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DeStefano out in front in fundraising for New Haven mayoral race (documents)

Published: Wednesday, July 13, 2011

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By Abbe Smith, Register Staff
asmith@nhregister.com /

NEW HAVEN – Mayor John DeStefano Jr. is way ahead of the pack in fundraising compared to his Democratic challengers, according to second-quarter campaign finance disclosure statements filed this week.

DeStefano raised \$116,856, including more than \$10,000 in donations from construction and development companies and numerous donations from school administrators, city employees and local businesses. Since the start of this year, DeStefano's campaign has raised \$233,483.

The next biggest fundraiser is challenger Jeffrey Kerekes, who raised \$2,875 in the second quarter. Kerekes said he has raised more since the June 30 cutoff and now has about \$5,000.

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Most of Kerekes donations are for \$10, \$25 or \$40. His largest are \$340, the limit for candidates participating in the city's campaign public financing program, the Democracy Fund.

Three other Democrats are challenging DeStefano for the nomination: Clifton Graves Jr., Anthony Dawson and Robert Lee. Dawson reported fundraising of \$1,105 for the first quarter.

Campaign finance information was not immediately available for Graves or Lee.

Kerekes has accused DeStefano of “snubbing” the Democracy Fund so he could collect donations from companies that have contracts with the city. By signing on to the Democracy Fund, candidates must agree to certain rules and restrictions, including not accepting contributions from businesses and political action committees.

The state prohibits contractors who do business for the state from donating in statewide campaigns, but contractors are allowed to give money in municipal elections.

In this filing period, DeStefano collected big checks from companies such as Gilbane Inc. and Giordano Construction, which have contracts through the city’s massive school construction program. Last reporting period, DeStefano had large donations from construction and development companies, including R2D Corporation, which worked on numerous schools, including East Rock School and Worthington Hooker, and Winstanley Enterprises, which is investing heavily in the city.

Kerekes said these kinds of donations concern him.

“I think the whole point of clean elections programs is they were created in response to special interests grabbing control and getting too much leverage in the political process,” Kerekes said.

DeStefano said he does not see a conflict of interest in accepting donations from individuals or companies that do work for or invest in the city.

“There has never been a hint of that kind of ‘pay for play’ behavior here in New Haven. I don’t tolerate that kind of behavior and I’ll never tarnish the name my mother and father gave me,” he said.

DeStefano said anyone who contributes to his campaign “knows they are only going to get one thing with me and that is someone who is going to work hard for them every day.”

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