

NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

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Candidates To Each Other: You Quit First

BY **Gwyneth K. Shaw** | JUN 30, 2011 12:05 PM

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GWYNETH K. SHAW PHOTO



Mayoral candidate Clifton Graves showed up to the Dixwell/Newhallville Senior Center ready to parry with voters. William Vaughn, president of the seniors association there, told him—politely—to come back when the group entertains all four challengers to Mayor John DeStefano, so members can pick the best bet. Graves is hoping the candidates do the picking first.

Graves (pictured), in his brief remarks to the group Wednesday, said he'd heard the message and is already moving toward unity ahead of the Sept. 13 Democratic primary.

"If we're going to make a change in this city, the best way for that to happen is for us to all come together," Graves said.

He said he's met with the other Democrats candidates who have declared they are taking on the incumbent Democratic mayor: [Tony Dawson](#), [Robert Lee](#), and [Jeffrey Kerekes](#). Graves said he put out feelers to each one

about making a decision, at some point before the primary, to consolidate the field against the mayor.

In an interview, Graves said the crowded field “shows clearly the level of dissatisfaction with this administration, and the clarion call for change.” On the other hand, he said, a splintered vote would all but guarantee DeStefano a 10th two-year term.

Graves said that while “my personal hope” is that the group would pick him as the best candidate, the situation requires a “realistic, pragmatic assessment” of who’s the most credible and electable candidate, regardless of the outcome.

During his campaign kickoff event last month, Robert Lee called the number of candidates “a concern.” He said he plans to sit down with the other hopefuls and “see if we can get one candidate to run.”

Reached Wednesday, Kerekes said it’s too soon to talk about winnowing the field.

“It’s way too early for any of us to know how we’re doing as a candidate,” he said. “At this point in the game, it’s still our job to educate the voters about their choices, and I think giving the voters a choice is a really important part of that process.”



THOMAS MCMILLAN FILE PHOTO

He Lee.

added that he’s open to discussions as the race goes on, especially after candidates start gathering the signatures necessary to qualify them for the ballot. Graves said his campaign had been told the threshold is about 2,500 signatures. It’s a near-certainty that DeStefano will earn the endorsement of the Democratic Town Committee July 26.

“Those are the kinds of things that can help people differentiate between candidates,” Kerekes said.

Graves agreed.

“That’s the truth right there,” he said of the signature-gathering process.



Kerekes.

campaign spokeswoman Jocelyne Hudson-Brown said he’s amenable to gathering all the candidates together to discuss the state of the race.

“It is our notion that Anthony Dawson will come out as the candidate that everyone will be supporting,” she said.

Graves said his definition of “credible and electable” includes management experience and the ability to organize at the grassroots level.

The ideal candidate is “someone who can hit the ground running,” he said. A good replacement for DeStefano has to have their fingers on the pulse of the community, Graves said, as well as the ability to sit across the table from Yale President Richard A. Levin or Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and make the city’s case effectively.

Then there are the issues: public safety, the budget crunch, education.

At the senior center on Wednesday, Vaughn said the city needs change in those areas, and that means DeStefano needs to go. He wants to make sure there’s a single candidate to rally

Dawson couldn’t be reached for comment Wednesday, but



PAUL BASS FILE PHOTO

Dawson.

around, to avoid splitting the vote and re-electing the mayor.

“We want to pick one candidate who’s going to be the best for us, and back that one,” he said. “We want to get a fair shake.”

Vaughan said the city’s problems aren’t necessarily DeStefano’s fault.

“It’s a thing that’s come up on him,” he said. “We’ve got to push a little harder. Things have got to be corrected.”

DeStefano has “done a fair job, but we need a change,” Vaughn said.

He cited street violence, the lack of jobs and the dearth of programs aimed at helping city kids, teens and young adults get on the right path, and stay there.

Dorothy Gomez (with Graves in the picture at the top of the story) lives in Beaver Hills, and said she used to feel safe there because there weren’t shootings and other crimes. Now there are, which is why she’s open to voting for a new mayor.

“We really have to do something for the youth,” she said. “We need to teach them the value of life. Something’s wrong.”

Comments

posted by: The Count on June 30, 2011 4:28pm

As they used to say in Russia, “In news there is no truth, and in truth there is no news.”

posted by: Jo ee on June 30, 2011 7:32pm

Thank You Count for posting that . I haven’t heard that one in many years. So on-line commentary just demolishes and mumbo jumbles it all to heck boy

posted by: first observer on June 30, 2011 11:08pm

Each candidate needs about 2,500 signatures to get onto the primary ballot? So if all four opposition candidates succeeded, they would, together, have collected about 10,000 signatures?

I suppose that’s unrealistic to expect, and I suppose there could be crossover signatures—people signing more than one candidate’s petition (would that disqualify their signatures?).

Still, let’s suppose 5,000 people express their desire for a new candidate this year. Is it true that DeStefano typically wins a general election with about 8,000 votes?

5,000 by September would go a long way to achieving something more than 8,000 by November for ONE opposition candidate in the general election whom people could get behind.