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# Why are politicians playing doctor?

By Ford Vox

🕒 Updated 4:21 PM ET, Mon April 20, 2015



Obamacare limits doctors' gun questions 05:09

Story highlights

*Editor's Note: Ford Vox is a physician and journalist*

Ford Vox: Florida law keeps doctors from talking gun safety with patients; Arizona law forces doctors to promote disputed abortion claim

He says doctor organizations are failing to defend medical profession against politically motivated interference by clueless lawmakers

elected to a state legislature.

Ford Vox

for them, like driving. And handling weapons. Some of those I treat suffered their injuries by bullets, typically fired by family members or themselves. Does anyone really believe I shouldn't talk about gun safety in these cases? It's a good thing I don't practice in Florida.

Florida's gun censorship law was dragged into court soon after the governor signed it, and while a three-judge appeals panel [upheld](#) the law last summer, doctors can still ask about guns while the full 11th Circuit Court of Appeals decides whether it will take up the case, a decision that could come down any day, the president of the Florida chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Dr. Tommy Schechtman, told me. He is a plaintiff in the case.



**Should doctors question kids about guns?** 00:58

*based in Atlanta. He writes frequently for CNN Opinion. [Follow him on Twitter @FordVox](#). The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.*

**(CNN)**— There are two paths to practicing medicine in America. There's the traditional, time-tested way, where new doctors graduate from medical school and then pass a series of national exams while training for years as resident physicians. Then there's the approach being forged in Florida and Arizona: getting

Lawmakers in those states are too often donning the white coats to orchestrate medical practice. In 2011, Florida enacted the Firearm Owners' Privacy Act, [which threatens](#) prosecution and loss of licensure for any physicians who dare ask their patients about gun ownership and gun safety. Guns are a scientifically uncontested health risk. [Asking about them](#) is standard practice in pediatrics and psychiatry.

I treat brain injuries, and it's part of my job to talk with patients about things that might be unsafe

In Arizona, another assault on physician free speech is scheduled to go into effect this summer. Bill 1318 [goes a step beyond](#) silencing doctors. It requires them to lie.

The bill was originally a hum-drum [attempt to block health plans from covering abortion services](#), a common state and federal strategy. But legislators slid in a last-minute [provision mandating that physicians who prescribe the abortion pill RU-486 tell patients the pill is](#)

PLAY VIDEO ↘ [reversible.](#)

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That's the opinion of a particular San Diego doctor who says this can be done through risky, large doses of progesterone. But the doctor hasn't proven his case, and his regimen is not recommended by the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) or the [Food and Drug Administration](#).

Any doctor is certainly within his or her rights to review the limited information available about the San Diego regimen and decide whether to discuss it with patients, but actually requiring physicians to make claims most believe to be untrue and unsafe means the legislators are overstepping their bounds and interfering with the patient-doctor relationship.



### The NRA, guns and health care 03:27

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I cannot imagine anyone attempting to put words into the mouth of a lawyer privately consulting with a client. Why are physicians putting up with a professional assault the American Bar Association would never permit?

Dr. Ilana Addis, chairwoman of the Arizona chapter of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, told me the amendment was added shortly before she was scheduled to testify about the bill before the Arizona House. While Planned Parenthood and the ACLU joined her organization in criticizing the provision, the bill passed both chambers and was [recently](#)

[signed by the governor.](#)

There's a common relationship shared by these laws, beyond turning doctors into government spokespeople. These laws capitalize on controversial issues to divide and conquer. Physicians don't all share the same opinions on abortion and guns any more than they all vote Republican or Democrat. This is part of the reason the key state physicians' associations aren't taking the lead in battling these laws.

The battle is left to the specialties most affected. In Florida, that's the state's chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, since pediatricians are most likely to ask about guns in the home. In Arizona, it's the state chapter of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists carrying the torch for physician free speech.

The Florida Medical Association didn't provide me with details about whether it has a lobbying effort against the gun law, and the Arizona Medical Association told me in a statement that "ArMA's policy is to take no position on abortion."

Representing physicians as a whole, the state medical associations have the most political clout in statehouses. The Massachusetts Medical



## School to rip abortion page out of books 01:25

PLAY VIDEO ↘

Society (MSS) tried to utilize that power recently when it [decided to dedicate "Doctor's Day"](#) to the issue of physician free speech, highlighting the threat posed by Florida's gun law in particular. Members are concerned about the precedent being set. Arkansas [enacted a law similar to Arizona just days later](#).

The American Medical Association can do more. It did file a friend-of-the-court [brief](#) as part of the Florida legal challenge, but at this writing hasn't weighed in on Arizona. The AMA [didn't sign on](#) to a statement released last week by the Coalition to Protect the Patient-Provider Relationship that hits hard on the new abortion laws as an affront to good medical care. Its huge lobbying operations are tied up in Washington, while states are the main battleground over the integrity of medical practice.

Now that the AMA has won the age-old ["doc fix" battle](#), ending automatic Medicare payment cuts to doctors, perhaps it will consider assigning [some of its \\$18 million lobbying team](#) to stand in for lackluster state affiliates who've abdicated their responsibility to vigorously defend the medical profession.

We have a Surgeon General now, Vivek Murthy, and he is [on a national listening tour](#) while he prepares to announce his areas of policy focus on April 22, Jonathan Beeton, a Health and Human Services spokesman told me. I hope Murthy will see beyond the bluster of abortion and gun politics and zero in on a key issue affecting public health -- free and unfettered communication between patients and doctors.

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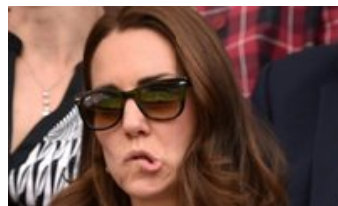
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**Lizaeth** 6 hours ago

Politicians are in the business for MONEY. Most of the time they own stock in insurance companies and/or health care companies and of course they do not care about the citizens. Money is bringing this nation down as low as it can go. Now if you want a politician in your pocket all you have to do is donate millions to their election fund and the sky is the limit. That is OK?? Americans are we sick of this yet? The man with the most money wins!

[Flag](#) [Share](#)[Like](#)**SKATE1** 4 days ago

Why not? They work hard to let corporations play doctor everyday.

[Flag](#) [Share](#)[Like](#)**JImR978** 4 days ago

From the American Academy of Pediatrics:

In 2012, the Academy reaffirmed its commitment to advocating for the strongest possible firearm regulations. The absence of guns in homes and communities is the most reliable and effective measure to prevent firearm-related injuries in children and adolescents. The AAP supports a number of specific measures to reduce the destructive effects of guns in the lives of children and adolescents, including the regulation of the manufacture, sale, purchase, ownership, and use of firearms; a ban assault weapons; and expanded regulations of handguns for civilian use. To prevent gun-related death and injuries, the AAP recommends that pediatricians provide firearm safety counseling to patients and their parents.

[https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/state-advocacy/documents/firearms\\_slr.pdf](https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/state-advocacy/documents/firearms_slr.pdf)

Perhaps the author can tell us why it is that the AAP has used their professional status to make public pronouncements on a political issue? And then perhaps he can explain why they are using the questioning of their patients in an attempt to advance that agenda.

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**hammer48** 4 days ago

I see that cnn didn't like my post being the first one so they deleted it. So I will post it again. I would ask Dr. Vox what makes you think you are a gun safety expert. All I see is a left wing Doctor trying to push his views on others.

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**curiousernow** 3 days ago

@hammer48 You are taking the wrong message from this. By a wide margin, having a gun in a household that contains children seriously increases the risk of a child being injured if not killed by that very gun. That happens way more than the gun actually being used in legit self-defense. And for the record, he's arguing for a more libertarian approach. You can argue for the gun rights of the immature or mentally impaired/unstable if you want.

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**JImR978** 5 days ago

"The Massachusetts Medical Society (MSS) tried to utilize that power recently when it [decided to dedicate "Doctor's Day"](#) to the issue of physician free speech, highlighting the threat posed by Florida's gun law in particular. "

Interesting. So how does that fit in with your complaints about politicians involving themselves in medical care? Let's see what the President of that same MMS had to say about what the medical profession in the wake of the Newtown shootings:

"As always, we must focus on the safety of our patients, children and communities. But we need to do more than that; it's time for us to speak out. As part of our action, I have asked that the MMS focus on three areas:

- Gun control – We need to emphasize that this is a public health issue, not just a matter of civil liberty
- Mental health – What should we do to ensure that those who need care get it?
- Education – How do we educate medical personnel to respond to such incidents?"

So why are medical professionals playing politicians? Why is he encouraging doctors to get involved in the gun control debate and hiding behind the "public health" claims? You don't want politicians involved in your business? That's fine. Stay out of their's.

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**JimR978** 5 days ago

"Why are politicians playing doctor?"

Really? Why are doctors playing firearms safety instructor?

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**Hollywoodeed** 5 days ago

I'll give up my bodily autonomy, most personal decisions and Constitutional rights to the government right after you give up your guns.

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**JSBmith** 4 days ago

[@Hollywoodeed](#) It's happening in Virginia. Mark Herring is having citizens falsely arrested or put in mental institutes to make sure they can't take a biochip off their bodies. It allows law enforcement to see what you see, hear what you hear and know your thoughts. It also enables 24/7 torture. Law enforcement will gang rape and sodomize women to keep them from coming forward. Dr.'s like Lawrence Chang, Dean Franklin, Tamara Green, Mark Clark, Gary Shawnik, Elizabeth Cooper, William Ervin, Sean Flannery, are making millions pretending to be invested in the brain initiative. Emergency Rooms are being bribed with \$2 million dollars to participate. In addition, CSB's are being rewarded with \$5 for every \$1 dollar the state will contribute. Tyranny is in the works and so is genocide. The BioInitiative Report of 2014 suggests that from 10 to 50% will develop cancer or disease from the non-ionizing

radiation. It is really the worst state in the nation. Judges like Arenda L. Wright Allen and Thomas E. Miller are complicit. It is heinous, atrocious torture and Virginia leads the nation. Virginia state troopers have murdered and destroyed more lives than Al Queda on 9.11.

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