

# *The Doctor Will Seek Your Vote Now*

Dozens of Democratic doctors are running for office in the midterms, including some spurred by opposition to Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his anti-vaccine stance.

By [Nina Agrawal](#)

Reporting from Aiken, S.C., and Philadelphia – The New York Times

- April 18, 2026

When Dr. Annie Andrews, a pediatrician, told voters gathered at the Friendship Baptist Church in Aiken, S.C., earlier this spring why she was running for the Senate, she explained that she wanted to fix the American health care system and fully fund Medicaid.

But she got the biggest cheers of all when she pledged to “lead the charge to impeach and remove R.F.K. Jr.”

Her criticisms of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has brought his brand of vaccine skepticism to the highest echelons of the federal government, struck a nerve in South Carolina, the state with the largest measles outbreak in the country.

Dr. Andrews, 45, is among more than three dozen Democratic doctors, nurses and other health professionals who have jumped into this year’s races for Congress, in what they hope will offer a chance to push back against the health policies of the Trump administration and Mr. Kennedy. Dozens more are running in down-ballot races, and a few are running for governor in Maine, Ohio and Wisconsin.

There have been indications that the White House is beginning to see vaccine skepticism as a vulnerability in the midterms: This week President Trump [selected Dr. Erica Schwartz](#), a physician who supports vaccines, as his nominee to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Mr. Kennedy [has largely stopped talking about vaccines](#) in recent weeks.

For some of the doctors running for office, like Dr. Andrews, the elevation of Mr. Kennedy to a health leadership role was the breaking point. For others, it was reductions to safety net programs like Medicaid and the decision to let federal health insurance subsidies expire. For still others, it was the Trump administration’s cuts to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Veterans Affairs, enacted to reduce federal spending and advance Mr. Trump’s policy priorities.



Dr. Andrews has accused Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the health secretary, of spreading misinformation about vaccines, which she said was directly responsible for South Carolina's recent measles outbreak and for the erosion of trust in doctors and public health officials. Credit...Sean Rayford for The New York Times

These candidates are putting health care front and center in their campaigns, often linking it to concerns about [affordability](#), an issue that [dominates voters' priorities](#).

Mr. Kennedy and his Make America Healthy Again movement, which is focused on healthy eating, removing toxins from the environment and reducing corporate influence in the food and pharmaceutical industries, helped propel Mr. Trump to victory in 2024. Andrew Nixon, a spokesman for the Department of Health and Human Services, said that in the past year, the agency has driven "historic" reforms, including overhauling food policy, lowering drug prices and investing in rural health. He added that recent surveys "make it clear that Secretary Kennedy's priorities resonate across party lines."

But support from MAHA leaders has splintered, and Mr. Kennedy's embrace of unscientific anti-vaccine theories and other policies have become a political liability.

Still, there is no guarantee these medical professionals will have an easy time winning election. Some are running against incumbents with big fund-raising advantages and strong name recognition. Many are new to politics.

There are 16 physicians currently serving in the U.S. House and four in the Senate. Most of them are Republicans. Doctors associations have historically leaned conservative,

dating back at least to the American Medical Association's opposition to the creation of Medicare in 1965.

There are signs that may be changing. "Over the last few years, scientists have been politicized," said Kristoffer Shields, director of the Eagleton Science and Politics Program at Rutgers-New Brunswick. A 2014 paper in the journal [JAMA Internal Medicine](#) found that since the 1990s, physician campaign contributions had shifted away from Republicans and toward Democratic candidates. More women have also become doctors over time, and they tend to [cluster in fields](#) that [lean Democratic](#), like pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology.

In 2018, Dr. Kim Schrier, a pediatrician from Washington State, was elected to Congress, flipping a red district blue. A nurse, Lauren Underwood, did the same in Illinois. Dr. Josh Green, an emergency room physician, was elected governor of Hawaii in 2022, and more Democratic doctors were elected to Congress in 2024.

The Democratic candidates running this year include family physicians, pediatricians, emergency room doctors and nurses.

In South Carolina, Dr. Andrews, who worked for 14 years at M.U.S.C. Children's Hospital in Charleston, is competing in a June primary and hopes in November to challenge Senator Lindsey Graham, the longtime Republican incumbent who is widely expected to win re-election.

But at the church in Aiken, she made clear that her real target was Mr. Kennedy.

"The day I decided to enter this race was the day that RFK Jr. was nominated to lead the Department of Health and Human Services," Dr. Andrews said. "He's been my professional archnemesis for decades, and any other pediatrician in this country would say the same thing."

Dr. Andrews accused Mr. Kennedy of spreading misinformation about vaccines, which she said was directly responsible for South Carolina's recent measles outbreak and for the erosion of trust in doctors and public health officials.

"We have a lot of work to do as health professionals to push back against these decades of anti-vaccine and anti-science conspiracy theories," she said.

At a meet-and-greet with community leaders at an Aiken cafe the next morning, Dr. Andrews spent several minutes talking with Dr. John Tiffany, a local pediatrician. He told her that one of every four or five families of newborns he sees now questions the vaccine schedule or asks to delay or avoid some vaccines.

Dr. Tiffany said he hadn't been involved in politics in the past. What alarmed and engaged him, he said, was the movement to expand vaccine exemptions for school-age children.

Still, he acknowledged the difficulty of Dr. Andrews's mission. "It's a gigantic mountain to climb to beat the Republican establishment," he said.

Dr. Andrews was endorsed by Emily's List, a big-money Democratic organization that boosts women who support abortion rights. The group has also endorsed Dr. Jasmeet Bains, a family physician and state lawmaker from California's Central Valley, in a congressional race against the Republican incumbent, Representative David Valadao. She was spurred to run by her anger over Mr. Valadao's vote for the 2025 bill that cut Medicaid. Mr. Valadao's campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

Two-thirds of the residents in her district — nearly half a million people — rely on Medicaid, which is among the highest shares in the country, according to an [analysis](#) by KFF, a nonprofit that conducts polling and research about health policy.

"I didn't choose this time," Dr. Bains said. "The time chose me."

Doctor-candidates around the country echoed a version of that sentiment.

Dr. Richard Pan, 60, a California pediatrician who as a state lawmaker wrote legislation to tighten vaccine exemptions and make medication like insulin more affordable, didn't think he would run for office again. But after watching Mr. Kennedy and the Trump administration upend vaccine policy and reduce health care affordability, he decided to run for Congress.

"Maybe it's time to get back in the ring," he concluded.

Col. Dr. Darren McAuley, 50, the Florida state air surgeon and a former V.A. pain management doctor, said he had not previously been involved in politics, and was looking forward to continuing to treat patients until retirement. But seeing the [effects of budget cuts](#) changed his mind.

"We were told it was being done to find fraud, waste and abuse," he said. "Really what it meant on the ground was that it became harder to provide services and health care to veterans." Wait times for new patient visits stretched longer and longer, he said. The loss of administrative staff made it harder to obtain benefits for patients' families. Dr. McAuley worried about suicides, a leading cause of death among young veterans. In July he began a bid to unseat Representative Laurel Lee, a Republican.

In Philadelphia, a staunchly Democratic city, Dr. Ala Stanford, 55, took her time before jumping into a congressional race. "I really thought about where I could have the most impact," she said.

Image



Dr. Ala Stanford, a pediatric surgeon running for Congress, greeting voters in Philadelphia last month. Credit...Rachel Wisniewski for The New York Times

Dr. Stanford, a pediatric surgeon, had become politically active during the pandemic, when she leveraged her relationships as a physician and maxed out credit cards to bring Covid-19 tests and vaccines to Philadelphia's Black residents, who were disproportionately affected. She later opened a primary care clinic in North Philadelphia.

"She went to work when she didn't have to," said Rudy Steward Jr., who had come to the Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church in March in favor of a different candidate but left leaning toward Dr. Stanford.

Emily's List on Thursday endorsed Dr. Stanford; she is in a tight three-way race ahead of the primary.

Voters have cited Dr. Stanford's health care service to the Black community as the No. 1 reason they trusted and would vote for her. Credit...Rachel Wisniewski for The New York Times

Health care professionals have certain advantages, said Dr. Shields of the science and politics program at Rutgers. "People generally trust their doctors," he said. They are also able to run as "outsiders" who have a particular expertise and passion, rather than as career politicians, he said.

But there are aspects of campaigning that may be foreign to them, like speaking to crowds and asking strangers for money — something even experienced candidates find difficult.

And then there's the politics of politics. "Sometimes you have to do things in certain ways in politics," Dr. Shields said. "You have to couch things in certain ways, or things might move more slowly than you're used to, or you have to accept political limitations."

It's a lesson Dr. Andrews learned the hard way. In 2022, she ran and lost a race for Congress — and in the fallout, her job — in part because her opponent hammered Dr. Andrews over her support, in line with medical guidelines, for gender-affirming medical care.

"What I learned from my last campaign is, I can't help you if I don't win," she said. "My job right now is to win an election in South Carolina."

It will be an uphill battle. Dr. Andrews will need to mobilize Democratic voters and persuade Republicans to cross the aisle. She has out-raised Mr. Graham in each of the last three quarters, accumulating \$6.5 million. But he has more than \$20 million in his coffers and is well-known, if not universally liked, across the state.

Regardless of what happens on Election Day, Dr. Andrews and other physicians said they hope their campaigns would spur more health care professionals to public service. "Getting political: I hope that's my legacy," Dr. Andrews said.