Liberty versus Lockdowns

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Citing the Bill of Rights and the *“ideals of civil disobedience,”* the owner of Atilis Gym in Bellmawr, New Jersey, defied Governor Phil Murphy’s orders by reopening on Monday. Cops *“formally”* notified the gym owner he was in violation of the shutdown order and then wished him *“a good day.”* The crowd cheered.

Civil disobedience is alive and well, even in this pandemic. Americans are not sheep.

Last week, a Texas judge told salon owner Shelley Luther if she disagreed with Dallas’s lockdown rules, she should *“hire a lawyer”* and sue. Sorry, but most working people can’t afford that. They protest instead, just like Rosa Parks did half a century ago, when she refused to stay in the back of the bus.

Lawyering has a place, though. In many states, business groups, churches and state representatives are suing to overturn what they claim are freedom-stifling rules imposed by autocratic governors. On Monday, an Oregon county judge struck down Governor Kate Brown’s coronavirus restrictions, making them *“null and void.”* The judge said the governor’s emergency powers should last only a month, and after that, she needs legislative approval. Brown is appealing.

Last week, a Wisconsin court struck down Governor Tony Evers’ *“safer at home”* regimen, when Evers tried to extend it until the end of May. The court said 28 days of emergency powers is enough.

Expect a similar outcome in Michigan, where Governor Gretchen Whitmer is being sued by the state legislature. Whitmer, according to a Detroit News editorial, *“declared herself the sole and absolute power in Michigan.”*

Although Whitmer is a Democrat, and the legislature mostly Republican, this isn’t mere partisan wrangling. Lawmakers offered to compromise on lockdown rules, and she refused. At stake is *“whether Michigan remains a representative democracy even in times of crisis,”* the Detroit News editors warn.

Also at stake is earning a living. Karl Manke, a barber who reopened his shop in Owosso, Michigan, two weeks ago, has been wearing a mask, washing his hands between customers and sanitizing his tools with UV light. He’s taking safety seriously.

Yet he’s been slammed with criminal misdemeanor charges.

Manke wonders why, if it’s safe to walk down the aisles in Walmart, it isn’t safe in his barber shop. Why are big-box stores *“essential businesses,”* and not the little guys?

The owner of Atilis Gym in New Jersey makes the same argument. *“Anything that Walmart can do,”* with hundreds of customers a day, small businesses can do as safely.

The longer lockdowns drag on, the dumber rules get. Mayor Bill De Blasio announced Monday beaches will be closed and anyone who dares swim will *“be taken right out of the water.”* Huh? Scientific evidence shows that being outside is low risk and swimming is undoubtedly the lowest.

Don’t count on the NYPD to drag swimmers out. Across the nation, cops have displayed common sense and sympathy for their neighbors. Four sheriffs departments in Michigan have announced they’re refusing to enforce Whitmer’s orders. *“With limited resources,”* said Shiawassee County’s sheriff, *“our priority focus will be on enforcing duly passed laws.”*

Those are beautiful words, especially coming from law enforcement. Even in this health crisis, when safety is paramount, Americans are standing up for the principles of self-government and personal liberty. They know that freedoms are rarely lost in easy times. They’re instead snatched away under the guise of an emergency.

The scientific evidence pouring in about the coronavirus shows how arbitrary some lockdown rules are, especially ones targeting the young and healthy. A miniscule 1.8% of coronavirus deaths in New York City are otherwise healthy people under age 65.

Governors and mayors in New York and across the country have been calling the shots. Why should we have confidence in them? Truth is, most of them failed miserably to protect the vulnerable. A staggering 51% of coronavirus deaths in the entire country are nursing home residents. Ordering people to shut their businesses and stay home didn’t save these victims. They were already stay-ins.

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