

Michigan's senatorial candidates debate: El-Sayed lurches further to the right

Stephen St. Clair
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The debate between Democrat Abdul El-Sayed and Republican Mike Rogers in Grand Rapids on October 8 was a politically degraded spectacle, laced with ad hominem attacks and sound bites pitched to the lowest political level, with both candidates making promises neither has any intention or ability to keep.

From the standpoint of which party will control the Senate after the November 3 midterm elections, the Michigan race is pivotal. Incumbent Democrat Gary Peters is retiring, leaving an open seat the Democrats must defend if they have any hope of picking up the four seats needed for a Senate majority. A debate was scheduled on September 15 but Rogers refused to participate, leaving El-Sayed to appear alone. The next debate is scheduled for October 21 in Detroit.

Rogers spent much of the evening attempting to associate El-Sayed with Muslim terrorists, whipping up Islamophobia and racism. Boasting of his previous stint as an FBI agent, Rogers alleged that El-Sayed's "biggest funders are from a group that supports the Muslim Brotherhood. He gets money from people who support openly Hamas, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda."

El-Sayed's response was to emphasize Rogers' role as a stooge of the deeply unpopular President Trump while further embracing the Democratic Party establishment. The candidate lauded by Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has abandoned the pretense that his campaign is a rebellion against the party tops.

Since winning the primary on a wave of opposition to the war in Iran, the Gaza genocide, mass deportations and ICE violence, he has systematically shed the "left" rhetoric that carried him to the nomination. He campaigned with Kamala Harris on September 22, war hawk and former CIA agent Senator Elissa Slotkin on

October 3, and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer the day of the debate. He has a campaign appearance with Barack Obama scheduled for October 24 in Detroit.

In 2012, El-Sayed wrote of Obama, "This leader has perpetrated war, violated our civil liberties, deported more people from our shores than any other president before him, and the list of his failures goes on." But in a Meet the Press interview aired Sunday, he called Obama "a really capable leader."

El-Sayed claims to be a workers' candidate and opponent of billionaires and oligarchs. But Obama oversaw the multi-trillion-dollar Wall Street bailout after the 2008 crash and the restructuring of GM and Chrysler, in which roughly \$80 billion in federal support was conditioned on the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs, plant closures, the gutting of pensions, the ending of cost-of-living raises, and the slashing of new-hire pay by 50 percent.

On Sunday, asked whether billionaires should exist, El-Sayed answered: "I am a capitalist ... if we're not serious about making sure everybody can participate in capitalism, then we're not serious about capitalism."

In the same interview, he refused to commit as a senator to vote for Trump's conviction and removal from office in the unlikely event that the Democrats, having taken control of the House in November, impeach the fascist president.

In the debate itself, El-Sayed hollowed out his "progressive" positions one by one. On his signature issue, Medicare for All, he said families could keep their private insurance. On immigration, he attacked Rogers from the right for voting against border funding. He repeated his support for a "safe and secure border" four times in the space of a few minutes.

On the war in Iran, he promoted the claim that it is

Israel's war and the Trump administration is Israel's dupe, a false presentation that downplays the criminal role of US imperialism. He based his opposition to the war entirely on its impact on oil prices and inflation, refusing to call it what it is: an illegal war of aggression. He implicitly aligned himself with the war aims of the United States, denouncing Iran for "bombing all kinds of countries in the Middle East and then choking off the world's energy supply."

Asked by the moderator which country, Iran or Israel, he considered the greater danger, El-Sayed replied: "I think both of them have proven dangerous in their own way, one at risk of attacking us, one getting us into wars we have no business fighting."

El-Sayed adopted the imperialist framing the Trump administration uses to justify its colonial-style attack on Venezuela, denouncing a company Rogers advised for "helping Maduro spy on his own people." The word "Ukraine" did not appear once in the entire debate. Both candidates support the war against Russia, a nuclear-armed power.

El-Sayed fully embraced economic nationalism, lining up with the UAW's call for "smart tariffs." On Meet the Press three days later, he appropriated Trump's signature chauvinist slogan, declaring, "I really am America first."



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