

Life or Death

Category: Health Care on the Line

written by Taylor E. H. | July 14, 2017

It was election night. November 8, 2016. As a southern, affluent, white male from a conservative household I leveled with her: "This election isn't life or death."

"Hell, I didn't even vote," I thought contently to myself, surrounded by what was easily the most intelligent and diverse group of individuals I'd ever been around. We had all watched the hilarity of the presidential debates together, and it seemed fitting to cap this election season off with another night of beer and *hor d'oeuvres*.

By this point in my master's program, I had been encapsulated by the intellectual bubble of *The Duke University* for nearly six months. There was no way the comical popularity of Donald J. Trump could translate into a presidency.

Then it did.

I didn't know what to tell my partner early that Wednesday morning. Her own diverse identity—a product of parents immigrating as an escape from Apartheid—and those of her international friends was a topic I hoped only to learn about in the context of her expertise in women's studies. It was not something I'd planned on ever having to defend.

The best I could do to console her tears was describe a hope that the rhetoric wouldn't or couldn't translate into policy. At least this didn't mean life or death for anyone.

Then it did.

So here I am now, at the Texas State Capitol, a policy intern for one of the few representatives pushing for increased access to health care. My partner's tears gave me a direction to focus my work. It's because health care issues are on the line that I am beginning law school and proposing bills this special session that not only preserve current levels of care but also push health care access further.

My partner's tears that November night gave me an awareness I didn't possess before: about the power of a vote; how policy affects my fellow citizens; and, of values contrary to those that come most naturally to me. I'm proud of the person those tears have encouraged me to become: a southern, affluent, white male who sees the world as bigger than he once did. Because health care is life or death, and it's on the line.

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