

ERODING FREEDOM

Closed For Our Own Good?

It was only a matter of time before we saw the backlash against the actions of the various levels of government to control the spread of COVID-19. While it is certainly not my aim to disparage the intentions of those who have had to make the difficult decisions intended to prevent further infections and deaths, the result has unfortunately brought our national economy to a screeching halt and, with it, all sense of normalcy.

As this health crisis unfolded, we began to witness the gradual erosion of liberties guaranteed to us as U.S. citizens under our Constitution. Before long, private businesses were forbidden from operating, places of worship were closed to their congregations, and people were prohibited from demonstrating on public property. There has even been serious discussion about the government tracking our every movement through our phones.

This situation reminded me of the old adage about how you boil a frog. If you gradually increase the temperature on the frog, it doesn't realize it's being boiled and doesn't jump out of the pot. Before the frog knows it, it has been boiled alive. Gradually losing our constitutionally guaranteed rights makes one better appreciate the predicament of the frog.

We were told that this situation was only temporary and needed for our own safety and security. I am further reminded of a famous quote that has been attributed to Benjamin Franklin: "Those who would give up essential liberty, to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

I have warned for a number of years in this column space that it would not take much for our government to ban motorcycling in the name of saving lives.

Most recently, I have made this argument in the context of autonomous vehicles that are allowed on our roadways yet aren't always technologically advanced enough to detect the presence of a motorcycle in their vicinity.

It wasn't all that long ago that AMA Life Member and U.S. Representative

Tim Walberg of Michigan wrote a letter to the then-director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention questioning if the CDC was attempting to reduce motorcycle ridership by pursuing a federal mandatory motorcycle helmet law. Walberg sent the

letter after reviewing a presentation made by a CDC task force empaneled to review the economic impact of a motorcycle helmet law. One part of the presentation touted the potential of a mandatory helmet law to reduce motorcycle use and thereby reduce traffic fatalities.

Now I recognize that motorcyclists have differing views regarding mandatory helmet laws. The AMA has had a long-standing position in favor of voluntary helmet use. The full AMA position statement can be found at www.americanmotorcyclist.com/voluntary-helmet-use. Even if you are in favor of a mandatory helmet law, the fact that the CDC has involved itself in the issue should concern you.

There are a variety of agencies within the U.S. Department of Transportation that have responsibility for traffic and vehicle safety, most notably, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. As its name implies, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is responsible for preventing and controlling the spread of disease. Perhaps if the CDC was more focused on this primary responsibility, rather than treating motorcycling as a disease that requires eradication,



By Rob Dingman

we would be better prepped to face the global health crisis we are now experiencing and the many economic challenges that have come with it.

As I described in last month's column, the AMA is ineligible to take advantage of the relief initiatives enacted by the U.S. Congress. To elaborate further, as a nonprofit incorporated under section 501(c)(4) of the tax code, the AMA is allowed to engage in a limited amount of political activity on behalf of our membership. This enables us to provide information to AMA members regarding government issues that may affect you.

To recap, the government has prevented us from conducting business and refused to provide our organization the same relief provided to other businesses, simply because we encourage our members to be engaged in the political process. By the way, engaging in political activity is another activity protected by our Constitution.

On a much lighter topic, the response to my March column about my project bike was remarkable. So many members wrote to me with suggestions for help, offers for parts and even an offer for a free sidecar, which I politely declined.

I was able to regenerate all of the collapsed hydraulic lash adjusters with a little heat and PB Blaster. As has been the case with the Nighthawk, whenever I get one problem fixed, I find another thing that needs attention, and the bike is still a work in progress.

I was able to find a deal on a Dnepr sidecar frame and body. When I got it, I realized that this sidecar really belonged on my BMW airhead. So now, I have two projects going at the same time and taking up space in my garage. At least these projects have given me something to do with all the time spent locked down at home.

This too shall pass and, with the ongoing vigilance of the AMA and its members, the motorcycling lifestyle will remain vibrant.

Rob Dingman, a Charter Life Member, is president and CEO of the AMA.