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Mayor DeStefano, rivals to vie for New Haven Democrats' votes Tuesday

Published: Sunday, September 11, 2011

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NEW HAVEN — City Democrats are gearing up for the most hotly contested mayoral primary in a decade: a veteran mayor running on his record against three passionate challengers vowing change.

Democrats Tuesday will choose from nine-term Mayor John DeStefano Jr.; Anthony Dawson, a former longtime alderman with a background in law enforcement; Clifton Graves Jr., a lawyer, community activist and youth mentor; and Jeffrey Kerekes, a psychotherapist and budget watchdog who co-founded the New Haven Citizens Action Network.

Voting will take place from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The last heated mayoral primary was 2001, when DeStefano faced off against state Sen. Martin M. Looney, D-New Haven, and was victorious. DeStefano is again on the defensive for the office he's held for 18 years. Kerekes is hitting hard on budget issues amid the lingering economic crisis, and Dawson and Graves are knocking the mayor on violent crime, a hot-button issue in a year with 25 homicides on record so far.

The DeStefano campaign is running two television commercials. One focuses on schools, and touts the New Haven Promise scholarship program, and the other talks about combatting crime. DeStefano frequently touts the district's school reform plan, \$1.5 billion school construction program and newly launched Promise program, which offers free college tuition for New Haven high school graduates.

Kerekes put up four billboards across the city and is running a TV ad that portrays him as the anti-career politician, a dig at DeStefano. He said the Number One complaint he hears from people is, "They want DeStefano

to go.”

“I’m the person that’s running who really wants to make the city better, who has the skills to do that,” Kerekes said.

Kerekes accuses the mayor of hurting city finances through wasteful spending and cronyism. His campaign vows transparency in government, reduced crime through community policing, better school reform, more spending in the classroom and more jobs. He has vowed not to increase taxes without a vote from residents. Kerekes said he is optimistic about winning the primary, but is even more confident that he and the other challengers combined will garner more votes than DeStefano.

Dawson’s platform touches on the budget, schools and jobs, but his focus is crime. A recent campaign mailing hails Dawson as the only candidate “with the experience to stop New Haven’s crime-wave.” He recently picked up an endorsement from former Mayor John Daniels. A former longtime aldermen and veteran of law enforcement, Dawson is outspoken about calling for the firing of Police Chief Frank Limon. He also has called for deploying more police resources to neighborhood plagued by violence.

“People care about getting their children out of this rampage of crime and into something constructive and meaningful so they can have some positive choices,” Dawson said. [Continued...](#)

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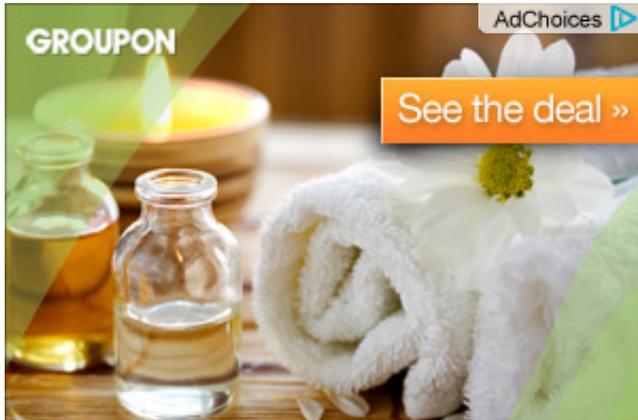


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