



Written by [Peter Rykowski](#) on November 5, 2021

Published in the November 22, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 22

---

## States Push Back Against COVID Technocracy

When COVID-19 was unleashed upon the United States in early 2020, many state and local governments quickly imposed a wide range of tyrannical restrictions on the American people. These included lockdowns, limits on public gatherings, business and church closures, and mask mandates. These restrictions were driven primarily by state governors, but also by state and local public-health officials, many of whom were unelected, and even Republican-controlled states were impacted. The results included widespread suppression of individual rights and significant damage to people's livelihoods.



yongtick/iStock/Getty Images Plus  
yongtick/iStock/Getty Images Plus

One year later, state legislatures across the nation are acting to ensure this does not happen again. Already, a majority of states have passed legislation in 2021 limiting the power of state and local officials to impose lockdowns, mask and vaccine mandates, and other tyrannical “public health” actions, thereby pushing back against COVID technocracy and government overreach.

According to a September report by Kaiser Health News (KHN), 26 states — more than half — enacted legislation this year limiting government public-health powers in some form. Additionally, the report found that three additional states had limited public-health powers through non-legislative means, including state supreme court rulings, executive orders, and ballot measures.

These governmental limitations came in various forms, depending on the state. The report found that 16 state legislatures limited officials' power to impose mask mandates or to quarantine citizens. Many of these legislatures also created processes allowing them to overturn such orders, even if signed by the governor. Additionally, 17 states limited, or completely prohibited, vaccine passports and mandatory vaccinations, while nine states limited or prohibited mask mandates.

KHN's report largely mirrors an earlier report, published on July 29, by Pew Charitable Trusts finding that at least 20 states had passed legislation this year limiting government public-health powers.

All told, this represents significant progress in limiting COVID tyranny. Although more work is needed, especially in “blue” states — most of the reforms happened in Republican-controlled states — and on the federal level, these actions are a big step toward the countering of COVID overreach that The John Birch Society has been calling for since the virus spread to the United States.

### State Legislatures Act

A look at some individual state actions illustrates the progress made this year in limiting government public-health powers.

In Montana, for example, the legislature passed multiple bills limiting government public-health



Written by [Peter Rykowski](#) on November 5, 2021

Published in the November 22, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 22

---

powers. One of these is H.B. 121, which significantly limits the authority of unelected local health boards. Among other reforms, it allows elected officials to change or rescind the orders of local health boards, including completely prohibiting them from taking certain actions, such as shutting down churches.

The state's legislature also passed H.B. 257, which protects businesses from local-government-imposed COVID restrictions and other forms of overreach. It also passed H.B. 702, which prohibits "vaccine passports" and is one of the strongest such laws in the country.



**More tyranny is coming:** Both in the United States and worldwide, governments are increasingly imposing vaccine mandates and passports. State legislatures can and must act immediately to put an end to this tyranny. *(Photo credit: courtneyk/iStock/GettyImagesPlus)*

Tennessee is another state where significant reform occurred. The state has six Metro Health Departments, fully comprised of unelected bureaucrats, covering the counties with the state's largest cities. Prior to and during COVID-19, the boards' orders carried the force of law and, empowered by an executive order signed by Governor Bill Lee, they took draconian actions that included unilaterally closing businesses, issuing curfews, limiting the size of public gatherings, and issuing mask mandates.

In response, the Tennessee General Assembly passed S.B. 858, which reformed the health boards to make them advisory and prohibited government entities from establishing vaccine passports. Furthermore, the General Assembly enacted H.B. 13, prohibiting government entities from mandating any of the COVID-19 vaccines. These actions marked a major pushback against government unaccountability and overreach in Tennessee.

Some states did not achieve reform easily, and even many Republican governors opposed limitations on their power or the power of unelected bureaucrats. In Indiana, the General Assembly overrode two vetoes by Republican Governor Eric Holcomb, enacting limitations on both gubernatorial and local public-health powers. Holcomb, still unwilling to accept a check on his power, is seeking to overturn the first of these laws at the Indiana Supreme Court. Legislators overrode vetoes by Republican governors of similar bills in North Dakota and Ohio.

Overall, states made significant progress in rolling back state and local "emergency" powers and ensuring a greater protection of individual freedom.



Written by [Peter Rykowski](#) on November 5, 2021

Published in the November 22, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 22

---

In other states, primarily those with Democratic governors and Republican legislatures, the pathways to reform were more unusual. For example, Pennsylvania voters limited Governor Tom Wolf's emergency powers by passing two constitutional amendments via a referendum. In Wisconsin, the state Supreme Court found that both local and gubernatorial COVID mandates violated the state constitution. Meanwhile, Republican legislators in Michigan took advantage of a unique provision in the state constitution to repeal — without Governor Gretchen Whitmer's signature — a 1945 emergency powers law.

In Kentucky, Democratic Governor Andy Beshear attempted to strike down in court three bills limiting his emergency powers that the Republican-controlled General Assembly had passed over his vetoes. These included legislation limiting the scope and length of his orders and giving the General Assembly and the state attorney general a say in such matters. In a victory for liberty, the Kentucky Supreme Court unanimously voted in August to uphold the General Assembly's authority to limit executive power.

## **Problems Remain**

Despite the progress outlined above, much more work remains to fully protect one's individual rights from tyrannical health edicts.

In Texas, legislators failed to enact meaningful limitations on Republican Governor Greg Abbott's emergency powers. In early 2020, Abbott used those powers to unilaterally order draconian COVID restrictions, notably leading to the jailing of salon owner Shelley Luther for defying his edicts. Despite it being a legislative priority in 2021, legislators failed to agree on a bill to rein in those powers. Later that year, in October, Governor Abbott formally requested that the legislature prohibit all COVID-19 vaccine mandates in the state. Once again, legislators left Austin without passing such legislation.

Even in states that passed substantive reforms, legal loopholes remain. In Florida, for example, Governor Ron DeSantis signed S.B. 2006, which banned government and business vaccine passports. However, this bill did not change a state law giving Florida's chief public-health officer — currently the state surgeon general — total power to vaccinate individuals against their will during a public-health emergency. Similar statutes still exist in other states, including Kansas, Idaho, and Massachusetts, while multiple states have statutes allowing for mandatory quarantining.

If state legislators are serious about countering COVID overreach, they should be expected to make repealing these statutes a priority for the next legislative sessions.

Now, legislators must also respond to President Joe Biden's unconstitutional vaccine mandates, which he decreed on September 9 and which would force an estimated 100 million Americans to get the COVID-19 vaccine. As of this writing, four states — Florida, Idaho, Tennessee, and Wyoming — have announced special sessions focused on combating the federal mandates. These sessions are an excellent opportunity for states to nullify the mandates in accordance with Article VI of the Constitution, which requires that only constitutional laws be enforced. State legislators would be wise to enforce the Constitution without compromising or backing down.

The special sessions also represent another opportunity to further limit the powers of public-health bureaucrats. In addition to countering the federal government's mandates, among other actions, Tennessee's session is expected to enact further limitations on the powers of the governor and local health departments.



Written by [Peter Rykowski](#) on November 5, 2021

Published in the November 22, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 22

---

## Danger of Technocracy

These state reforms are so important because they directly counter the push toward technocracy. As Patrick Wood notes in his 2018 book *Technocracy: The Hard Road to World Order*, technocracy, or a “scientific dictatorship,” is the preferred government of those pushing for a global “New World Order.” It is essentially central planning under the rule of elites and “experts,” and it disregards God-given individual rights.

Although much of the focus on technocracy is on the global level — the UN’s Agenda 2030 is an example of this — it has also been implemented domestically. The Deep State has been working toward technocracy for decades and, as Wood notes, the term itself has been prominent since the early 1930s.



**Victory for freedom:** This year, over half of U.S. states limited the powers of state and local officials, and some appointed pro-freedom individuals to public-health positions. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (pictured) has done both. (*Photo credit: AP Images*)

The implementation of sweeping “health” powers for unelected bureaucrats is one example of this. Other examples include the delegation of state election-administration powers from the legislative to executive branches, allowing for governors and unelected bureaucrats to unilaterally change election rules during COVID-19; “merit selection” systems for choosing judges, which are ideologically biased in favor of liberals; “independent” redistricting commissions; and the public-school system, which subverts parental authority and actively indoctrinates children with Marxist ideology.

Many of these “reforms,” in addition to directly violating the U.S. Constitution’s various provisions, shift power away from the American electorate and empower technocrats who disregard both the Constitution and individual God-given rights. Accordingly, they represent an existential threat to America’s status as a free, constitutional republic.

Thankfully, liberty-minded state legislators have begun to push back on all these fronts, but bolder action is needed to fully protect Americans from the threat of technocracy.

## Changing the People

In addition to legislative curtailment of totalitarian health powers, many public-health officials are being replaced. According to KHN’s report, at least 303 state and local public-health department leaders have



Written by [Peter Rykowski](#) on November 5, 2021

Published in the November 22, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 22

---

either resigned — often in disgust over their curtailed power due to the various legislative reforms — retired, or been fired.

COVID-19 has also caused many conservative leaders to pay closer attention to the quality of those whom they appoint to public-health positions. Florida’s new surgeon general, Dr. Joseph Ladapo, is a prominent example of this. Appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis in September, Dr. Ladapo is a vocal opponent of lockdowns, business and church closures, and mandates.

A signatory of the Great Barrington Declaration, Ladapo stated in September that “we need to respect human rights” and that “it’s not virtuous and it’s not right to just sort of take away those rights from individuals.” He also criticized the Deep State push for vaccinations as “almost like a religion” when “lots of good pathways to health” exist. As long as people such as Dr. Ladapo hold public-health offices, Americans can be more confident that government will protect their God-given freedoms. Governors and legislators would be wise to place their focus on filling such positions, while simultaneously advancing more structural legislative reforms.

Although much more work needs to be done, state legislators, at least in red and purple states, have made an encouraging amount of progress this year toward limiting technocracy and protecting the medical freedom of Americans.

*Peter Rykowski is a research associate for The John Birch Society, manages JBS’s legislative alerts, and is editor of the JBS Bulletin.*



Written by [Peter Rykowski](#) on November 5, 2021

Published in the November 22, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 22

## Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative, non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



[Subscribe](#)

### What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.