

Democratic Policies Moving Forward

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Making Waves for Democracy July 27, 2025 Meeting

Following the election, I was too angry to consider any areas Democrats needed to improve. *We had an ethical, smart, compassionate candidate versus a lying, vindictive criminal. We had one of the best economies internationally.*

My feelings changed recently because of three things: Rethinking what income inequality means even in a good economy; evaluating Mamdani's mayoral candidacy win in New York City; and reading the book Abundance.

- I. **Increased awareness of the impact of income inequality even when the economy is doing well:**
 - a. **Housing:** Despite efforts of many caring politicians. A household is considered "cost-burdened" if they spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs (rent or mortgage payments and utilities).
 - i. Around 32.8% of all U.S. households (41.8 million) were cost-burdened in 2023.
 - ii. Affordability for Homeownership:
 1. *Median Home Price vs. Income:* The median price for a single-family home in the U.S. reached a record high of about \$412,500 in 2023, which is five times the median household income. This makes homeownership increasingly difficult for many.
 2. *Income Needed to Afford:* In 2023, a buyer needed to earn at least \$126,700 per year to afford mortgage payments on a median-priced home.
 3. *Limited Affordable Markets:* As of 2023, only three of the nation's 100 largest metro areas had median home prices that were three times their median incomes (a common affordability benchmark), a drastic drop from 75 metros in 1990.
 4. *Supply Shortage:* The U.S. has a severe shortage of over 4.5 million homes, contributing to skyrocketing prices.
 - b. **Healthcare despite the Affordable Care Act**
 - i. Nearly half of U.S. adults (just under 50%) say it is difficult to afford healthcare costs.
 - ii. More than 1 in 4 adults (28%) reported delaying or not getting some form of healthcare (medical care, prescription drugs, mental health care, or dental care) due to cost in 2023.
 - c. **Education – despite efforts to lower student loans**
 - i. The average cost of college has more than doubled since 2001.
 - ii. Tuition and fees have risen 12 times faster than the Consumer Price Index (CPI) since 1978.

- iii. The average total cost of college (including tuition, fees, books, supplies, and daily living expenses) for a student in the U.S. is approximately \$38,270 per year (as of 2025 data).
- iv. Disinvestment by States: Real estate appropriations per student have fallen, forcing public institutions to rely more on tuition revenue.

Although the economy was going well overall, a substantial portion of the US population has been unduly burdened with housing, healthcare, and higher education costs. These should be affordable to working folks.

II. Examining the Zohran Mamdani mayoral race.

- i. He is currently the Democratic nominee for the 2025 mayoral election.
- ii. ***Social Media Savvy:*** His campaign effectively utilized social media, including viral videos and appeals to diverse communities by speaking in multiple languages (Spanish, Bangla, Hindi/Urdu)
- iii. ***Key Platform and Policy Positions:*** Mamdani's campaign centers on addressing the high cost of living in New York City, advocating for bold, progressive policies:
 - 1. ***Housing:***
 - a. Immediate rent freeze for all rent-stabilized units.
 - b. Investment in building additional affordable housing.
 - 2. ***Transportation:***
 - a. Permanent elimination of fares on all city buses.
 - b. Improvements to bus speed through dedicated lanes and signals. (He previously secured a pilot program for fare-free buses on five lines).
 - 3. ***Public Safety:***
 - a. Creation of a "Department of Community Safety" to focus on preventing violence through social services and mental health programs, rather than solely relying on police.
 - 4. ***Economic Justice:***
 - a. \$30 minimum wage by 2030.
 - b. Establishment of city-owned grocery stores.
 - c. Tax increases on corporations and individuals earning over \$1 million annually to fund his proposals (estimated to be a \$10 billion tax hike).
- iv. ***Broadening Coalition:*** He not only energized progressive strongholds but also gained support in working-class, multiethnic neighborhoods that had previously leaned towards more moderate or even conservative candidates.

A liberal agenda that truly addresses the high cost of living could be successful. We need to show we can act decisively on these important issues.

III. Reading Abundance a book by Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson

- i. We have the means to address these pressing issues.
- ii. Why have we failed to address the needs of the working class – let's consider housing. We care and have powerful leaders working on these issues and yet are failing. Homelessness declined a bit from 2007-2015, but has been on the rise since.
 1. We have enacted legislation, such as housing subsidies and tenant protection, to help the demand side of housing without successfully addressing the supply side.
 2. Without addressing the supply side, building more affordable housing, prices rise because of demand, making housing unaffordable for many working-class families.
 3. Zoning and regulations enacted in the late 1960's and early 1970's vastly improved our environment, saving lives and species. We had to stop building to save the planet.
 4. The equation has changed today.
 - a. We have the technology to address climate change – we need to scale up.
 - b. We have the technology to build much more affordable house, partially through modular building, but the earlier regulations impede our efforts.
 - c. We have been limited by the regulations passed earlier. I believe in regulations. I just read the book *Becoming Madame Secretary* (historical fiction by Stephanie Dray describing the life of Francies Perkins the first female cabinet member in the U.S. She was Secretary of Labor under FDR. Without regulations on working hours and work condition, child labor was common and adults were being abused by horrid working condition. However, many of the zoning regulations we enacted earlier are no longer necessary because technology could solve the environmental issues even if we build the housing so many desperately need.
 - d. Liberals are organizing some new movements, such as "Yes in My Backyard" and the "Abundance Agenda" promoting building more housing, transit, and clean energy.

As we move forward, we may succeed in re-engaging the working class by focusing on progressive issues that would truly make a difference in their lives, such as affordable housing, healthcare, and education. Addressing policies that hinder progress, as well as taxing the wealthy, could be crucial components to a truly transformative policy agenda.