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Ayyadurai is no ordinary Senate candidate

By Chris Lisinski, clisinski@lowellsun.com

UPDATED: 04/06/2017 07:27:31 AM EDT

LOWELL -- Shiva Ayyadurai is an entrepreneur, MIT graduate, Donald Trump-supporting Indian-born immigrant and U.S. citizen hoping that his outsider status will carry him to the U.S. Senate.

A Republican, Ayyadurai declared on social media



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several weeks ago that he intends to challenge for Sen. Elizabeth Warren's seat in the 2018 election. He filed official paperwork with the Federal Election Commission on March 17.

Warren, a Democrat, is a former Harvard Law School professor who defeated incumbent Republican Sen. Scott Brown in the 2012 election.

In a Monday meeting with editors of The Sun, Ayyadurai portrayed himself as a "21st-century senator" with a track record of success and innovation.

"I've been solving problems since I was 14 years old," said Ayyadurai. "My entire life has been about solving problems."

Ayyadurai, 53, spent the first seven years of his life in Bombay, where he said he was subject to discrimination as a member of India's lowest caste. His family, including his father, mother and sister, immigrated to New Jersey in 1970. Ayyadurai said he arrived wearing a pair of Bermuda shorts at the airport and understanding little about America.

But it didn't take him long to figure out that education and hard work could determine success.

He was a top academic student as he made his way through public school, and educators, spotting his computer science acumen, placed him in an advanced program with other high performers.



Scientist and entrepreneur Shiva Ayyadurai speaks about his plans to run for U.S. Senate during a Monday meeting with The Sun. Sun/Chris Lisinski

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At age 14, Ayyadurai got a job at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. Ayyadurai said in 1978 he developed an email program for the institute and in 1982, he acquired a copyright for the program called "EMAIL." He said the system was the first to combine existing electronic messaging with many of the modern features we now know.

"The fact is a 14-year-old kid in Newark, New Jersey, did invent email, email the system as we know it today," Ayyadurai said.

Ayyadurai's claims have sparked controversy in the tech world, however. Critics have argued that many of email's features had already been in use for years on the ARPANET, the government-funded predecessor to the internet that connected scientists and researchers. Ayyadurai has filed lawsuits against media outlets that dispute that he invented email.

He said academic and business elites have worked to diminish his email innovation in order to protect their own turf. "Why would they reward a 14-year-old immigrant from India who doesn't fit their profile as to who should be making these (innovations)?," he said.

Beyond his history with the email program, Ayyadurai received four advanced degrees from MIT, including a doctorate in biological engineering and a Fulbright Scholarship to study the relation between Eastern and Western medicine.

He has launched two startup companies: Systems Health, based on his Fulbright research; and CytoSolve that works to accelerate the drug development process using human genome modeling.

Ayyadurai points to this background as why he would succeed in office -- he said his greatest skill is "solving problems" -- and argued that liberal politicians such as Warren and U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders promote the wrong values.

"There is a lot to be valued by working hard and learning lessons in life when you're young," he said. "We've created this entire thing based on this ethos that that is somehow wrong. That has been perpetuated by people simply to get elected."

If the early days of his campaign are any indication, Ayyadurai is likely to target the same sort of anti-establishment populism that Trump rode to an electoral college victory. He sharply criticized what he sees as bloat in the political and academic establishments, particularly among those on the left.

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Alluding to his childhood in India, Ayyadurai said he thinks America has a "neo-caste system" in which "elites" remain inside bubbles and subjugate minorities "by not giving them the opportunity to struggle hard and work hard."

"It should not be who you know, but what you do," he said.

Ayyadurai, who lives in Belmont, said he had never voted in a U.S. election until he cast his ballot for Trump in November. He donated \$2,700 to the Trump Victory fundraising committee in August. He also donated \$2,000 to John Kerry's presidential campaign in 2003, according to FEC records.

On Monday, Ayyadurai called Trump's victory a "necessary disruption" that "says something right about the country." He explained that a partisan Congress seems unwilling to compromise and get important legislation done.

He also expressed support for the president's controversial executive order temporarily blocking immigration from several Muslim-majority countries. He referred to his own family's journey to the United States in 1970. Ayyadurai said America's openness to highly educated immigrants at that time caused a "brain drain" for struggling countries needing the talent to create better systems to solve their own problems. Things only got worse in many of those countries, he said.

"What does that do, the dynamics of that? So America doesn't have to put all of its infrastructure to grow our educational system," he said. "You could argue that the influx of immigrants we've allowed here has created global insecurity."

Ayyadurai said he plans to contribute funding to his own campaign, but did not say how much. Warren's campaign is likely to be well-funded -- from Jan. 1, 2015 to Dec. 31, 2016, she received more than \$5.8 million in contributions, according to the most recent available FEC data.

State Rep. Geoff Diehl, a Whitman Republican, is also considering a run for Warren's seat. According to a recent Boston Herald article, Diehl is setting up a federal fundraising account and filing a statement of candidacy with the FEC.

Follow Chris on Twitter @ChrisLisinski.

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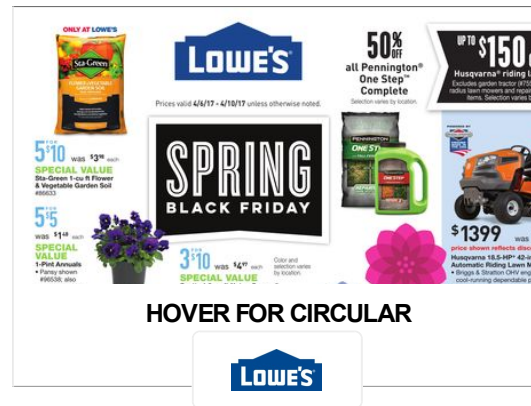
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