

El-Sayed drops his left rhetoric at Michigan rallies

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Michigan Democratic Senate nominee Abdul El-Sayed appeared at two campaign events Wednesday—an afternoon event in Ann Arbor, where he was joined by Michigan congresswoman Debbie Dingell and Maryland congressman Jamie Raskin, and a larger evening rally in Farmington Hills, where Raskin also appeared.

The events marked the latest steps in El-Sayed’s post-primary effort to reassure the Democratic establishment that he poses no threat to the party’s foreign policy of war and its subordination to the corporate-financial oligarchy at home. In the three weeks since his narrow August 4 primary victory over four-term congresswoman Haley Stevens, El-Sayed has downplayed the anti-war and anti-establishment themes of his primary campaign, which was backed by the Democratic Socialists of America and Democratic “progressives” such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. Within days of his primary win, he appeared on “Meet the Press” and declared his support for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. He also touted a “warm and inspiring” phone call from Barack Obama.

The Ann Arbor event was deliberately kept relatively small. It was not widely advertised on the University of Michigan campus, and those wishing to attend had to show an RSVP and photo ID to gain entry to the 200-seat screening room at the Michigan Theater. The audience was largely elderly, and many identified themselves as supporters of Dingell, a six-term Detroit-area congresswoman. The Farmington Hills rally drew roughly 800 people, also mostly older.

Dingell opened the Ann Arbor rally and preemptively shut down discussion of the support for El-Sayed by left-wing podcaster Hasan Piker, which has been played up by elements in the Democratic Party establishment as well as El-Sayed’s Republican opponent, former congressman Mike Rogers. “I am done, so don’t any reporter ask me again about Hasan Piker,” she said. “They are trying to

divide us, and we’ve got to stop letting them try to divide us.”

Piker, who calls himself a “Marxist-Leninist,” appeared alongside El-Sayed at an April campus rally and has drawn smears of antisemitism for his opposition to the Gaza genocide. Among those pushing this line is two-term Michigan Representative Hillary Scholten, who has cited El-Sayed’s association with Piker for her refusal to endorse him.

At a press conference after the Ann Arbor event, El-Sayed distanced himself from Piker. A reporter asked:

I have a question for you about some criticism you’ve been taking in a couple recent days from other Democrats in the state. Congresswoman Scholten has been critical of your association with Hasan Piker. The attorney general, Nessel, said today that she believes that you were perhaps making excuses for domestic terrorism. Are you going to speak with these folks? How do you respond to that?

In response, El-Sayed said:

You know, I think there’s a narrative that he’s trying to push that somehow we’re disunited. There is no real justification for that, no evidence for that.

Replying to a subsequent question on Piker, El-Sayed added:

You would think if you turned on any media that this whole campaign is about a streamer in California. That's not what this campaign has ever been about.

Both Raskin and Dingell are longtime recipients of funding from pro-Israel political action committees. According to the Resist Hate tracker, Raskin has received \$174,616 over his career from the American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and other pro-Israel lobby groups. Dingell has received \$29,424 from pro-Israel groups, including J Street, the liberal Zionist complement to AIPAC.

The framework for the events in Michigan was the pro-war stance of the Democratic Party. At the Ann Arbor rally, Dingell flaunted her pro-war credentials. Introducing Raskin, she boasted that he had been “banned for life from Russia,” and added, “Me too, by the way... so I gladly stand with my brother by Vladimir Putin for pro-Ukraine activities.”

Raskin, the next chair of the House Judiciary Committee should the Democrats, as expected, gain control of the House of Representatives, made an appeal to more conservative forces, saying, “I’m a liberal. I’m a progressive. My favorite thing to call myself today is a conservative because I want to conserve the land, the air, the water, the climate system, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, Social Security.” At the Farmington Hills rally he struck a more “left” pose, invoking Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass and Thomas Paine.

For his part, El-Sayed distanced himself from the “progressive” label. Speaking in Ann Arbor, he said, “There is not red or blue,” he said. “There is not purple. There’s not even progressive or liberal. There are people who are struggling with basic things.”

El-Sayed, who ran the public health departments of Detroit and Wayne County, gave a tangled and confused answer in Ann Arbor to a question from the audience about how to pay for “Medicare for All.” On the one hand he suggested that the private health insurance industry would simply disappear. He said:

Medicare for all would be cheaper than the current system. Why? Because the whole system relies on us paying extra money into the system to pay the overhead of the health insurance system. That overhead goes away. No CEOs, no marketing

budget, no army of billers — that all goes away.

However, he avoided any suggestion that the medical insurance behemoths, the pharmaceutical monopolies and the hospital chains should be expropriated and integrated into a publicly owned health system. At the same time, he proposed financing the program with another regressive tax on workers. “We would pay for it the same way we pay for Medicare and Social Security,” he said. “It would come off the top of our paycheck now.”

At the Farmington Hills rally, El-Sayed promoted economic nationalism. Criticizing Trump’s tariffs against Canada, he said, “OK, you want to protect American jobs, you want to protect American manufacturing. All right, I could get down with those tariffs.” This is essentially the line of the UAW bureaucracy, which has endorsed El-Sayed’s campaign. UAW President Shawn Fain criticizes Trump’s tariffs as scattershot and poorly conceived, while promoting American nationalism and backing tariffs in principle.

At least as revealing as what was said at the Michigan rallies is what was not said. In the primary campaign, El-Sayed repeatedly attacked Haley Stevens for her support for Israel and the \$30 million in funding she received from AIPAC. He made no mention of Gaza at Wednesday’s events.

Nor did he mention the U-Mich Eight, who face federal conspiracy charges for protesting against the Gaza genocide. One of his primary campaign staffers is among the eight students and campus workers framed-up by Trump’s Justice Department.

He called the criminal US-Israeli war against Iran merely “dumb” at the Ann Arbor press conference. He was silent on the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. He said nothing about the pogrom against immigrants, the ICE paramilitary rampage or the deportation camps. Nor did he speak about Trump’s preparations to rig or overturn the midterm elections.



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