

Bipartisan Collaboration with Dr. Kavita Patel

Doctors For A Healthy US, LLC

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Introduction

- [Dr. Kavita Patel](#) is a primary care physician in Washington, D.C.
- During her time with Obama's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement, she played a critical role in policy development and initiatives related to health reform
- She gained Capitol Hill experience through her work with Senator Ted Kennedy, the liberal "Lion of the Senate"
- Consider:
 - Why is bipartisanship important?
 - How can we use advocacy and engaging stories to reach bipartisanship?
 - What opportunities are there to actually get something done?

Context

- Our country is increasingly divided along partisan lines; the healthcare system reflects this divide
- Emotional polarization has developed around issues like climate change, religion, guns, and abortion
- Mixed opinions on big issues can result in apathy, as people tire of the constant arguing and feel un-compelled by either candidate; this was illustrated in the 2016 election's low turnout
- Since Trump's election, the House has become majority Democrat, and this year, the Senate may also be flipped

Dr. Patel's Bipartisan Experiences

- *A story about bipartisan collaboration:*
 - While working with Senator Kennedy, they had to collaborate with conservative Senator Sam Brownback, whose beliefs sharply opposed Senator Kennedy's → Brownback suggested that physicians should be required to show women the ultrasound pictures of a fetus prior to an abortion
 - Kennedy responded by acknowledging Brownback's concern and making a counter-suggestion: start with women who want to see their pregnancies through term, and identify infants impacted by genetic abnormalities → after months of collaboration, a registry was funded within the NIH to track chronic diagnoses for infants
- While pursuing medical school, Dr. Patel learned the value of listening and negotiating—with patients, staff, and fellow physicians
- When the Affordable Care Act (ACA) needed votes in the Senate, Dr. Patel noted that votes were split along party lines; there wasn't much bipartisanship on big issues like healthcare, immigration, and Supreme Court appointments

The 2020 Election & Beyond

- People on both political sides are tense as the election nears
- With America more divided than ever, it can be hard to believe that compromise is possible
- Dr. Patel works with people in the Trump administration and manages to have civil conversations about important things that everyone can agree on, like trying to increase reimbursements for primary care workers
- Bipartisanship is critical to moving America forward; even if Trump doesn't get reelected, his enthusiastic supporters and the prevalence of their ideologies won't disappear
- No matter the election outcome, we must identify ways to achieve bipartisan action to meet our goals

Questions & Answers

1. *What are some overlapping topics of concern for Democrats and Republicans?*
 - Economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19
 - Healthcare concerns, like out-of-network surprise bills and pharmaceutical prices; additionally, rural regions without ICUs are seeing rises in COVID, bringing more attention to rural infrastructure needs
 - Tax cuts / reform initiatives
 - [Civil rights](#)
2. *In the past few decades, ideological divides have grown, and it has become increasingly difficult to work across the aisle. How can we get to a place where we can agree to disagree, to put people above politics?*
 - Put relationships above politics! Things change when we open up to one another about personal things, good and bad
 - Spend time together, listen to each other, get to know one another
 - Show that you are genuinely listening
3. *Can social media be leveraged to improve public health?*
 - Healthcare workers not only have an obligation to make facts and information accessible to people, they should also highlight important findings from pertinent studies
 - Social media is a great way to rebuild faith in public health professionals, and to support / connect with one another as healthcare workers
 - We need more voices from women in healthcare on social media
4. *Does the opioid epidemic present an opportunity to bring people together?*
 - The past few Congresses have set aside money to address the epidemic, and while COVID-19 eclipsed it, substance use disorders are exacerbated by COVID
 - Biden could invest resources in the Office of National Drug Control Policy and use media to reinspire and empathize; this has been an ongoing problem

Conclusion

- True bipartisanship is not reserved for Capitol Hill → *collaboration can happen within any interpersonal relationships and local situations where there are strong opinions (not necessarily political ones)*
- Healthcare professionals who are interested in media, advocacy, or running for office should take a look at these speeches by [Mario Cuomo](#) and [Senator Ted Kennedy](#)