

NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

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10%? That's Peanuts!

BY **Staff** | JUN 28, 2011 1:09 PM

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The race is on—to see which mayoral candidate would pay himself the least if elected.

Jeffrey Kerekes issued a release Tuesday morning promising to cut the mayor's total compensation at least 50 percent if he wins this fall's general

election.

[Kerekes is one of four Democrats](#) who have announced they plan to challenge incumbent Mayor John DeStefano in a Sept. 13 party primary. Kerekes has also vowed to run as an independent in the general election if he fails to win the primary.

Kerekes stated in the release that he would pay himself a "flat \$75,000" a year in salary—and, on top of that, ditch the job's "generous health and pension plan." The current mayor's compensation adds up to \$175,000 when you combine his \$127,000 in salary with "an estimated 40 percent" in pension and health care contributions, Kerekes said.

His statement follows a [vow by another Democratic candidate, Clifton Graves](#), to cut the salaries of the mayor and all top appointees by 10 percent.

"Most people in New Haven do not make \$75,000 and their average tax bill is more than \$6,500 on pretty modest homes," Kerekes' release stated. "Our kids are not being educated and there are murders in the streets almost every other week. Our finances are a mess. All of it is tragic and we deserve a mayor less consumed with his own compensation, attaining higher office or being feted in Amsterdam."

[Click here](#) to read the full release.

"This is just a prelude to Mr. Kereke's announcement next week where he will roll out his plan to eliminate the mayoral salary completely," mayoral spokesman Danny Kedem responded. "Instead of gimmicks, Mayor DeStefano is committed to creating jobs and growing our economy by creating opportunities for kids to succeed like extending school day hours, providing many afterschool programs and creating and maintaining New Haven Promise."

Mayoral spokesman Adam Joseph called it "tough" to calculate the precise value of one employee's pension and health benefits. DeStefano contributes \$6,135 a year to his own health care plan, according to Joseph; he didn't have a breakdown for the city's contribution.

Comments

posted by: Noteworthy on June 28, 2011 1:46pm

If saving taxpayers \$100K on day one is a gimmick according to the mayor/Kedem, then that explains why the Mr. DeStefano can't seem to find waste with two hands a mirror. Not to mention the help of a virtual beehive of executive assistants and staff nearly all with separate budgets and assorted personnel.

A proposal to bring city employees back who have been leaving and voting with their feet steadily for 20 years and an immediate savings of \$100K sounds like good to me, not gimmicks.

Perhaps the mayor has a fresh idea about his compensation or maybe how to turn a torrent of city paychecks going to the burbs into safe streets and better schools? One can hear the roar of silence.

posted by: anon on June 28, 2011 2:13pm

Nice work. I would have capped it at around \$90K, since \$90K is an appropriate market rate salary for a few of the top people at City Hall (e.g., Rob Smuts, Karyn Gilvarg, Mike Piscitelli), but that's a minor detail.

Given our typical income levels and high tax rates (primarily designed to suck money out of poor families & renters, and redistribute it among highly-paid suburban union leaders), most city salaries should be capped at \$75K. We might lose a few good people by doing this, but you can guarantee that under a progressive administration, very capable folks would step up and fill their shoes.

posted by: Darnell on June 28, 2011 2:26pm

How many spokespeople does the mayor have? Will we ever hear directly from him again?

Saying that, does Mr. Kerekes feel that the mayor should join the ranks of the uninsured?

Eliminating the mayor's health insurance does not get us close to solving the problems we face, even though it does send a message and provides the moral high ground for the mayor to make tough decisions.

But cutting the salary in half and eliminating the health benefits, that is even a little right of where I am...lol

Waiting to see where this fits in the overall plan.

posted by: cba on June 28, 2011 2:48pm

The prevailing view of all mayoral opposition candidates is that Destefano and his staff are grossly overpaid, and that one should lead by example in austere times. These candidates might not be viable but they are definitely correct in their assessment of Destefano's worth which in the opinion of many voters is zero

posted by: richgetricher on June 28, 2011 2:58pm

Kerekes is a breath of fresh air. At a time when everyone is saying it's all about me, Kerekes is walking the walk. Here's one guy leading by example. This guy seems like the real deal.

posted by: streever on June 28, 2011 2:58pm

That is some gusto Kerekes!

A gimmick is finding 100k to cut in the city budget? When the Mayor seems committed to cutting long-term projects that provide a lot of upside benefit, fire services in East Rock?

I trust that the Mayor's campaign manager was not around for the lucrative deals the Mayor acknowledges he gave our union employees when he ran for Governor? Talk about a gimmick. He handed the keys to the city to out-of-towners in exchange for some votes.

It is pretty mind-blowing to see the spin put on this by the Mayoral supporters.

posted by: anon on June 28, 2011 3:03pm

Darnell - until we have universal health insurance, don't you think that every public official should join the ranks of the uninsured? That might help get the ball moving on what is one of the greatest social injustices of the past century.

posted by: Billy on June 28, 2011 3:04pm

Cutting the mayors pay isn't even an issue. ... Its 45 yearold cops that leave with 100k a year + pensions.

Who ... negotiated these contracts? Did they have the union vote or the taxpayers best interest in mind??? Now we're stuck with this. More democrats run wanting to sound like conservatives.....They're not conservative, and thats what New haven needs.....A balanced budget, not parking meter gimmicks that are going to drive business into surrounding towns.....I see another waterbury on the horizon. Nice job Connecticut's Democrat machine, you killed another one time great city!

posted by: first observer on June 28, 2011 3:12pm

The mayor's spokesmen (plural—does he need more than one?—just another indication of the top-heavy, expensive ranks of this administration's staff) talk evasiveness and balderdash out of their mouths.

Kerekes for Mayor. Very exciting and intriguing.

Whoever it becomes, let's unite, for the general election, behind one candidate to give DeStefano the run of his life.

Time for a change.

posted by: Atwater on June 28, 2011 3:23pm

Kekeres is right, the city is facing a lot of problems, which is why a mayor, who does a good job should earn a decent salary. \$175,000 seems about right for a mayor of a medium sized city. Once again Kekeres is throwing red herrings hoping to attract attention to his campaign.

The reason why DeStefano will win again is because there aren't any serious contenders. There's been no one who seems able to lead this city through a pretty tough time, which is only going to get worse before it gets better. Even if DeStefano, by some miracle, loses, we'll still be stuck with a Democrat.

posted by: Not Peanuts ... "Cash-ews" on June 28, 2011 3:30pm

@Noteworthy

looks like the Mayor is AWOL on his own campaign. Reminds me of when he was running for Governor and went AWOL on running the city. maybe Kedem (who?) would like to toss his hat in the race.

posted by: The truth on June 28, 2011 3:58pm

How is the Mayor creating jobs when he just laid off 80 and is trying to privatize the custodians with a company the pays poverty wages???

posted by: Cedarhillresident on June 28, 2011 4:03pm

Dan are you kidding me...this coming from the king of gimmicks! Or rather this coming from one of many spokespeople of the mayor..(I would love to know the true number of how many there are...including the ones that got hidden in the BOE).

I think this is a good mind set to put forth. I think that this is a lead by example thing. I am positive he is not expecting this of city workers but what it does say is I heard you. No more waste. No more "fluffer" BS positions. Unions said we will work with the city but we need to see it at the top to. Well this is one thing the residents and unions can agree on. I have heard John say he cut his staff yad yad and he may have, but those same people are still working "fluffer" jobs within the city. He does the whole shell game thing....but we all know where the pea is. Time for change! We now HAVE a choice!

posted by: streever on June 28, 2011 4:06pm

Billy:

If we just need a Republican to run, why don't you?

posted by: Noteworthy on June 28, 2011 4:10pm

It seems clear to me that the Kerekes proposal to take such a significant cut in pay and benefits is designed for him alone. He is not proposing this be legislatively enacted for all future mayors whose compensation is set by the BOA.

As for health insurance, it's my understanding Kerekes will maintain his existing coverages which he will pay himself as he does now.

This promise not only takes the moral high ground but it clearly puts service back in the forefront vs. current

administration policy of feathering one's bed first and telling the masses to eat cake while sleeping on straw.

The message from the top of the ticket, which includes a strong endorsement of term limits amid charter reform, is that being careful with money that belongs to others is important. It should start with the mayor and extend through every department, every employee and every expenditure. I like that.

Now that Kedem and Joseph have weighed in on another transformative Kerekes promise/proposal, maybe the mayor's non-speaking school public information officer would also like to say something. I believe that covers all the spokespersons. Yes?

posted by: Billy on June 28, 2011 4:33pm

Streever would I have your endorsement?

Are you in some way inferring it's not a problem with democrats giving sweet deals to their voter base (pastors, and the unions,) while pole ... the taxpayer?

Oh wait, how could I not see that it's "W"'s fault....The democrat party have choked this dump from day one!

posted by: double talk on June 28, 2011 4:49pm

What is this ..?

A campaign based on false expectations to attract attention.

Your telling me this guy wants to cut his own salary and Benni's by 50% in order to cut taxes by 50% for "Coming back Home". Really!

First of all the Mayors salary is set by the board of alderman, the health benefits are set by an employee group plan negotiated with the insurer, and the Mayors pension is set by the charter. Really!

So just how is Kreekes going to achieve this self imposed destruction of the position, while at the same time leaving Mayo's salary @ \$226,000 plus benni's, set by contract negotiation. Really!

Let's get real here and just cut the crap.

posted by: Morris Cove Mom on June 28, 2011 5:16pm

Yea, Kerekes! That 10%-across-the-board was a pretty great idea. But 40% in one place is genius!

posted by: Ellis Copeland on June 28, 2011 5:31pm

The thing I find most interesting is this: everyone here agrees that Johnny Boy needs to go. But in September he'll win by 20-40 points. And in November, if Mr. Kerekes follows though, he will win by 20-40 points. Just how does that happen?

posted by: ellis Copeland on June 28, 2011 5:55pm

I should clarify: Johnny Boy will win in November by 20-40 points.

posted by: Livesinfairhaven on June 28, 2011 5:55pm

Why don't we just pay the Mayor the full salary, but make sure he/she does what we elect them for. If these mayoral candidates feel they are worth less than the going rate, why would we want them??

posted by: Time has come on June 28, 2011 7:32pm

Finally a candidate that gets it. And understands the complexity of the budget. He is not promising programs and more spending like many candidates do to get your vote. He is promising financial accountability starting with himself. Changing the way we spend. And making sure what we do spend is on the right things to get take this city back and to care for the people of this city.

Totally refreshing.

posted by: Darnell on June 28, 2011 8:39pm

anon - good point.

posted by: Billy on June 28, 2011 9:22pm

WQe need the ability to “recall” a mayor on their campaign promises.....Nobody is safe for years.

posted by: TskTsk on June 28, 2011 9:49pm

Well LivesinFairhaven and double talk you can have your own spin on this, but lets face it,Mayor DeStefano has over stayed his welcome and this challenge to him is a serious one and also one that not only will give him a run for his money, but may just have enough steam to unseat someone that has become very stale and way too cocky for his own good and not so good for the taxpayers and residents! Whew that was alot to say in one breathe but felt really wonderful. I hope I can say something sweet and short after the elections are over>like, “goodbye Mayor and I wish you well”.

And also goodbye to all the over paid soldiers who speak for the mayor while he is in town or not, because they both know that one will get a raise and one will get a job.

posted by: Noteworthy on June 28, 2011 9:56pm

Double Talk:

That is an appropriate nick since you know the mayor can self limit BOA approved salary and benefits. While these other components which are covered by contract and charter are allowed, indeed escalated by Mayor DeStefano for his personal benefit over the years, it is also the mayor’s prerogative to reject them which is what Kerekes will do. I recall the mayor while not taking steps in this crisis to end the longevity bonuses for himself and his top staff, says he rejected it. You may also remember right after a recent election following his failed bid for governor, that DeStefano demanded the BOA give him a double digit pay hike to make up for not asking for a raise while he was running for governor. He got it.

Lives in Fair Haven:

My only comment is the size of one’s salary is not the only index of one’s value. I would argue that the fiscal management of the city, how safe our streets are, how many jobs there are for New Haveners and how well we educate our children are a far better yardstick of value. While Kerekes’ plans for a transformed New Haven are made public, the current mayor has a long record.

On those fronts, Mayor DeStefano should not only be working for free, he owes us a refund.

posted by: Atwater on June 29, 2011 7:59am

This is not a serious challenge for the mayor, it is a gimmick, or more like empty rhetoric. The mayor knows he will easily be re-elected if the caliber of challengers continues to be so low.

The problem I have with all of this is that DeStefano was re-elected several times, probably by the same people who now complain about him. And the BOA, who set the mayoral salary are also elected representatives. So, the people of this city are really to blame for making poor choices come election time. It seems all they hear is Democrat and they pull the lever, or they get caught up by another type of vacuous political spin.

Would a Republican do a better job? Maybe, probably. But, political affiliation doesn’t matter, at least it shouldn’t. What we need is a fiscal conservative, Democrat or Republican, but most fiscal conservatives belong to the latter. Kekeres seems to be too naively idealistic to do the job. So far his “ideas” are far fetched and ambiguously generic. But, they make for good sound bites and headlines.

posted by: Roz on June 29, 2011 8:22am

I think John DeStefano has been a wonderful mayor. Look at all he’s done for the city. I’m sure he’ll promise to take a salary of \$50,000 when he’s re-elected. In fact its already widely rumored he will issue a press release on Friday confirming his intention. Ever the astute politician, giving the City a really great Independence Day gift.

posted by: Cedarhillresident on June 29, 2011 8:32am

@livesinFairhavenremember the AIG CEO Edward Liddy, coming out of his retirement and taking \$1 as his salary during the 2008 and 2009 financial crisis

http://money.cnn.com/2008/11/25/news/companies/aig_ceo/index.htm