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Two New Haven wards opt out of Democratic endorsements

Published: Thursday, July 28, 2011



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NEW HAVEN – Two wards did not make endorsements at the [Democratic Town Committee nominating convention](#) Tuesday, though for very different reasons.

Ward 1, which includes Yale University, opted against endorsing someone in favor of having the candidates' petition be on the November ballot without party affiliations. Ward 11, on the other hand, did not endorse the sole Democrat who filed papers to seek the seat because the co-chairmen of the Fair Haven Heights ward are supporting the incumbent, Alderwoman Maureen O'Sullivan Best, an independent.

Ward 1's lack of an endorsement took place without protest. No one was seeking the endorsement.

But Ward 11's decision not to endorse Bella Vista resident Barbara Constantinople despite her being the only Democrat seeking the seat ruffled feathers with some on the committee. When Ward 11 co-chairmen Patty DePalma and Vincent Marottoli abstained from endorsing a candidate, Ward 8 co-chairman Chris Randall objected and questioned the legality of the decision not to endorse the only Democrat who wants the seat.

Constantinople, an eight-year resident of the Bella Vista senior housing complex, said she was upset but not surprised by the move. Her argument is that she was never given a chance to make her case to members of the ward committee, since she was not invited to the meeting. Constantinople claims she made numerous attempts to reach out to DePalma and Marottoli, but that they never provided her with information about a ward committee meeting where she could "make her case" about why she should be endorsed.

"The seniors need someone to be behind them. They should be able to have a voice," Constantinople said.

Constantinople said she plans to gather signatures to get on the ballot for the September primary.

Reached Wednesday morning, DePalma confirmed that she and Marottoli are supporting O'Sullivan-Best, not Constantinople.

"Maureen has been here two years and she does follow through. She has been far more reputable than any other alderperson we've had in this ward," DePalma said.

DePalma said O'Sullivan-Best is a frequent visitor to Bella Vista, stopping by at least once or twice a week. Regarding Constantinople's claims that the ward co-chairs tried to shut her out of the ward meeting, DePalma said it's not her job to notify people when she has the ward meeting. She said she told Constantinople if she wanted information about running for office, she should go to the registrar of voter's office in City Hall.

At issue for Democrats at the convention who thought Constantinople should get the nod is whether the ward co-chairmen can decide not to endorse the only Democrat seeking the office.

After the meeting, mayoral challenger Jeffrey Kerekes, who received seven votes for the endorsement but lost to Mayor John DeStefano Jr., said Constantinople's case is further evidence of the failed political system in New Haven.

"This process is not democracy," he said.

Democratic Town Committee Chairwoman Susan Voigt said that while local bylaws say wards shall make an endorsement, the state rules do not back up that rule. Specifically, the local bylaws say: "the candidate for alderman from each ward shall be endorsed by a convention of delegates in each ward" and that the person with a majority of votes at the convention by members of the ward committee shall get the endorsement.

O'Sullivan-Best said she was happy to have the support of the Ward 11 co-chairmen and plans to seek re-election as an unaffiliated candidate.

In Ward 1, outgoing Alderman Michael Jones, said the reason for not endorsing has to do with optimizing fairness of the process. Since Yale students, which make up the majority of the Ward 1 constituents, are gone during the summer, having candidates run in the November election instead of the September primary gives them more time.

"We all thought it would be the best way to have the most fair process possible," Jones said.

Jones, who graduated and is working on U.S. Rep. Chris Murphy's campaign for Senate, said Yale student Vinay Vajak, class of 2014, has declared his intent to seek the seat. Vajak could not be reached for comment.

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