



Texas Gov. Greg Abbott Bans Private Businesses From Mandating Vaccines for Workers

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order on Monday banning any entity in the state—including private businesses—from requiring that workers or customers show proof of having been vaccinated against COVID-19.

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Abbott, a Republican, said in a statement that the readily available and safe vaccines were "our best defense against the virus" but added that vaccinations should "always remain voluntary and never forced." He also asked the state legislature to codify the ban on vaccine mandates into state law.

As *The Texas Tribune* notes, the new ban on vaccine mandates is a significant (and disappointing) reversal for Abbott, who had previously banned government-run entities like school districts from mandating vaccines but had taken a hands-off approach with businesses. "Private businesses don't need government running their business," an Abbott spokesperson told the *Tribune* in August.

Apparently, Abbott now thinks they do. By sticking his nose into the affairs of private businesses, Abbott is setting up a potential conflict with some of his state's biggest employers, including Southwest Airlines and American Airlines—both of which are based in Texas and recently told employees to get the shot if they want to keep their jobs. Mandatory vaccination policies should always include carveouts to cover those who have had a previous COVID-19 infection or have religious or medical reasons for not getting jabbed, of course, but those issues are better worked out between employers and employees.

Abbott's new mandate also puts some businesses in a tricky situation where they must choose between disobeying state or federal law. President Joe Biden announced last month that all businesses with more than 100 employees would be required to mandate vaccines for their workers (or conduct weekly tests), with the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) enforcing the mandate.

Biden's mandate continues to be a massive overreach of executive authority. Abbott's ban on private mandates is little different. Neither is probably all that enforceable, though every business owner in Texas will rightfully fear being held up and punished by one side or the other as an example of what happens to those who refuse to comply.

Vaccines remain by far the best strategy for saving lives and ending the pandemic. It makes sense that businesses would want their employees to be vaccinated. Those who refuse the shot should be free to do so, but they do not have a right to any particular job. None of those decisions should require the coercive efforts of state or federal officials.

FREE MINDS

The new Hulu series *Dopesick*, adapted from a 2018 book of the same title, is promoting a misleading narrative about America's overdose epidemic that blames doctors for overprescribing pain meds, writes Jeffrey A. Singer, a medical doctor and senior fellow at the Cato Institute. That misguided understanding of the crisis led state and federal policy makers to implement policies intended to reduce opioid prescribing.

Then, this happened:

Prescriptions of opioids per 100 persons have dropped nearly 50 percent since 2012. Almost simultaneously the overdose rate has surged from roughly 40,000 in 2012 to 93,000 in 2020. Meanwhile, pain patients suffer from pain and mental anguish—especially veterans—as doctors abruptly taper or deny opioids to treat their pain.

Purdue Pharma—the maker of OxyContin, and the villain in the book and Hulu series—may have been untruthful with doctors or overly aggressive in marketing, Singer says. But that's quite unrelated to the more immediate question of how to help people suffering from chronic pain or opioid addiction. For them, prohibition is clearly not working. (Disclosure: Singer is a financial supporter of Reason Foundation, the nonprofit that publishes this website.)