

VACCINES

Pandemic a lesson in need to protect personal freedom

President Biden declared the “pandemic is over” during a softball interview Sunday on “60 Minutes.” While that news was reportedly a surprise to his health officials, we have ridden out an unprecedented storm.

Over the course of the pandemic, over 95.6 million cases were reported, with 1.05 million deaths amid lockdowns, masking and social isolation affecting the length and breadth of the country.

Throughout, we saw countless gestures of kindness. As Americans banded together in solidarity, our nation’s first responders and health care providers were no longer taken for granted but rather celebrated. It looked like Amer-



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icans would unite in the face of a shared enemy.

It took our government to make a dire situation untenable.

Freedom of religion is a cornerstone of America. The Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts in

search of a place where they might freely profess their religion without fear of reprisal. It’s a freedom so fundamental that our Founding Fathers made it the very first clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Never in our 246-year history had such a basic human right been so flagrantly disregarded as it was during the COVID pandemic.

President Biden, as well as political leaders on local and national levels, enacted

vaccination mandates following the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. These measures make vaccination compulsory for many jobs in the public and private sector.

There’s no problem with getting a shot if one chooses. The problem is when individuals are forced to vaccinate because the government says so.

Many private sector workers were laid off because they refused to comply with the order from their employers. The Supreme Court’s decision to suspend the enforcement of the Biden administration’s sweeping vaccine-or-test mandates for major private firms provided some solace. Those working in the public sector, unfortunately, did not enjoy the same reprieve. First responders, who were previously hailed

as heroes, were now zeros who lost their jobs. In Massachusetts, Gov. Charlie Baker fired 300 state troopers, while Boston Mayor Michelle Wu sought to fire police and firefighters, only to be stopped by an appeals court ruling against Wu’s ruling. Many of those who rejected vaccination cited genuine religious exemptions, which were quickly dismissed.

Religious exemptions have become the enemy No. 1, particularly among certain Massachusetts legislators. State Rep. Andres X. Vargas, D-Haverhill, introduced H2411, which would have eliminated the religious exemption for vaccination for school-aged children, even though only around 1% of Massachusetts families now utilize it. Attempts to pass S1517 and H2271, An Act Pro-

moting Community Immunity, were also made by Vargas and State Sen. Rebecca Rausch, D-Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex. This measure would make it possible for any doctor to vaccinate a minor without the knowledge or approval of the parents; would allow any private day care, preschool, school or school-affiliated extra-curricular activity (“covered program”) to require additional vaccinations outside of those approved by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health; would allow any covered program to refuse the religious exemption for vaccination; and would require that DPH accept all medical exemptions.

These proposed pieces of legislation never saw the light of day due to the protest, advocacy and lobbying of Health Choice 4 Action

MA, a group of parents that pushed for parental health choice for children. Vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans campaigned in Massachusetts and across the country against vaccination mandates that violated religious freedom. The battle was won in many instances, but in others it still rages on. Without a vigorous defense, we risk seeing our most basic liberties erode.

Long after the pandemic is over and COVID recedes, we will not forget the grievous assaults on Americans’ rights.

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