



## ***Politics are Costing Americans Sleep***

In Kevin B. Smith's NIH-published "Politics is Making Us Sick," we learn that "an estimated 94 million Americans perceive politics as a significant source of stress" in their daily lives. Given the connection between stress and a lack of quality sleep, it's certain that politics are costing Americans sleep.

Stress activates the body's fight or flight response, which leads to the release of stress hormones like cortisol. Cortisol heavily impairs the regular natural sleep-wake cycle, making it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep. Here we see a direct link between politics, stress, and a lack of sleep.

Extreme forms of stress can even cause physical tension in the muscles, paving the way for discomfort and restlessness while sleeping. Such intense stress-induced physical discomfort can disrupt sleep and contribute to conditions like insomnia.

Political decisions related to specific policies, like environmental legislation related to climate change, have already been described as leading causes of politics-induced stress. In phenomena like "climate anxiety," which contributes to politically-significant stress levels in the American public, Americans place particular emphasis on worrying about the climate. At certain times, this stress becomes so intense that it can — according to The American Psychological Association — cause depression or even suicidal thoughts, which inevitably hinders effective sleep.

The most important thing to note in this discussion is that elevated cortisol levels — induced by political stress — are interfering with the natural sleep-wake cycle of much of the American public, and that's something which, to some degree, has surely existed throughout American history.