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One week without masks



KATHERINE BUTLER / THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

Bars on the Square were packed the first weekend after Gov. Tate Reeves and the Oxford Board of Aldermen lifted mask and capacity mandates.

COVID-19 case rate remains stagnant in Oxford

HADLEY HITSON
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On March 2, Gov. Tate Reeves and the Oxford Board of Aldermen decided to eliminate all mask mandates and lower COVID-19 capacity limits. At 5 p.m. on the following day, people could officially enter some businesses maskless, gather in larger groups and attend sporting events at greater capacity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say symptoms of the virus may appear between 2-14 days after exposure, but now, just

over a week after the mandate removal, local COVID-19 cases have not jumped in the way that some community members expected.

The state as a whole has seen an average of 388 new cases per day since the mask mandates were lifted, which is an 8% increase compared to two weeks ago, according to data from The New York Times. Meanwhile, the city of Oxford reported 37 new cases since March 3, which is a 28.8% decrease from the week before, according to data from the

SEE STAGNANT PAGE 3

Despite no restrictions, some businesses require masks

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Though Gov. Tate Reeves and the Board of Aldermen have lifted the mask mandates in Mississippi and Oxford, some local businesses are still requiring customers to wear masks.

Several stores and restaurants posted statements on social media explaining to their customers that they will still be requiring masks to be worn. These businesses

include Ajax Diner, Oxford Canteen, End of All Music, Big Bad Breakfast, City Grocery, Chicory Market and Cicada.

Chicory Market posted on Instagram that they will continue to require masks and limit the capacity for their market to keep staff and customers safe.

"We are a small family business that has managed, through much ingenuity and hard work, to stay open and

SEE RESTRICTIONS PAGE 2

Housing insecurity becomes urgent

UM report finds increase in Oxford housing costs

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A newly released report from the Housing Insecurity Lab and LOU-HOME, Inc. sheds light on the urgent need for affordable housing in the LOU community. The report, titled "Housing Insecurity in Lafayette County, Mississippi: An Affordability Crisis," says there's been a 29% increase in the housing wage over the past decade.

According to other findings in the report, the housing wage required for a two-bedroom home in Lafayette County is \$17.35 per hour. A worker earning the minimum wage in Lafayette County would need to work more than 80 hours per week — the equivalent of two full-time jobs — to afford a one-bedroom rental unit at fair market price.

"The data is clear: rising rents have far outpaced low-wage workers' earnings, resulting in a housing climate in which even modest housing units are out of reach for a large share of our county's residents," the report states.

SEE HOUSING PAGE 12

Campus vaccination begins

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Vaccines will be available on campus beginning Friday, March 12, to people who work on campus, according to an email from Provost Noel Wilkin. Currently, only the Pfizer vaccine is available and only those who meet Mississippi State Department of Health guidelines on who can receive the

vaccine will be eligible to be vaccinated on campus.

On-campus vaccinations are only available to people who work at the university at this time, including student workers and those who work in Aramark locations on campus.

"If you have not already received a vaccine, and are not scheduled to receive a vaccine at another location, we strongly encourage all

workers on campus (faculty, staff, graduate students and undergraduate student workers) who meet the criteria (from MSDH) to sign up for an appointment to get vaccinated," Wilkin said.

Vaccines will be available at the Tad Smith Coliseum starting on Friday, and appointments are

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FILE PHOTO: KATHERINE BUTLER / THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

RESTRICTIONS

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COVID-free, and we want to protect this place for all in our community, whether or not they are eligible for a vaccine," the post read.

Gretchen Williams, the owner of Heartbreak Coffee and Uptown Coffee, is requiring people to wear masks to the coffee shops. Williams said she believes it's too soon to go back to full capacity with no mask mandate.

"Luckily, some of my staff has already had both of their vaccinations, and the majority of them have already had their first. I want to give them the opportunity to get vaccinated first," Williams said. "Once that happens, then we'll think about opening up for dine-in and letting customers come in without masks."

Along with requiring masks, Williams said she does have some extra precautions set in place at both Uptown and Heartbreak Coffee.

"For the past year, we have had plexiglass that we've installed in Uptown. So we do have that barrier over there. We don't have that here at Heartbreak," Williams said. "But we're lucky to have a drive thru over here (at Heartbreak). We're encouraging people who don't want to wear a mask to use the drive thru. That gives us a little bit more space."

David Shaw, the owner and general manager of Sneed's Ace Hardware Store, said that he's requiring masks because the majority of his staff, including himself, haven't been able to get the vaccine yet.

"For the most part, it works out pretty well. Most people

understand, and we had people who appreciated it," Shaw said.

Leighton McCool, the owner of Lost Dog Coffee, enforced wearing masks from the very beginning of the pandemic, and her business was even among the first to shut down last March when the pandemic began.

"To me, the mask is about saving people's lives, like my dad," McCool said. "I'm just grateful that my dad hasn't had it. He's double vaccinated now, so I feel better, but that's who I worried about more than anyone."

Lyn Roberts, the manager of Square Books, said that because the pandemic is still going, she is following the recommendations made by scientists, community health providers, state health providers and the health department to continue wearing masks.

"Until our entire staff is vaccinated -- which they are not -- and the majority of people are vaccinated, I think we have to continue wearing them," Roberts said.

Roberts said that while she is not a scientific expert, she knows that there's still a lot that is unknown about the coronavirus, such as whether people that have received the vaccine can transmit the coronavirus. She said her priority is to keep the employees and Oxford community safe in Square Books.

While some businesses are requiring customers to wear their masks, Lee Harris, owner of Funky's Pizza and Daiquiri Bar, is letting customers make their own decision on whether to wear their mask or not.

"My staff voted that they wanted to keep wearing them," Harris said. "We're



PHOTOS: KATHERINE BUTLER / THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

Following Gov. Tate Reeves's decision to lift the mask mandates on March 3, many local businesses have returned to operating the same way they did before the pandemic.

letting the people decide what they want to do. If (someone) wants to come in and wear a mask, feel free to. (If someone) decides to come in and not wear a mask, that's fine."

Harris said that while he is allowing customers to make their own decisions on wheth-



er or not to wear a mask, he is still going to be taking safety precautions.

"While cases are going down, it still is an issue. The virus didn't just disappear," Harris said.



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Shelter on track to shut down

KATE KIMBERLIN
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At the annual Mississippi Critterz board meeting, Janice Antonow, the Oxford city liaison for the shelter, announced that the shelter is on track to shut down. This announcement came after questions from local attendees who could not be identified on Zoom because no attendees had their cameras on and few used their real names.

“We don’t have any specific plans for the shelter, and we are on the path to close down,” Antonow said.

According to a director’s report compiled by Mississippi Critterz president Aynslee Smith, the shelter still has

11 cats and 65 dogs, and all transports are still on schedule. After several questions came from community members, Smith initially refused to release any of the names of their distribution partners.

“I can’t say who, due to the relationship we have with our transport partners,” Smith said.

After questions about how the cats are housed in the shelter, as well as the two cat colonies that the executive board owns. Antonow disclosed that Kitty City out of Memphis is a transport partner used by the shelter.

Tamara Austin, the board’s vice president, also announced that she will step down from her position.

“She has been a true asset and a great example of stepping in when needed,” Smith said.

Treasurer Natascha Scott said the shelter’s biggest financial concerns are medical expenses and payroll for staff. A large part of the budget also recently went toward a new van for the shelter.

“Everything else is pretty sturdy,” Scott said.

The shelter is actively looking for volunteers, and Smith encouraged anyone who “has experience” to volunteer at the shelter or foster an animal.

“If everyone would contribute their knowledge, we would love for y’all to step up and become a foster,” Smith said.



PHOTO COURTESY: MISSISSIPPI CRITTERZ VIA FACEBOOK

VACCINATIONS continued from page 1

available on Friday and Saturday of this week and Tuesday and Thursday of next week.

Vaccinations will take place inside the coliseum, which has been set up for potential distribution for over a month. Patients will receive a parking pass and paperwork to bring to their appointment via email beforehand. Social distancing and masks are required inside the facility, and patients must wait at least 15 minutes before leaving after receiving their dose in case of an allergic reaction.

According to the Food and Drug Administration, there is a remote chance that people could develop severe allergic reactions such as difficulty breathing, swelling of the face and throat, rash or dizziness from the Moderna vaccine while the Centers of Disease Control reported that 21 people developed anaphylaxis after the first 1.8



FILE PHOTO: KATHERINE BUTLER / THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

The Tad C. Smith Coliseum has been prepared to receive shipments of the coronavirus vaccine for weeks, and vaccine administration will begin on campus on Friday, March 12.

million doses of Pfizer vaccine had been administered in January. Initially, the only available brand of vaccine available on campus will be Pfizer.

Administrators have encouraged university community members who are apprehensive about both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccine that they are safe. Dr. Hubert

Spears, a staff physician at the Employee Health Center, said the COVID-19 vaccine is the best and the safest vaccine he has ever seen.

In a panel on vaccination last month, Dr. Lauren Bloodworth, a clinical associate professor of pharmacy practice, said the university is set up to administer around 400-500 vaccines per day. Pharmacists and pharmacy students under supervision will administer the vaccines on campus.

The university’s Vaccine Distribution and Administration Task Force has had students trained and prepared to administer vaccines on campus for months while they waited for the first shipment to arrive. Pharmacy students have also been signing up for potential shifts to volunteer at the Tad Smith Coliseum since Feb. 8.

As of this week, 799,782 vaccinations have been administered in Mississippi and while only 293,379 people have been fully vaccinated in the state. In Lafayette County, 19,478 people have been vaccinated.

STAGNANT continued from page 1

city’s website; however, March 9 and 10 are not included in the data.

The university’s Oxford campus cases have also remained relatively idle. Since March 3, the university’s COVID-19 dashboard reported nine new cases among university community members. During the week prior, from Feb. 23 to March 2, the dashboard reported 14 new cases.

As a whole, the university reports 14 active confirmed cases, 11 of which are students, two are staff and one is a faculty member.

Still, UM continues to maintain mask requirements in all campus buildings, including residence halls.

“Our community has done a tremendous job of adopting and adhering to our university protocols to limit spread of the virus, and those protocols continue to work effectively,” Chancellor Glenn Boyce wrote in an email on March 3, following the city of Oxford’s decision to not require masks.

Visit Oxford, the city’s tourism office, took to social media to remind the community that state and national health officials continue to recommend masks and social distancing. The office did so shortly before the removal of mask requirements went into effect.

“Businesses will make their own decisions regarding masks and spacing. We ask you to please respect those decisions,” Visit Oxford tweeted.

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State Senate approves teacher pay raise

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The Mississippi Senate passed House Bill 852 last week, offering a \$1,000 raise to all teachers and rewarding new teachers with \$1,100 “in an effort to make jobs more attractive.”

“We will not play politics with our teachers’ future,” David Blount, vice chairman of the Senate Democratic Caucus, said in a tweet on Tuesday. “We are acting in unified, bipartisan support of our teachers.”

Many people in Mississippi believe the bill is a step in the right direction for the state.

Blake Adams, program coordinator for the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP), said that the increase in pay is long overdue. He also said that the pay structure is not properly designed to encourage students to enter the teaching profession and stay in the state.

“We know we have some extremely great teachers and talent here, and we need to reduce the export of that talent and increasing teacher pay also increases the import of talent,” Adams said.

Adams believes that the state should work to bring in more educators from outside of Mississippi, but he also believes it is important to incentivize Mississippi natives to stay and teach here because they “know and look like Mississippi.”

Mississippi has some of the lowest teacher salaries in the United States. According to the Southern Regional Education Board, the annual starting salary for teachers in Mississippi is a little over

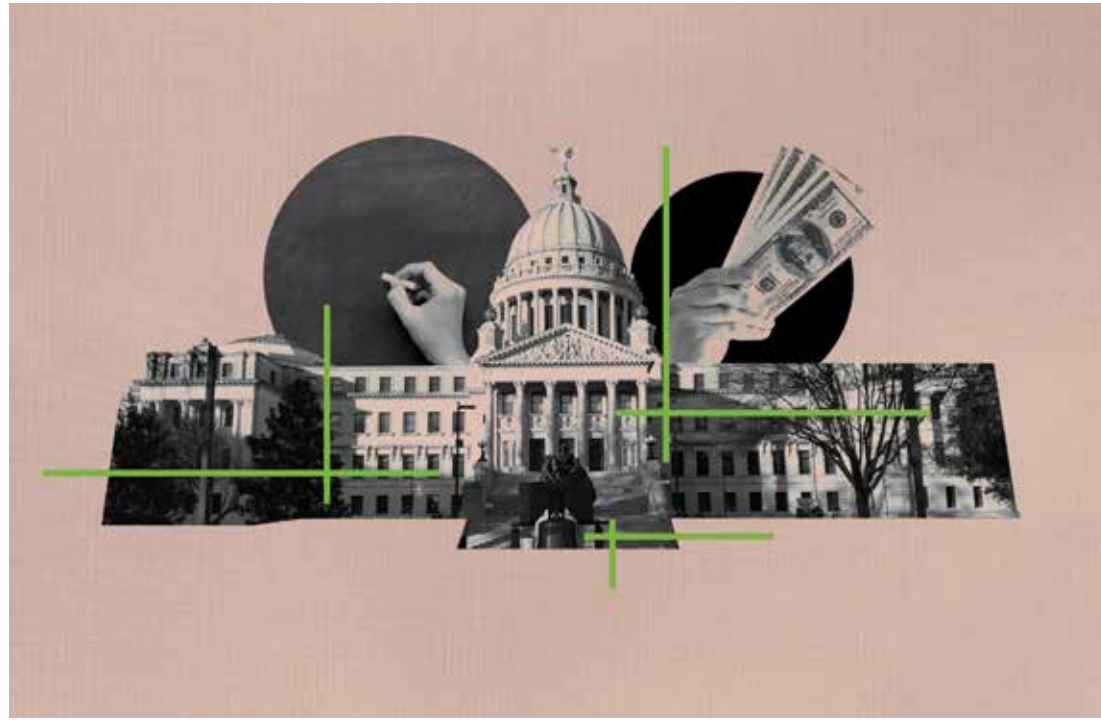


ILLUSTRATION: KATHERINE BUTLER / THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

\$35,000. However, the take-home pay is about \$25,500.

During his election campaign in 2019, now-Gov. Tate Reeves presented a four-year plan to increase teacher salaries.

“We do know that there’s not a teacher in the state that makes what they are worth,” Reeves said during a press conference in 2019. “As governor, I want you to know that I’ll support our teachers.”

Reeves proposed a \$4,200 increase to teacher salaries over the course of four years. In the first year, the salary would increase by \$1,500; \$1,000 in the second year; \$1,000 in the third year and \$800 in the fourth year. He also proposed increasing state spending from \$12 million to \$24 million for classroom supplies.

Reeves said he would like to pay teachers in Mississippi

the Southeastern average rate, which is just over \$47,000. He also said that he would sign any teacher pay raise bills that legislators pass.

Reeves’s full proposed plan has not been approved.

According to Mississippi Today, 54 school districts and charter schools in the state are experiencing a teacher shortage, largely caused by the low salaries that the schools are offering.

A teacher shortage is declared when a school district has 60 or more teaching positions and 10% of those are not appropriately licensed, which includes teachers teaching out of their fields, teachers teaching with no certification and long-term substitute teachers.

According to a study conducted by Mississippi First, educator preparation programs in the state experienced a 32% decrease from

the 2013-14 school year to the 2017-18 school year. The out-of-state pipeline for teachers declined by 96% during those four years.

Mississippi teachers also earn \$6,000 less than teachers in neighboring states and over \$20,000 less than the average Mississippian with a bachelor’s degree, according to Mississippi First.

Azurrea Curry, a freshman education major, believes that increasing the pay for teachers is an important step in encouraging teachers to stay in the state.

“Teaching in Mississippi can be a hard task. A lot of times, people tell you not to teach at all, and certainly not in Mississippi,” Curry said. “Increasing the pay is sort of an incentive for some (people), and it could be the deciding factor between staying and leaving.”

Curry is a part of METP, and she plans to stay in the state after graduation.

METP is a collaboration between the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University to attract top-performing students through scholarships and experiences. The program trains secondary English, mathematics and science teachers and elementary and special education teachers. As a member of the program, students commit to teaching for five years in a Mississippi public school after graduation.

Although the state is working to increase wages for teachers, some people do not believe the pay is increasing enough.

One Twitter user, Chris Wright, called the increase “a slap in the face to hard-working teachers.”

“Good teachers will continue leaving as long as Mississippi continues to not care about paying their teachers what they are worth,” he wrote.

Adams, the METP coordinator, believes that pay impacts the perception of the teaching profession, which gives parents, peers and society the “fuel” to push students away from the profession as a whole.

“We should pay teachers on the same range as what a nurse, other health care professional, or a frontline worker gets paid because if we didn’t have teachers, we wouldn’t have engineers, nurses, doctors or lawyers,” Adams said. “(Teaching) is the cornerstone of our foundation, and we should treat it as such.”

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How a stepfather and stepson grew a local delivery service

KATE KIMBERLIN
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With the rise in popularity of nationally franchised food delivery apps, it can be difficult for local delivery services to get off the ground. The high barrier to market entry didn't stop deYampert "Brame" Garner and his stepfather Kent Breckenridge from successfully launching Fetcht, the local delivery service.

Since 2018, Breckenridge said that being local has benefited businesses financially in times of need — such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when citizens of Oxford could not support local restaurants in person.

"We're here to help those restaurants. We're here to be a resource," Breckenridge said.

Garner, a junior accountancy major, expressed to Breckenridge that he wanted to start a business and begin working for himself when he was a senior in high school. Through discussions in various parts of the Oxford community, Breckenridge discovered that there was a need for a delivery service that catered to local restaurants.

"There were a lot of older folks that wanted something that could deliver food to them," Breckenridge said.

After getting input from locals, Garner and Breckenridge tailored their business model to serve within counties instead of just within city limits, like larger delivery platforms that typically geofence their restaurants.

"I felt like it was a void in the market and something that was going to grow for quite

some time," Breckenridge said.

Fetcht began operation in nearby Panola County in order to test the service out before expanding to other counties. Now, Fetcht delivers from most restaurants in the Oxford area and can be delivered throughout Lafayette County.

Many restaurants local to Oxford have faced adversity due to the pandemic and have not had the opportunity to get connected to national delivery services. Fetcht was able to change that.

"When there's a change in the market, we're poised to mobilize. We were able to roll out an entire take out option on our website when everyone had to move to curbside pickup," Breckenridge said.

While Breckenridge and Garner have been business



PHOTO COURTESY: FETCHT

Kent Breckenridge delivers food to Oxford community members with his delivery service Fetcht.

partners for two years now, both of them will admit that it hasn't been easy.

"The business has strained our relationship at times, but I value his relationship over the business so we try our best to uphold that," Garner said.

While they will admit their faults when it comes to

working with one another, Garner said he learned a lot between his time at the university and working with his stepfather.

"He has owned a few businesses in the past, so between that and getting an accounting degree has taught me a ton," Garner said.

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COLUMN

How Rebel baseball handled Alcorn State

RUBY DRAAYER

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No. 3 Ole Miss baseball was able to dominate Alcorn State in an 11-1 victory on Tuesday night. The Rebels are now 2-0 all-time against the Bravehawks. The Rebels are also on a six-game winning streak. The team won every single game last week against the Memphis Tigers, one midweek match-up against the Jackson State Tigers and the first weekend series sweep of the season against the Belmont Bruins.

Last year's game against Alcorn State ended in extra innings, after the teams tied 8-8 going into the 10th inning. The last game against the Bravehawks ended with a score of 9-8, with the Rebels coming out on top. However, this year Alcorn State didn't put up as much of a fight.

Freshman pitcher Josh Mallitz had his first career start for the Rebels. The Florida native had a career day after six strikeouts in only four innings pitched. Following Mallitz, freshmen Luke Baker

and Cody Adcock, junior Brandon Johnson and sophomore Wes Burton came in to pitch for an inning each. Every pitcher struck out at least two batters, combining for 14 total strikeouts in eight innings.

While the pitchers remained dominant for the entire game, Ole Miss offensively struggled for the first few innings. Senior pitcher Tim Elko continued to showcase his National and SEC Player of the Week accolades after going 2-for-3 with three RBI's. If you're keeping track, that's 17 in the senior's last six games.

Sophomore Hayden Dunhurst has forgotten what it is like to get out. The Mississippi native was walked four times, and he hit by a pitch to round the bases three times. Meanwhile, senior Hayden Leatherwood was also able to have a great night, going 2-for-3 and adding an RBI. After Tuesday's game, junior Justin Bench leads the SEC in hit-by-pitches this season with a total of six.

Ole Miss baseball will now look to keep its win streak going as they take on the University of

Louisiana at Monroe Warhawks this weekend.

The ULM Warhawks are 5-4 on the season and will be coming off a 10-3 loss to Louisiana Tech at home. ULM has a range of capable hitters on their roster and could be a problem for whoever will be on the mound this weekend. In order to come out with another series win, the Rebels will need to make sure that they are on top of things.

On the other side of the ball, Ole Miss will rely heavily on short-stop Jacob Gonzalez to continue to make big plays. Overall, the pitching has done a great job of limiting hits, but because of the hitting capabilities of ULM, there will be very little room for errors. Through 13 games of this season, Ole Miss has a combined 11 errors on the team.

Head coach Mike Bianco announced on Tuesday night that ace pitcher Doug Nikhazy will not pitch this weekend due to a chest strain. It looks like a minor injury, but he will be reevaluated in a few days. In his place will be junior Gunnar Hogle and



HANNAH GRACE BIGGS / THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

The Rebels won against Alcorn State on Tuesday, March 9. Ole Miss will play in another series this weekend against ULM.

sophomores Drew McDaniel and Derek Diamond to start each day of the series. The average earned run average (ERA) for these three pitchers sits at 3.53.

This series will air on the SEC Network and will start at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, March 12 and 1:30 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, March 13-14.

ANALYSIS

Rebels travel to Kentucky for weekend series

RUBY DRAAYER

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Ole Miss volleyball will look to improve its overall season record traveling to Kentucky to take on the Wildcats on March 12. The Rebels sit with an overall record of 1-15. Their first and only win of the season against the Louisiana State University Tigers on Feb. 28 with a score of 3-2.

This season has been difficult for the volleyball team as they have had to take on a full SEC schedule, unable to gain a single win until late in the season. Kentucky will be no different. The Wildcats are undefeated so far this season and have only lost three sets since spring play began. During this past week, Kentucky's star setter Madison Lilley was named SEC Player of the Week, and Kentucky outside hitter Alli Stumler was named SEC Offensive Player of the Week.

The Wildcats recently beat LSU 3-0 on March 5-6 — a match where outside hitters Avery Skinner and Stumler tallied 15 kills each against the Tigers. Sophomore Azhani Tealer also contributed to the win with a career-high



PHOTO COURTESY: OLE MISS ATHLETICS

The Rebels lost their most recent game to South Carolina on March 6 and are hoping to improve their 1-15 season record in the upcoming game against Kentucky.

of nine blocks. The Rebels must control the Wildcats' ability to defend during their matchup, as the Wildcats kept LSU's team hits to

a .149.

The Rebels have been off to a rough start after losing 15 games of their last 16. After a hard-

fought, five-set match against LSU, the Rebels were able to finally break that losing streak. In their previous matches against

South Carolina, the Rebels were close to bringing home another win, but they were unable to close out the sets.

Sophomore Anna Bair has recorded eight matches with 10 or more kills and successfully stepped into a leadership role for this Rebel team. The Missouri native had a fantastic series against South Carolina, tallying 15 kills and three blocks. Other impressive players include freshmen Samantha Schnitta, Sasha Ratliff and GG Carvacho.

Schnitta tallied nine kills and two aces, as well as one block during the game against the Gamecocks. Ratliff and Carvacho both added seven kills each. Unfortunately, the effort still wasn't enough to defeat the Gamecocks in the Rebels' final home game of the season.

To continue the season, Ole Miss will take on the Wildcats on March 6-7 in Lexington, Kentucky. The series marks the second to last series of the season, with the Rebels expected to play against the Georgia Bulldogs at the end of March. The matches are set for 6 p.m. on Friday and 4 p.m. on Saturday.



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Athletes collect water for Jackson

WILL CARPENTER
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This past weekend, Ole Miss Athletics held its “Pack the Truck” event where donors dropped off cases of bottled water for Jackson residents who have been without running water for over three weeks.

Jackson’s water crisis began during the record-breaking winter storm that hit Mississippi in mid February, causing up to 100 water mains to burst. At least 40,000 Jackson residents have been without water for nearly three weeks.

According to CNN, city officials are reporting that they are seeing progress in solving the situation, and at least 70% of the damages have been repaired. As of Monday, city officials said that water pressure has been restored to 95% of the city, but around 5,000 Jackson residents are still

without water. City leaders said that they’ll need roughly \$2 billion to replace their entire water and sewage system.

Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann said in a Mississippi Today article that when it comes to financially supporting Jackson, all options are on the table. This includes several bills that are pending in the legislature, and possibly sending some of Mississippi’s \$1.9 trillion stimulus package that Congress is expected to pass this week.

“I’ve lived in Jackson more than 50 years. More than half my life has been spent here,” Hosemann told Mississippi Today. “I’ve spent a lot of time trying to make it better, and I want to make it better now. There’s a water crisis, and we want to help. Where we can help them with the funding, I want to do that. Jackson is the capital of Mississippi. It deserves to be supported as such.”



PHOTO COURTESY: OLE MISS ATHLETICS

On March 5-7, Ole Miss student athletes collected cases of water to send to Jackson, where the recent winter storms have left thousands of residents without water.

Ole Miss football players and other student athletes loaded the trucks — typically used for transporting football equipment to away games— from 3 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Friday, noon to 5 p.m. on Saturday and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sunday. The event also encouraged UM community members to make monetary donations to the Mississippi Food Network.

Rebel linebacker Momo Sanogo is one Ole Miss athlete who showed his support for the cause on social media, posting pictures of volunteers working the drive and encouraging people to come out and donate in his tweets.

“Last day to pack the truck! Share with your friends and let’s make today count! #HottyToddy,” Sonogo said in a tweet on Sunday.

Ben Craddock, a former football player at Ole Miss and Jackson resident, responded to Sanogo’s tweet, as well as the original tweet by Ole Miss Athletics promoting the event.

“Thank you @OleMissAF bc so many in our city need this so bad. This is one of many reasons I love my school @OleMiss #ServingOthersInNeed #HugeDifferenceMaker,” Craddock said in a tweet.

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Rifle lands No. 2 seed

KELBY ZENDEJAS
thedmsports@gmail.com

No Mississippi team has ever won a Division I championship in any sport, but the Ole Miss rifle team is currently positioned to be the team that could change Ole Miss Athletics history. Earlier this month, the all-women rifle team earned a spot in the NCAA Championships for the first time in 15 years, and this week, the team is headed to Ohio to compete.

The Rebels rank No. 2 nationally in NCAA rankings and currently hold an 11-1 overall record.

After the Great America Rifle Conference (GARC) Championship, eight members of the team earned a total of 16 honors, break-

ing the program's record and earning the second-most among the nine members of the conference.

Head coach Marsha Beasley garnered GARC Coach of the Year, while assistant coach JP Lucas earned Assistant Coach of the Year for the second year in a row.

Freshman Lea Horvath has paved her way in Ole Miss rifle history, grasping smallbore, air rifle and aggregate first-team honors. She also earned GARC Rookie of the Year. Meanwhile, sophomore Kristen Derting earned three honors, one as the second-team smallbore (583.71) and one as the second-team aggregate (1176.86). Derting also earned an honorable

mention for air rifle.

In addition to Horvath and Derting, junior Erin Walsh earned a second-team smallbore honor with her average score of 583.17. The Delaware native also earned an honorable mention in the combined average score category as well. The next honor went to senior Abby Buesseler, who managed to earn an honorable mention in smallbore and was also named Ole Miss rifle's Scholar-Athlete of the Year.

The Rebels finished the GARC Championship in fourth place overall and second place in air rifle. Key leaders in this match included Horvath, who placed sixth in air rifle (597), and Gratz, who shot a 592.



PHOTO COURTESY: OLE MISS ATHLETICS

The Ole Miss rifle team currently sits at No. 2 and has the chance to be the first Mississippi team to win a Division I championship.

As a whole, the team finished with a score of 2,370 in air rifle. The Rebels had a total score of 4,689, placing them behind teams such as West Virginia (4,689) and Army

(4,692). The NCAA Rifle Championship starts on Friday, March 12 and will last until Saturday, March 13 in Columbus, Ohio.

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Track and field earns entries to championships

KELBY ZENDEJAS

thedmsports@gmail.com

After an outstanding performance at the SEC Indoor Tournament where the Ole Miss track and field men's team placed at fourth overall and the women's team at seventh place, the NCAA Indoor Championships will welcome 10 entries from the Rebels to compete this week. The teams garnered seven male entries and three female entries.

For the men's competition, distance runner Mario Garcia Romo qualified for the men's 3K and distance running medley alongside Waleed Suliman, who will also compete in the men's mile and 3K. The other medley runners will be Everett Smulders and Marcus Dropik.

Jumper Allen Gordon qualified for both the men's high jump and long jump, while distance runner Baylor Franklin will take on the 800-meter race.

For the women, weight throwers Jasmine Mitchell and Shey Taiwo qualified for the women's weight throwing competition, while distance runners Loral Winn, Toni Glatz, Sintayehu Vissa and Maddie King qualified for the medley race.



PHOTO COUTESTY: OLE MISS ATHLETICS

Waleed Suliman leads the pack at the NCAA East tournament in 2019.

The Rebels landed rankings for the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association (USTFCCCA) on Monday with the men at No. 11 and the women at No. 17 for the Pre-Championship Indoor Rating Index poll. The Rebels will enter the NCAA tournament within the top-25 teams.

This marks the 36th time for both teams in the polls since 2008.

In addition to the recent team rankings, associate head coach Ryan Vanhoy was named USTFCCCA South Region Men's Assistant Coach of the Year on March 4. This marked his eighth consecutive year at Ole Miss and sixth

year as associate head coach for Rebels distance programs. The coach has won the honor four times after winning the indoor seasons for men in 2016 and 2017.

Vanhoy's team won six SEC medals and set two SEC meet records in their stint at the SEC Tournament on Feb. 25-27.

In its last tournament, the Rebels won several SEC titles, as the team gathered 12 titles throughout the duration of the SEC Indoor Championship. These medals include twice gold medalist Garcia Romo in the men's 3K and distance medley, twice gold medalist Suliman in the men's mile and distance medley, silver medalist John Rivera Jr. in the men's 800 meter and two-time title winner Smulders with a gold medal in the distance medley and bronze medal in the men's mile.

Other winners include Dropik who earned a gold medal in the men's distance medley race, freshman Cole Bullock with a gold medal in the men's 5K, and Gordon with a tied bronze medal in the men's high jump.

Meanwhile, the women garnered two medalists in the women's weight throw competition, as All-American weight throwers Mitchell and Taiwo earned a gold medal and silver medal, respectively.

The SEC competition will begin on March 11 and will last until March 13, with all three days being all-day events in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Fans will be able to watch the action on ESPN.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Rebels secure No. 6 spot in SEC Tournament

KELBY ZENDEJAS

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Ole Miss basketball picked up two home wins last week against Kentucky and Vanderbilt, placing the Rebels in the sixth seed for the upcoming SEC Tournament. The Rebels will face off against the No. 11 South Carolina Gamecocks at Bridgestone Arena in Nashville, Tenn., on Thursday.

"We took off Sunday, and we had great energy yesterday," head coach Kermit Davis said in a press conference on Tuesday. "It does take some consistency to win 7 out of 9. That's saying something. It shows the league anybody can beat anybody in this league."

Heading to Nashville, the Rebels hold a 10-8 conference record and an overall record of 15-10. For the eighth time in the past ten years, the Rebels placed above the media's preseason polls, as the SEC Preseason Media Poll said Ole Miss would finish in ninth place in the league. The Rebels proved the polls wrong, as the team won seven out of the nine final games on the schedule.

Senior guard Devontae Shuler also received an SEC honor this week, First-Team All-SEC honoree. This makes the guard the 16th Rebel



KATHERINE BUTLER / THE DAILY MISSISSIPPIAN

Devontae Shuler passes the ball to KJ Buffen around Kentucky defenders. The Rebels won against Kentucky 70-62 on March 2.

guard to earn the accolade in 15 years and also the third honoree since Kermit Davis became head coach. This also marks the first time Shuler has received the honor.

"It's a great feeling," Shuler said in a press conference on Tuesday. "I thank God for the people at Ole Miss who

have pushed me. I continue to thank these guys. Mostly, I want to thank God for it."

During the regular season, Shuler led the team in scoring with 15.6 points per game and assists with 3.3 average points per game. The senior also ranks ninth in steals with 1.5 steals per game, landing in

the top-10 in those categories alongside Vanderbilt's Scotty Pippen Jr. Shuler also recorded eight 20-point games this season and has helped the team be in consideration for the NCAA berth after winning seven of their past nine games.

Shuler ranks third in ca-

reer steals with 180, eighth in career three-pointers with 176, tenth in career assists with 321 and 21st in career points with 1,297 in the Ole Miss record books.

"That's the first time he's been on a postseason SEC team of any kind," Davis said. "So deserving. Great teammate. He was excited, and I was excited for him. It was very well-deserved."

The game against South Carolina will be the ultimate test for the Rebels, as the last time the two teams faced off was on Feb. 13 when the Rebels won 81-74. Shuler recorded 31 points and seven rebounds. Ole Miss also leads in the all-time record against South Carolina 22-20 but falls 5-4 against the Gamecocks in SEC Tournament meetings. The Gamecocks narrowly won 85-84 during the 2018 tournament.

The game between South Carolina and Ole Miss will be played last out of the four games that day, as it's set to start 25 minutes after the game versus No. 7 Missouri and No. 10 Georgia. No. 3 LSU will be the opponent for the winner of the Rebels' game.

Tipoff against the Gamecocks is set for 8 p.m. on Thursday in Nashville.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Angie Thomas opens Oxford Conference for the Book

WILL CARPENTER

thedmfeatures@gmail.com

Square Books kicked off the 2021 Oxford Conference for the Book on Monday night with a conversation between Mississippi-raised authors Angie Thomas and Kiese Laymon. They discussed Thomas's new novel "Concrete Roses," her literary inspirations and her hopes for young Black writers.

Thomas received critical acclaim for her 2017 young adult novel "The Hate U Give," the story of a 16-year-old Black girl named Starr Carter who witnesses the death of her childhood friend at the hands of police brutality. The novel's film adaptation released to even stronger popularity, so Thomas spent time reflecting on before and after the novel's boom in pop culture.

"Had you told me 15 years ago — when I was in Georgetown trying to rap that one day — the First Lady of the United States is going to say she just bought (my



PHOTO COURTESY: OXFORD CONFERENCE FOR THE BOOK

book and is reading it, I would have been like, 'Get out of here,'" Thomas said.

Her new book "Concrete Ros-

es" released in January and serves as a prequel to "The Hate U Give," telling the story of Starr Carter's father Maverick. Thomas and

Laymon discussed the main character's unique name.

The name "Maverick" was inspired by her favorite novel "Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry" by Mildred D. Taylor. When crafting the main character, Thomas said she sought inspiration from the way J.K. Rowling characterized so deeply in her Harry Potter novels.

One of Thomas's biggest influences, however, is rapper Tupac Shakur, on whom Maverick is loosely based.

"(Shakur) opened my eyes to the power of storytelling, the power of words and the power of us," Thomas said. "The love he showed to Black people through his art is contagious. I'm so appreciative to that brother, and I hope that my books honor him, specifically 'Concrete Rose.'"

Part of the difficulty in portraying a character like Maverick was capturing male sensitivity, Thomas said. In particular, she struggled with deciding on whether she would show the main character crying.

To make the decision, she "immersed herself" in works by Mississippi author Kwame Alexander and Laymon to make sure she represented Black men fairly in her story, as it was a goal of hers to not give a stereotypical portrayal of a Black father.

"I immersed myself in books by Black men, so that I wouldn't jump into this thinking I knew it all," Thomas said. "I think the best thing a writer can ever do is be humble. Be humble enough to be wrong."

To prove a point, Laymon and Thomas even joked about trying to name more than one movie where a Black man cries. It is these kinds of stereotypes that Thomas said she is trying to change with her character, as people like Maverick are not uncommon in America.

When working with such difficult topics, Thomas said young readers are what keeps her motivated as a writer.

"What gets me going, keeps me going, is thinking about being at things like the Mississippi Book Festival, having Black girls and Black boys tell me, 'I don't read nobody's books but yours. You're dope,'" Thomas said.

Acting as a role model for the younger generation is important to Thomas. As a resident of Jackson, she wants to remain present in the community to interact with the youth and serve as a reminder that their goals are achievable.

Some of this drive comes from her experience in the creative writing program at Belhaven University, a private Christian university in Jackson. Out of 100 students in the program, only four were from Jackson, and Thomas was the only Black student. This led Thomas to ask what could have caused a university in the capital of Mississippi to yield such a relatively small number of Black writers representing the city.

For her next project, Thomas plans to focus a new novel with a fantasy element on a 12-year-old boy growing up in Jackson.

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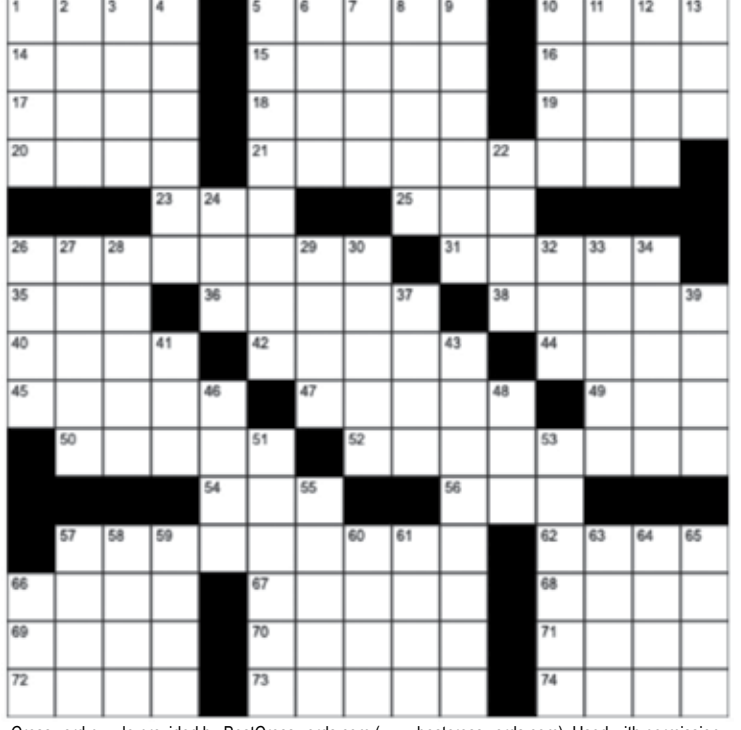
ACROSS

- 1- Balkan native;
- 5- Arose;
- 10- Against;
- 14- Bhutan's continent;
- 15- Dry as ___;
- 16- Mindy of "The Facts of Life";
- 17- ___ Crunch;
- 18- Tooth;
- 19- Brain wave;
- 20- Egyptian canal;
- 21- Confined to the berth;
- 23- Hole-punching tool;
- 25- East Lansing sch.;
- 26- Bliss;
- 31- "The Planets" composer;
- 35- Drs.' group;
- 36- Twisted expression?;
- 38- Grain stores;
- 40- Cincinnati club;
- 42- Where Columbus was born;
- 44- Fit to be tried;
- 45- 1957 hit for the Bobbettes;
- 47- Blank look;
- 49- Compass dir.;
- 50- Long;
- 52- Put in order;
- 54- New Jersey cager;
- 56- Galena, e.g.;
- 57- No problem!;
- 62- Apians;
- 66- Actress Hatcher;
- 67- Scarpia's killer;
- 68- Military group;
- 69- Like Death Valley;
- 70- Prufrock's creator;
- 71- Unaccompanied;
- 72- Cheek;
- 73- Slow on the uptake;
- 74- Helper. Abbr.;

SOLUTION TO 3.4.21 PUZZLE



- 27- Abrasive mineral;
- 28- Big dipper;
- 29- Driving aids;
- 30- Gossipmonger;
- 32- Fleur-de-___;
- 33- Jargon;
- 34- 1,000 kilograms;
- 37- Laugh heartily;
- 39- Highly ranked competitor in sporting events;
- 41- Neptune's realm;
- 43- Ascribe;
- 46- Sea eagle;
- 48- Musical gift;
- 51- Took home;
- 53- Interstellar cloud;
- 55- Fulcrum for an oar;
- 57- Lab fluids;
- 58- "Topaz" author;
- 59- Disencumbers;
- 60- The doctor ___;
- 61- Sgts., e.g.;
- 63- Slaughter in Cooperstown;
- 64- Half of zwei;
- 65- Leave in, to an editor;
- 66- Univ. aides;



Crossword puzzle provided by BestCrosswords.com (www.bestcrosswords.com). Used with permission.

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6	7	1	5			3	4	
	4	5			8	1	9	2
		9						
		4		7				
1			8	3				6

HOW TO PLAY

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 with no repeats.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL CHALLENGING

6	7	9	3	8	4	2	1	5
1	2	5	9	7	6	4	3	8
4	3	8	5	1	2	9	6	7
2	9	1	8	6	7	5	4	3
7	5	9	4	3	1	8	2	6
8	4	3	2	6	5	1	7	9
9	6	2	7	4	8	3	5	1
6	9	1	6	3	2	9	8	4
3	8	4	1	5	6	7	9	2

OPINION

GUEST COLUMN

Mississippi's anti-trans bill violates university values

ASB LEADERS

thedmopinion@gmail.com

Mississippi Senate Bill 2536, the anti-transgender bill aimed at banning trans athletes from participating in women's sports, passed last week. The fact that we even have to be releasing this op-ed just days after International Women's Day is a disappointing reality that sometimes comes with living in this state. As a refresher, it passed through the Mississippi House of Representatives 82-28, and the Mississippi Senate 34-9.

This Senate bill, quite frankly, is dangerous. It perpetuates unsubstantiated claims of athletic advantage that have continued to be refuted, cultivates an environment that actively encourages students to either

stand with or stand against trans students and openly introduces us to potential sanctions from the NCAA. How something so problematic managed to make it through state legislature is embarrassing and serves as another demoralizing reminder of the work that still needs to be done across this state.

It also doesn't help that so many disenfranchised communities in our state continue to be disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and poor infrastructure. The state government, surprisingly, has the time to push through legislation like this instead of protecting the public health of citizens, providing COVID-19 economic relief or supporting Jackson leadership with the water crisis.

As elected student leaders and members of this UM community, standing up for our students in the face of blatant discrimination is a necessity. It's easy to label this issue as unimportant or too controversial to have an opinion. There are likely many out there who agree with the principles that went into the bill's creation. This isn't meant to serve as an attack on individual thought, but instead, this is an appeal to humanity.

All of us every day are challenged to live by the UM Creed and "believe in respect for the dignity of each person."

When state legislation is so openly hostile and imbued with prejudice as this Senate bill, we have to be the very best of ourselves and rally together behind our shared university bonds. Whether or not you know a

trans athlete, and regardless of how you feel personally about the idea of trans athletes competing in women's sports, we can't sit back idly and watch discriminatory legislation be passed and enacted. That sets a dangerous precedent and will always set us back, not guide us forward.

The Associated Student Body will always stand with our underrepresented and minority students across campus, including those that identify as a part of the LGBTQ community. We encourage and celebrate the positive diversity of the LGBTQ communities and assist in the education of all of our student body. Most importantly, we will never waiver in fighting for the safety of our students and their experiences.

Austin Newcomb is the ASB Director of LGBTQ+ outreach and a senior majoring integrated marketing communications from Corinth.

Morgan Atkins is the 2021-2022 ASB President and is a junior majoring in public policy leadership from Olive Branch.

Anna Hall is the ASB Co-Director of External Affairs and is a senior majoring in public policy leadership and journalism from Franklin, Tenn.

Joshua Mannery is the 2020-2021 ASB President and is a senior majoring in political science from Jackson.

Masks off means freedom to make dangerous decisions

JOHN HYDRISKO

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Over the course of the pandemic, Mississippi's response has proven below average at best and abysmal at worst. As of publication, Mississippi is 45th in testing and 35th in vaccinations. Adjusted for population, Mississippi remains 15th in cases and 5th in deaths.

On March 2, forty-three Mississippians died of coronavirus. The same day, Gov. Tate Reeves signed an executive order that rolled back the bulk of Mississippi's coronavirus protocols, and the Board of Aldermen voted to lift Oxford's mask mandate, which had been in place for almost a year. In a matter of hours, the state and the city forfeited their stakes in public health and passed that responsibility to individuals and businesses.

The reasons for these decisions haven't been all that reasonable. Officials — including Reeves and Oxford Mayor Robyn Tannehill — have argued that we don't need mask mandates because vaccines are available. Still, a vaccine

doesn't affect transmission until it's in someone's arm. Just over 9% of Mississippians have been fully vaccinated.

The same officials have argued that we don't need mask mandates because the rate of hospitalization is lower than it has been, but a low rate of hospitalization is dependent on public health measures, like mask mandates.

After signing Executive Order 1549, Reeves told the press: "The governor's office is getting out of the business of telling people what they can and cannot do." If Reeves's business isn't to tell people what they can and cannot do, then I'm not entirely sure what his business is.

Do not mistake this dereliction of duty for libertarianism. Even the smallest of small governments have mandates to limit one person's freedom when it endangers another person's freedom. My right to swing my fist ends where your nose begins. My right to spew virus-laden spittle should end at the supermarket's sliding doors.

Of course, Gov. Reeves,

Mayor Tannehill and the rest would prefer that I don't make a hot zone of the produce section. Indeed, they request that I show some restraint. After all, they're sensible policymakers. They just feel uncomfortable with the burden of making sensible policy.

It's not too surprising that Mississippi or Oxford loosened coronavirus protocols. If we know anything about America, it's that Americans have a high tolerance for preventable death. It's shocking, however, that our leaders dropped these protocols so totally and so suddenly.

They could have raised capacity limits without removing the mask mandate. They could have removed the mask mandate in non-essential businesses without removing the mask mandate in essential businesses. They could have, in any number of ways, protected people from disease and death at the low cost of some foggy eyeglasses and a few itchy noses. Nonetheless, they were either unable or unwilling to act with so much as a taste of nuance.

This nation has always asked its citizens to make great sacrifices. We expect that someone will rush into our burning homes. We hope that someone will teach our children what we cannot. We have handed people ration books and draft cards. To these people, we are rightly grateful.

Through all this, Americans have wondered if our capacity for sacrifice is limitless. What hardship is too great for us to endure? At long last, it seems we have found an answer: facemasks and plexiglass.

With those few common-sense rules in place, there were things we could not do. We could not gather in large crowds. We could not go out

with our faces bare. Even with people following these protocols, thousands of people died from the virus.

Now, those rules are gone, and we have our freedom back. Now, we can pack ourselves into a bar. Now, we can breathe freely in a convenience store. People will die, but not only from the virus. They will die from our own petulance. Now, after much delay, we get to kill each other.

John Hydrisko is a senior English, philosophy and history major from Philadelphia, Penn..

Opinion Policies:

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HOUSING

continued from page 1

Last semester, the Housing Insecurity Lab — a University of Mississippi undergraduate seminar taught by associate professor of sociology James Thomas — conducted a study on housing in Oxford. The pandemic limited the lab's access to primary data, which prompted the group to partner with LOU-HOME, Inc. to analyze publicly available data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"Our report shows that the need for affordable housing in Oxford is severe and has only increased over time," Thomas said. "Through this report and future reports, we hope to better inform community conversations on affordable housing and steer those conversations toward concrete solutions."

Thomas said the report will hopefully empower Oxford community members to make stronger collective demands from their elected leaders.

"If you go out into our community and ask our community, 'What are our biggest problems or challenges that

we face?' Affordable housing is going to come up overwhelmingly as the number one problem," Thomas said.

Although the need for affordable housing in Oxford is being described as a growing crisis, Thomas said he has noticed a lack of urgency surrounding the problem within local government.

"A lot of the initiatives at the local government here in Oxford and Lafayette County have privileged the voices of the developers, and at the expense of people who live here and struggle to find and afford quality housing," Thomas said.

LOU-HOME, Inc., a non-profit organization founded in

2006, operates on the mission of increasing the availability and access to affordable housing and home ownership in the Lafayette-Oxford-University community. Thomas said it is the leading organization in the community to resolve the housing security crisis, but government help is needed.

"One of the most im-

mediate things we need in our community is a housing trust fund, a dedicated stream of public dollars that would go toward subsidizing affordable housing," Thomas said.

Afton Thomas, associate director for programs at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, is running to represent Ward II on the Oxford Board of Alderman. One of her campaign focuses is affordable housing.

"I hope everyone reads (the report), including our local leadership, but it's also your civic duty and responsibility to think outside yourself," Afton Thomas said. "I think as a community, we do that. I think that our local leadership needs to also now do their part."

Thomas said she would like to hear the aldermen and the county supervisors discuss a housing trust fund, which has helped other communities recently. She also said that the housing crisis cannot be solved without discussing wages.

"We can lead by example. We can raise our wage floor, and that can only help alleviate some of that pressure on people to have affordable housing," Thomas said.



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