



# Surgeon General's Warning: How Politics Crippled the Nation's Doctor

By Mike Stobbe

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**Surgeon General's Warning: How Politics Crippled the Nation's Doctor** By Mike Stobbe

What does it mean to be the nation's doctor? In this engaging narrative, journalist Mike Stobbe examines the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, emphasizing that it has always been unique within the federal government in its ability to influence public health. But now, in their efforts to provide leadership in public health policy, surgeons general compete with other high-profile figures such as the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Furthermore, in an era of declining budgets, when public health departments have eliminated tens of thousands of jobs, some argue that a lower-profile and ineffective surgeon general is a waste of money. By tracing stories of how surgeons general like Luther Terry, C. Everett Koop, and Joycelyn Elders created policies and confronted controversy in response to issues like smoking, AIDS, and masturbation, Stobbe highlights how this office is key to shaping the nation's health and explains why its decline is harming our national well-being.

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## **Surgeon General's Warning: How Politics Crippled the Nation's Doctor By Mike Stobbe Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Stobbe, national medical correspondent for the Associated Press, delivers a riveting history of the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General and the 18 doctors who held the post, beginning in 1871 with General William Sherman's chief medical officer, John Woodworth. Stobbe spent seven years on this study of the nation's doctor, interviewing nearly every living surgeon general. A few of many fascinating facts: Hugh Cumming, who became surgeon general in 1920, helped abolish the shared drinking cup at public water fountains; Thomas Parran, who became surgeon general in 1936, condoned the arrest of women deemed promiscuous spreaders of venereal disease; and in 1957, surgeon general Leroy Burney issued a 660-word statement on cigarette smoking and lung cancer. Later, C. Everett Koop became a hero for taking on Big Tobacco and advocating condom use and sexual education to help Americans understand and combat AIDS. Stobbe covers the proud moments and the despicable ones (the Tuskegee experiment on black men with syphilis). He covers the rise (1871–1948), the decline (1949–80), the struggle (1981–2001), and the plummet (2002–present), sadly concluding that because politicians have taken away the chief MD's ability to be an independent speaker of truth, it may be time to shutter the Office of the Surgeon General. An outstanding resource on the history of U.S. public health. --Karen Springen

Review

"A riveting history of the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General and the 18 doctors who held the post. . . . An outstanding resource on the history of U.S. public health." -STARRED REVIEW  
(Karen Springen *Booklist* 2014-06-01)

"Remarkably enjoyable and fast-moving. . . . Eye-opening to anyone interested in American history and politics." -STARRED REVIEW  
(*Library Journal* 2014-06-01)

"A richly detailed account of the rise and fall of the United States surgeon general. . . . An important book for policymakers. Many readers will lament the declining state of a post that has contributed much to the country's health." -Kirkus (2014-06-01)

"Stobbe's skillful, engaging report is especially relevant today as the public's health continues to challenge the nation's leaders." -Publishers Weekly (2014-07-07)

"With the rare blend of a reporter's nose for a story and a scholar's fastidiousness, Stobbe chronicles the past century and a half of Surgeons General. The result is a stimulating perspective on the history of American public health." -Dave A Chokshi *The Lancet* (2014-07-05)

"Invaluable to scholars and highly engaging for general audiences. . . . Stobbe's research and portraits of the men and women who have held the post of Surgeon General are remarkable in their vividness and insights." -Jedd Beaudoin *PopMatters* (2014-10-16)

"Stobbe has written an interesting and informative book useful to both scholars and general readers. He captures well the political challenges that those working at high levels on public health issues are likely to face."

(*Health Affairs* 2014-09-14)

"The Surgeon General's Warning is an impressively detailed, eminently readable account of the creation, strengthening, and gradual decline of the office of surgeon general. . . . A journalist by trade, Stobbe's narrative is not only based on impressive research but is also very entertaining to read. He effectively brings history to life by recounting the personalities and biographical details of past surgeons general and their contributions to public health in the US. . . . Stobbe can lay claim to having written perhaps the definitive history of the subject."

(M. N. Green *Choice* 2015-02-01)

From the Inside Flap

"Mike Stobbe's history of the U.S. surgeon general is more than a grand tour of American medicine. It is a thoughtful and engaging analysis of what the surgeons general did and do while pursuing the not-always-so-straight line of advancing the public's health."—Howard Markel, M.D., Ph.D., George E. Wantz Distinguished Professor of the History of Medicine, Director at the Center for the History of Medicine at the University of Michigan, and Editor-in-Chief of *The Milbank Quarterly*

"*Surgeon General's Warning* is a fascinating, thoroughly researched historical tour of the political battlefields of U.S. public health. We watch successive surgeons general lead noble charges—or beat cowardly retreats—in struggles to marshal indifferent, embarrassed, or corrupt administrations against plagues ranging from venereal disease to tobacco and from AIDS to obesity."—Arthur Allen, author, *Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver*

"Well researched, engagingly written."—Jill Center, Senior Health Policy Analyst

## Users Review

**From reader reviews:**

**John Lyons:**

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in writing, they also doing some investigation before they write for their book. One of them is this Surgeon General's Warning: How Politics Crippled the Nation's Doctor.

**Kristen Zamora:**

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