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EDITORIAL: New Haven primary tallied voter anger

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A win is a win, and New Haven Mayor John DeStefano Jr. put the best face on it. Running against three opponents, DeStefano won, but with only 43 percent of the vote. Further, union-backed candidates critical of City Hall won 14 seats on the Board of Aldermen, unseating incumbents backed by DeStefano and convincingly upsetting long-term members, such as Carl Goldfield, D-29, the board's president.

The issues were local: taxes, crime, jobs. But, they reflected a national mood. Voters aren't happy and they are expressing their displeasure by voting against incumbents.

In New York City, a congressional seat held by a Democrat since 1920, vacated by disgraced former U.S. Rep. Anthony Weiner, was won by a Republican.

The New Haven election demonstrated the clout of organized labor here. Aldermanic candidates benefited hugely from the support of Yale University's labor unions, Unite Here locals 34 and 35, as well as that of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Council 4. DeStefano relied heavily on the campaign support of the New Haven Firefighters Union.

In one ward, the anti-incumbent mood worked in an unusual way. A candidate backed by City Hall unseated Alderman Darnell Goldson, D-30, a frequent critic of the DeStefano administration.

In a city where a win in the Democratic primary is tantamount to victory in the general election, the new Board of Aldermen will have a different relationship with City Hall. The expectation is that it will challenge the mayor more on budget, economic development and cost-cutting issues that affect the unions.

The union-endorsed candidates have not been entirely clear about how they square their unhappiness with high taxes, which is shared by everyone, with their desire to protect city services and jobs at a time when New Haven's finances are seriously strained.

DeStefano now faces Jeffrey Kerekes, who received the second highest number of votes Tuesday, in the November general election. Kerekes will run as an independent. There is no Republican candidate.

The discussion about taxes, jobs, efficient use of government resources and the high number of city homicides will continue. In a one-party town, DeStefano, mayor for 18 years, can take nothing for granted. Voters sent a message Tuesday. They are not happy.

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