

***Healing Politics: A Doctor's Journey into the Heart of Our Political Epidemic*** by Abdul El-Sayed.

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Abdul El-Sayed is an epidemiologist, a son of Egyptian immigrants, and a Muslim who ran for governor of Michigan because he hoped to use the problem-solving skills of an epidemiologist to generate solutions for some of the difficulties in his state. Achieving these desires is hampered by the huge epidemic of insecurity that is facing our country. Insecurity exists because society has not provided basic services needed for everyone to live a dignified life. He writes about problems and proposes solutions in eleven areas. I have listed some of those.

## **Healthcare**

### Problems:

- During an epidemiologic transition, life expectancy increases when a society takes on the ability to control and vastly reduce the burden of infectious diseases and other causes of ill health in neighborhoods with conditions like unsafe drinking water, overcrowding, rats and mosquitoes.

American healthcare is ineffective, inefficient, and inequitable.

The healthcare system is built around profiting from sickness.

Many deductibles for family healthcare are \$2500, one quarter are \$5000 or more. After hospital mergers, prices usually rise 6-18%. Medicare is barred from negotiating drug prices by federal law.

Recommendation: Medicare for all

- A large system could negotiate drug costs and make deals with doctors.
- Our present system incentivizes doctors going into lucrative specialties.
- It would reduce corporate cost for private health care.
- Increased taxes would be offset by not paying insurance premiums, deductibles, or co-pays.
- People would not stay in bad jobs for health care “benefits.”

## Climate

### Problems:

- Climate change is *the* most important existential challenge facing the US.
- It will destroy resources we take for granted; infrastructure, housing, food, water, jobs.
- Many infrastructure failures reflect institutional racism.
- Goldman Sachs called water “the petroleum of the next century.” By 2025 two-thirds of the world’s population will experience water shortages.

### Recommendation: Green (and Blue) New Deal

- The Green New Deal would be very expensive, but we must consider the cost of cleaning up disasters against the cost of preventing them.
- Stop destroying the environment to protect the fossil fuel industry.
- Making needed environmental changes would create many jobs.

## **Education**

Problem: Millennials are the first generation who won't exceed their parents in educational attainment or in earnings.

Recommendation: Comprehensive Education Guarantee

- Increase our collective knowledge with universal free pre-K, increasing public school quality rather than supporting for-profit charter schools, and free college education to a given level.
- Advantages of universal availability of college-level education.
  - College education is worth \$1.3M/person in additional lifetime earnings and contributions to the economy.
  - College-educated people volunteer more, are happier, healthier, and have an average of 12 years more of life.
  - Educated people are generally better parents.

## **The National Economy and Employment:**

Problem: Corporations have claimed the rights of people but have avoided the responsibilities of people, like paying taxes. Economic inequality underpins all other social injustice, with increasing income among the very rich and stagnated wages among the poor. In the last 50 years American productivity has increased by 77% while hourly pay has increased, on average, by only 20%.

Recommendations:

- Require wealthy Americans and corporations to pay their fair share.

- Tax sufficiently so the government can solve nationwide problems.
- We, as a society, must be willing to invest in a solution.
- Government and industry determine and implement the most effective, efficient, and sustainable solution to such problems.
- Re-empower unions.
- Provide a living wage. If the minimum wage had kept up with inflation since 1960 it would be \$20/hour.
- Have corporations pay a progressive tax rate because consumption drives the economy.

## **Elections**

Problem: The backlash to President Obama's presidency has redefined American politics.

- Conservative politics has become the identity politics of insecurity waged by White men to protect their privilege. Identity is complex. Privilege doesn't necessarily mean superiority. Often we don't know the ways we are privileged because knowing them is not a matter of survival.
- The average member of Congress has twelve times the wealth of the average household. Most of the older White men in Congress have not had to walk through the world as "different" or "other".
- Voter suppression has made marginalized individuals and entire neighborhoods unable to vote. Difficulties obtaining and returning mail-in ballots, reducing the number of weekend voting days before official Election Day, long lines on election days, ID laws, felon disenfranchisement, and the underlying gerrymandering

that prevents entire districts from Electoral College representation.

- Campaign financing and corporate lobbying also threaten democracy, especially with “dark money” from unidentified (or impossibly hard to identify) sources via PACs and super-PACs.
- Conservative politics has inundated society with “big lies” about elections and progressive activists who support politics that represent those currently marginalized. Identity politics representing POC, women, religious minorities, disabled, and LGBTQIA+ is about empathy, inclusion, and sustainability. Reforming our politics will require empathy centered on our collective humanity so we can engage others in a way that can dismantle the illusions of conserving privilege.

#### Recommendations: Empathy Politics

- Understand and heal insecurity rather than ignore and inflame it.
- Empathize with pain *and* have the courage to speak truth to power.
- Reform the systems that have driven our insecurity, inequity, and pain
- Deep structural reform of the system that maintains our insecurity.
- Election Reform
  - Reform election regulations to enable Congress to represent women, ethnic groups, and POC. Equity in representation is empathy in institutional form.
  - Federalize the system.

- Determine districts by a nonpartisan committee and based on the census.
- Make voting universally accessible and mandate voting in federal elections.
  - Make election day a holiday.
  - Have “no reason” absentee voting and increase days and locations for early in person voting.
  - Enact automatic registration at 18 and automatic reregistration when you move.
  - Enable online voting.
- Abolish the Electoral College.
- Institute comprehensive publicly funded election spending reform: Limit spending and require disclosure of where campaigns get their money and how they spend it.

## **Public safety**

Problem: The American Society of Civil Engineers rates America’s infrastructure and school infrastructure D+. We are also outgrowing our aging energy and transportation infrastructures.

- Fifty percent of Americans feel lonely or left out. Twenty percent say they rarely or never feel close to people. Young people are the most likely to feel lonely.
- Life expectancy is decreasing from diseases of despair, especially in the White working class. Of course, the insecurity of the marginalized: Black and Brown-Americans, Americans with disabilities, Americans of minority faiths, and LGBTQIA+ Americans is long-standing.

- Between 9/11 and Dec 2016, more acts of terror were committed on US soil by White supremacists than by people acting in the name of radical Islam.
- Gun homicide is the leading cause of death among Blacks ages 1-44. Sixty percent of all deaths by guns in the US are suicides and that number is rising. The sharpest increase is among children which is up 61% in the past ten years. Americans own half of all the guns owned by civilians in the world.

### Recommendations: Comprehensive Public Safety Reform

- Dismantle the stigmas of drug addiction and mass incarceration.
  - Treat incarceration as a failure in education.
  - Treat parole as a way of keeping people out of jail.
  - Ban applications from asking about felonies.
  - Change the drug laws and penalties for minor infractions: legalize marijuana nationally, make free syringes (and condoms) available.
  - Expunge past records for minor offenses.
  - Rebuild the mental health infrastructure.
- Change militarized policing and stop military weapons being sold to police departments.
- Require body cameras and independent investigations of killings by law enforcement agents.
- End the cash bail system, increase public defenders, and end solitary confinement.
- Pass comprehensive gun legislation.

"Next time: the topics Finances, Families, Housing, Inequality, Immigration, Media, Food, and the conclusion. Our country has a lot of work to do."