

USG Presidential Ticket Profiles

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Voting for the Undergraduate Student Government elections open today at noon on UConncontact and closes at noon on March 5. Below are profiles for the candidates competing for the president and vice president roles for the University of Connecticut Storrs USG.

Venice Montanaro and Keira Conrad

President contender Venice Montanaro is a sixth-semester political science and sociology major with a Latino studies minor. In partnership with the vice president candidate Keira Conrad, a fourth-semester political science and economics major, they set their campaign focus on three areas: quality of life, affordability and transportation.

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VENICE MONTANARO

“We really wanted to focus on three because when we sat down with each other, we came up with this big list of everything we knew had faults,” Montanaro said, pointing out how an Instagram form helped them gauge complaints students had. “By grouping them into the three categories, it’s allowing us to push the emphasis on it.”

One of the campaign pillars most important to Montanaro was affordability.

“I’m a student with three jobs and I’ve consistently had at least two jobs since I started my education, so I know how important it is to be able to pay for things,” Montanaro said. “Affordability is a big one that’s really important to me... focusing on making sure people are fed, and people are happy and people are learning new skills.”

One plan Montanaro mentioned to help tackle affordability is to strengthen USG ties to Husky Harvest, a network of food pantries at UConn campuses accessible to anyone with a UConn ID, according to the Husky Harvest website.

“Before the campaign, we did a project and we planned it all for [a future partnership] with the parking services to have a program where you could pay off your parking tickets by donating food to Husky Harvest,” Montanaro said.

She added how specific complaints they received would fit into the other pillars as well.

“Not to say UConn is bad in any way, but there are certain things that can improve quality of life, such as [complaints on YikYak where] if you go up to the Towers, that hill, there’s a fence, and everyone tears down

the fence because it’s annoying,” Montanaro said. “We should talk to transportation and campus maintenance, and see, can we get that down permanently if so many students are against it?”

Montanaro said that Conrad has been a helpful campaign partner on other quality of life initiatives related to the hours of UConn facilities.

“I know Keira is really passionate about dining halls staying open later, maybe even the [Student Recreation Center] staying open later on weekends,” Montanaro said. “Seeing how passionate she was about that was incredible and made me want to work with her, seeing her share issues I didn’t know about.”

The free professional clothing closet is a USG event Conrad played a major role in coordinating, like with a partnership with Goodwill, and one she said she hopes to expand as vice president.

“Looking ahead, I would love to see the program expand, whether that means increasing inventory through donation drives, creating a more permanent and visible space, or potentially opening satellite closets in other high-traffic areas of campus,” Conrad said.

Joel Harris and Eliyahu Cohen

President contender Joel Harris is a fourth-semester mechanical engineering student and current College of Engineering senator. He views the strength of his ticket with Eliyahu Cohen, a fourth-semester financial technology student, standing for reform within USG.

“Let’s give this money back to clubs, let’s empower clubs to bring speakers.”

JOEL HARRIS

“The big focus of our campaign is we don’t think USG as it stands represents the will of the student body, and I don’t say that lightly,” Harris said. “I say that because historic turnouts on USG elections are 10% of the student body.”

The main part of their focus is increasing funding for Tier-II organizations at UConn, where the USG’s Funding Student Staff is responsible for issuing funds, according to the USG website.

“When we get Tier-II’s that are receiving emails in January saying that we’re out of money, you don’t get money, and we start denying things that should have funding available to them, that’s where we run into an issue,” Harris said.

One of the biggest criticisms the ticket has received when campaigning on Tier-II funding is that the president of USG doesn’t have the power to appropriate more funds to Tier-II’s, according to Harris.

“We disagree, we think there are certain constitutional powers enshrined within the USG Constitution that have historically not been used by the president,” Harris said. “We’re



University of Connecticut’s Undergraduate Student Government (USG) logo. USG aims to voice and amplify student concerns to university administration. PHOTO COURTESY OF @USGUCONN ON INSTAGRAM.

happy to take a case up with the judiciary about using the presidential power to impact the budgets and benefit Tier-II’s and benefit campuses.”

Harris and Cohen said they aim to reform some of USG’s budget to fund Tier-II organizations instead of spending on speakers for USG events.

“What we’re seeing is that when we spend \$20,000 dollars on a speaker, we get 20 students there, and that’s a very lopsided ratio. That’s a mismanagement of funds,” Harris said. “Let’s give this money back to clubs, let’s empower clubs to bring speakers.”

An audit on USG is another promise Harris and Cohen made in their campaign to address claims of USG fund mismanagement.

“The reality is USG advisors are the only department at UConn

that’s grown despite budget cuts,” Harris said. “There is without a doubt a certain amount of fat on the meat that needs to be trimmed away and given back to students.”

Cohen’s campaign for USG vice president follows Harris’ focus for more Tier-II funding as he is also president of two Tier-II organizations on campus. Cohen mentioned having difficulty getting funding for the Financial Technology organization to go to a conference.

“What I really like about our ticket is [that] we’re outsiders,” Cohen said. “Sure, we’re a part of USG, we’re senators, we’ve been in the community. We understand it, but I’m coming from two different organizations that have requested funding before.”

Cohen said his individualized major in financial technology is currently in the process of being

established with his academic advisor, as he is now a finance major and computer science minor.

Switching majors was something Cohen said could possibly lead him to transfer to UConn Stamford, but he said that’s probably not going to happen, and he’ll decide in the next few months. Harris said the Constitution has methods in place to make him a viable vice president if he transfers.

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