

# NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

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## Who's To Blame For Crime & Unemployment?

BY **Thomas MacMillan** | SEP 8, 2011 8:12 AM

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THOMAS MACMILLAN PHOTO.

Greer on the Green, with mayoral challengers.



As one Edgewood activist blasted Mayor John DeStefano for turning the city into “Homicide Haven,” local building trade union leaders defended the mayor against what they called a “backlash” of anti-incumbent sentiment.

The activist was Eliezer Greer, who three years ago formed an [armed citizens patrol of Edgewood Park](#). In a stemwinder speech at 2 p.m. Wednesday outside City Hall, Greer charged DeStefano with allowing crime and violence to run rampant.

Greer rounded up Democratic mayoral primary challengers Tony Dawson, Clifton Graves, and Jeffrey Kerekes to stand beside him for what amounted to a joint non-endorsement of the mayor’s leadership. Greer declined formally to back any specific challenger, but instead said the city needs anyone but DeStefano. The event took place as those three candidates enter a final sprint to Tuesday’s Democratic primary, where they’re trying to stop DeStefano’s quest for a 10th term.

An hour earlier, at the construction site of a new school in the Hill, union leaders came to DeStefano’s aid. The New Haven branch of the AFL-CIO’s Connecticut Building and Construction Trades Council handed DeStefano its official endorsement in front of the future Hill Central Music Academy on Dewitt Street.

The two events offered two views on how to judge an incumbent—on when he should get credit for success or take blame for problems.

Meanwhile, the campaign’s harshest attack mailer arrived in mailboxes across town Wednesday, also seeking to tie the mayor to the year’s murder spree. Sent by Dawson’s campaign, it personally took on DeStefano (as well as Graves). A photo of a miffed DeStefano appears in the flyer’s top left-hand corner below this headline: “While DeStefano Does Nothing—Our Children Are Being Murdered!”

### **Job Success Amid National Decline?**

At the DeStefano endorsement event, Andy Esposito, head of the trades council’s New Haven branch, said the mayor is being “taken for granted” and scapegoated for economic problems outside of his control.

The event marked the mayor’s second union endorsement in this campaign season. On Monday he appeared with leaders of the firefighters union, who [announced their support](#).



Esposito (right).

“The mayor is doing a great job under trying times,” Esposito said. He said the mayor has kept taxes down and done an “excellent job with the school system.”

Esposito said his organization represents 18 trades with 18,000 members in the greater New Haven area. That includes iron workers, sheet metal workers, carpenters, electricians, and laborers. Two weeks ago the New Haven organization caucused, with two representatives from each trade, to decide whom to endorse. The vote was unanimous for DeStefano, Esposito said.

“I don’t want to see a good guy get beat,” Esposito said as he approached a copper sheet-metal podium to address some two dozen workers and union officials.

The mayor faces a “backlash” of anti-incumbent sentiment that has little to do with him and more to do with political and economic decisions in Washington, Esposito said.

He hailed the mayor’s \$1.5 billion school construction program.



DeStefano (center)

The city has "been building these schools for 15 years," DeStefano said. It makes a difference to the kids who walk into them, he said. "It's a powerful thing."

School construction has meant jobs for New Haveners and for women and minorities, DeStefano said. That means payroll dollars stay in New Haven, he said.

Esposito is the business manager for Iron Workers Local 424, which has 300 members in New Haven. He said the trade unions will have drivers and poll workers out for DeStefano on Election Day.

Butch Davidson, business manager for roofers and waterproofers Local 12, said it's a shame to see DeStefano "get a black eye" for economic conditions that aren't his fault. "We're going to be having our members go door to door to remind them it's not his fault."

Reached later, Democratic primary opponent Kerekes disagreed. The city's financial problems precede the current economic crisis, Kerekes said. Years of underfunding pensions have created a "huge liability," and school construction has led to more debt, he said.

"I think they're off-base here," opponent Graves said of the union endorsement. The city is facing a dire economic condition, but the administration hasn't done enough to promote job creation and economic development, he said.

"The mayor can't be Harry Truman and Pontius Pilate," Graves said. DeStefano wants to take credit for city successes but "doesn't want to be blamed for violence in the street," he said.



Kerekes, Greer, Graves, and Dawson (left to right).

### “Homicide Haven”

At the 2 p.m. Wednesday event on the Green, Graves and others heaped blame on the mayor for crime and violence.

“Welcome to what was once called New Haven and is now Homicide Haven,” said Greer, who delivered a passionate speech with his back to City Hall, sounding almost like a candidate for mayor himself.

Crime is rampant in the city and more guns are in the streets “than ever before,” Greer said. The Labor Day weekend saw a “catastrophic milestone” as the city [saw its 25th homicide of the year](#), surpassing the total for all of 2010, he said. Greer placed the blame squarely on the mayor.

“The mayor’s current police chief lives in Chicago and vacations in New Haven,” Greer said. The mayor’s number one priority should be to keep people safe, he said. “In this regard, our city gets a grade of ‘F.’”

It’s time for new leadership and new ideas and for people to “civilly swarm” the polls on Tuesday, Greer said. He didn’t specify whom voters should support at the polls, except that it be anyone but DeStefano.

The mayoral challengers spoke in alphabetical order.

“I totally agree with Rabbi Greer,” Dawson began. He said he’s already asked for the police chief to resign and if he were elected, he’d fire him on “Day One.” He’d then begin “block-by-block organizing” between police and neighbors to combat crime.



Dawson, Kerekes, Greer, and Graves (left to right).

Graves said as mayor he'd create a "task force on public safety" and institute "more aggressive community policing."

Kerekes said the city's crime has its roots in poverty and a failure of education. The city's schools have become "dropout factories" and the returning felons whom the mayor points to as a source of violent crime are part of the "master class" of those "factories." He also called for a new chief and a return to community policing.

Greer said after the event that he has not chosen to endorse a candidate in the primary, but that it may yet happen.

In response to Greer's press event, DeStefano campaign manager Danny Kedem released this statement: "To fight violence in the city we need simultaneous short, mid, and long term interventions. We are clearing street level dealers off corners and taking down gangs like R2 with the help of state and federal officers. In the mid term, utilizing the city's innovative program to build a support system for felons who want to make positive choices with their lives. And most importantly giving our kids a chance to go to college through New Haven promise and school reform."

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## Comments

**posted by: Not Right on September 8, 2011 8:27am**

If putting up candidate signs on the green lines and city property is against the law how is putting up your sign "Re-Elect DeStefano" on a city construction site possibly legal!

**posted by: Governing on September 8, 2011 8:35am**

One can complain, and rightly so, but governing, once elected, is another thing entirely. The candidates have not crafted a concrete plan over which, those who really elect the mayor, can get excited about.

Saying that he fired the police chief the first day on the job, Dawson betrays his ignorance of statutes. Squawking about taxes, without a substantive plan to cut them, while recognizing the needs of the city, is just simply irresponsible. It is easy to go to the mayor's forums, confront him with a bunch of numbers, but what happens is people just glaze over and Jeffery's points are just lost.

Candidates, start presenting us with some concrete plans that show you have the capacity to govern. Goofy proposals that appeal to people's anger, rather than substantive proposals, will only serve to further alienate the already disgruntle voter.

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**posted by: Freedom of The People on September 8, 2011 8:35am**

It's the way people think that's the problem. When you have people being exploited for their social ills, by corporations, and political leaders, non-profits. Your going to have this type of out cry but again it's the method of thought behind all groups involved. The leadership is taking advantage of all of it's resources and the people who want to drive "change" forward are begging and even lowering themselves to the level of the man they are attempting to defeat in a "race". Someone should ask these candidates what do they think about having a unified delegation with one person up for mayor, They wanna stop violence but don't want to speak on the guns being shipped in weekly which might correlate to the missing guns from manufacturers nationally ? might be a reason for the rampant illegal possession of firearms in the city. You have police brutality at an all time high nationally and especially in new haven on black males with and with out criminal records, and you have an in adequate corporate funded Wal-Mart education being taught k-12 so forget the schools already. Again it's how people think and at the end of the day if they have thought at all about why? Being a leader is'nt about a guessing game or what shoe fits better it's about knowledgeable enough to stimulate the good in human beings.

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**posted by: anon on September 8, 2011 8:51am**

Governing, the candidates have all come up with many concrete plans.

Perhaps a few of the "voters" are disgruntled because they haven't been paying attention to anything that takes place in their community other than press coverage.

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**posted by: Mike on September 8, 2011 8:59am**

"Greer charged DeStefano with allowing crime and violence to run rampant."

I could not say it any better. This is probably the 10th city I have lived in in 42 years and in that time I have never seen such disregard for the law as I have seen here in New Haven. The troublemakers have absolutely no fear of the police whatsoever. You have to enforce the little stuff which means cops have to do more work. You cannot wait until they are hardened adult criminals, cops have to be hard on the teens/pre-teens since its obvious their parents arent doing anything.

Building new schools is great, now lets try and actually teach them something besides new schools are great. How are those test scores Mayor John?

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**posted by: concernedwestvilleres on September 8, 2011 9:03am**

Again, the three candidates show their lack of knowledge and all they can do is finger-point or come up with "sounds good" solutions. Community policing sounds good, but I doubt it would reduce the number of homicides. If someone is hell-bent on killing another person it will happen even if police are around- the criminal will wait for the opportune moment.

As for firing the police chief because the chief should come from the ranks that defies changing the organization. Bringing someone from within will not change it. You need people who are not part of the culture to change the culture. Chief Limon may be from Chicago, but that doesn't mean he isn't and can't be a good police chief. Organizational change takes time and a new police chief can't make changes "overnight". Also, I doubt changing police chiefs would suddenly drop the crime rates.

DeStefano is correct that part of the problem is the state "dumps" convicts in New Haven after release—because New Haven has the services they can obtain. I don't hear of many parolees being dumped in Hartford, Waterbury, or Bridgeport. The mayor should refuse to accept these convicts if they are not from New Haven or don't have family in New Haven and dump them in Hartford where the governor now lives.

A major part of the problem will only be solved in the home and in providing job and future opportunities for people in

New Haven. Yale and Higher One hire many people but they need to be college educated for most of the jobs. New Haven Promise is one step in the right direction. We need to find solutions for job training and to work with local employers to hire New Haven residents for jobs especially in the poorer areas of town.

Blaming the mayor for every problem is absurd and I seriously doubt any of these candidates will be able to change the situation. ...

As for Rabbi Greer it is great he is getting involved in the community. He wants to see change. ... I wonder if his only concern is whether the crime will seep over to his Beaver Hills enclave ... That remains to be seen.

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**posted by: robn on September 8, 2011 9:31am**

<i>“(Esposito) said the mayor has kept taxes down and done an “excellent job with the school system.””

What planet is this guy from?

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**posted by: anon on September 8, 2011 9:33am**

Mike is correct that one of the only ways to reduce the crime rate using policing is to consistently stop people for traffic offenses and littering. This also catches many illegal weapons.

The other is to create major incentives so that officers actually live in the city, not the way things are now where 90% live somewhere else. Community policing only works when at least a few of the officers live here. We should also train and hire more residents to lower level security jobs, like what the Town Green and Yale University have both done with their paraprofessional security patrols. Cut salaries, and give the savings back to workers in the form of generous residency incentives.

Neighborhoods are only as safe as the number of police officers who live in them, not the number of patrols. Just look at where our cops live and you'll see a direct nearly 1:1 relationship between crime and lack of residents who work in law enforcement.

Drastic times call for drastic measures, not endless talking, panels and work groups about the same problems we have known for decades how to solve.

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**posted by: Go Dawson! on September 8, 2011 9:34am**

How is it that Dawson thinks being a hospital security guard qualifies himself to run a city? He hasn't told us anything he's done in his years as an alderman to make a difference. All I hear is griping and pandering.

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**posted by: Paul on September 8, 2011 9:42am**

If DeStefano loses the Democratic Primary, what will the other two non-incumbents do? Dawson? Graves? Kerekes? Please respond! Who will the Democratic Party back? Will DeStefano still run for Mayor if he loses the Primary? Can someone answer these questions?

What if DeStefano wins the Democratic Primary but one of the non-incumbents wins 2nd place by a large margin? Will any of the non-incumbents drop out and back the 2nd place candidate? Dawson? Graves? Kerekes? Please respond!

If the three challengers are serious about beating a very strong incumbent mayor, two of you need to put your egos aside, drop out, and back New Haven residents' choice for the strongest candidate running against DeStefano. The three challengers should discuss this once the Primary happens on the 13th if beating the Incumbent is your top priority.

