with additional adverse reactions that have been noted and documented and proven from these shots. (They) have no purpose or benefit.”

Action Alert!

I was not at this meeting but was alerted by a concerned citizen about this inexplicable lack of action. She organized others and at the October 10 Board of supervisors meeting 11 people spoke during the public comment period asking the Board to reconsider this issue.

Supervisor Starkey pursued possible ways for this issue to be brought back in front of the Board, but at this meeting due to procedural rules this topic could not be discussed or voted on again. And yet she persisted. Eventually Supervisor Starkey and the Board Chair agreed this could be brought back under strict conditions.

In consultation with the County Counsel, it was determined that this issue could be reconsidered if 2/3 of the members agreed to suspend the rules. This meant that four out of five Supervisors must first vote to suspend the rules before there could be any further discussion of the vaccine program.

People Showed Up

The vote to reconsider approval of this vaccine program was scheduled at the October 24 Board of Supervisors meeting. Several organizations and a handful of strong community leaders helped spread the word and mobilize people to come to this meeting to show support for this program.

Nearly 40 people showed up. Thirteen citizens testified in support of the Bridge Access Program. One observed that Supervisors should not put their personal opinions over fact-based public policy. One person stated clearly that even though he was not vaccinated, he supported giving other people that choice.

A woman who is immunocompromised reminded us that encouraging vaccinations helps protect the most vulnerable. Removing cost as a barrier will make it more possible that more people can choose to get

vaccinated. This is good for all of us. This is good public policy.

Miracles Do Happen!

After hearing public comment, the Chair invited a “Motion to Reconsider.” Chris Howard made the motion, and it was seconded by Wilson and Borges. To my surprise it was a unanimous vote. I thought it was long shot, but five out of five voted to bring this vaccine program back on the agenda for discussion and a possible vote.

This is when the Supervisors went to work. They had a chance to ask questions and seek clarifications from County staff. It was verified that if the County chose not to participate in this program to provide free vaccines, the County would then have to buy vaccines with other funds for an estimated cost of \$17,000.

Allowing more time to consider this decision and hearing the polite but persistent support from the members of the public, convinced the Supervisors to vote to approve participation with the Bridge Access Program. Supervisors Borges, Howard, Short and Starkey voted yes. Supervisor Wilson voted no.

It Gives Me Hope

Sometimes elected officials act as if they know everything, and this leaves little room to consider additional information. The best ones will listen to their staff and comments from members of the public. Successful organizations foster an open process where people can know what is going on and provide feedback.

Occasionally our elected officials make a mistake. When this happens, we should give them a chance to acknowledge their error, reconsider and change course. However, some individuals who would rather run the ship of state against the rocks. Fortunately for us, this is still a small minority in our county.

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