

America's Leaders Need Sex Ed

For those who want to regulate women's bodies, ignorance has been no obstacle.

By Lauren Kelley

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A few recent news stories have served as reminders that an awful lot of people lack even a basic understanding of the female body. And some of those people get to make and shape our laws.

There was the lawyer in Alabama who tried to justify an extreme anti-abortion bill that he helped draft [by arguing that](#) after a man and a woman have sex, “you can take her straight into a clinic and determine an egg and sperm came together.”

That's not medically possible. Even the most sensitive pregnancy test won't come back positive until an embryo is implanted in the uterus, which typically happens a week or more after fertilization. So the idea that any woman would be able to get an abortion within two weeks of fertilization — the cutoff under the Alabama bill — is preposterous.

Maybe not everyone learns the mechanics of early pregnancy in ninth-grade biology class. But it's reasonable to expect that someone trying to legislate what pregnant people can do with their bodies would have a better grasp on the matter. (He might also want to consider the logistics of sending millions of women for in-clinic pregnancy tests immediately after they have sex. But that's a story for another day.)

Then there was the member of Maine's House of Representatives who said that giving incarcerated women an adequate supply of menstrual products [would make prisons](#) akin to “country clubs.”

Beyond the questions this raises about what he thinks goes on at country clubs, it's disturbing that an adult male doesn't seem to know what tampons and pads *do*. As so many of us are intimately aware, these products are not luxury items, but rather an absolute necessity for anyone who's menstruating.

The bad news for the rest of us is that these guys are hardly alone in trying to legislate aspects of human bodies that they do not understand.

There was the lawmaker in Idaho who [asked](#) at a legislative hearing whether a woman could get a gynecological exam by swallowing a tiny camera. (No more than a dentist can do her job by looking at your feet.)

And the Texas state representative who [seemed to think](#) that abortion providers cut into women's bodies. (That's a cesarean section.)

And the *other* Texas lawmaker [who said](#) that while getting a rape kit exam, "the woman can get cleaned out" to end her pregnancy. (That's not what rape kits are for.)

And, of course, this [infamous observation from Todd Akin](#), then a Missouri congressman: "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down." (Where even to begin?)

And last month President Trump [mused](#) about Central American migrants heading to the United States: "Mothers who love their daughters give them massive amounts of birth control pills, because they know their daughters are going to be raped." (That is ... not how birth control works.)

This is without even getting into politicians' misguided notions about [comprehensive sex education](#), their insistence that [the morning-after pill](#) and [intrauterine devices](#) cause abortions and their curious views about birth control in general. ("Many of the Christian faith have said, well, that's O.K., contraception is O.K. It's not O.K.," [said Rick Santorum](#), [the former Republican senator from Pennsylvania](#), in 2011. "It's a license to do things in a sexual realm that is counter to how things are supposed to be.")

As members of the anti-abortion movement have sought increasingly extreme restrictions on the procedure — and have rolled back access to contraception and other health services — their justifications have become further removed from [science](#) and [fact](#). It would be naïve to think that giving every elected official a copy of "Our Bodies, Ourselves" would change that.

But facts do still matter. And it sure wouldn't hurt for more people in power to learn about the bodies they're trying to regulate.

Nor would it hurt for supporters of reproductive freedom to remember they're fighting a war on multiple fronts — and ignorance about women's bodies is one of them.