

OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST
ELIAS THEODORE

Ward 1, my home and yours

Energy, approachability and a new sense of togetherness — that’s what I’m striving to bring to Ward 1. I’m running because I see untapped potential for the alder to connect students with opportunities, to be a figure on campus who radiates positivity around engaging with New Haven.

My priorities will be local and actionable: strengthening the relationship between Yale and New Haven, investing in the New Haven Green, promoting more affordable housing and supporting businesses downtown. I’m so excited to do this work, and I hope you’ll join me.

Just a few years ago, I was a senior at Wilbur Cross High School contemplating my college decision. Yale was everything I wanted in a school, but its location gave me pause. I’ve lived about a mile from campus since I was six. Part of me wondered if I should leave New Haven and explore somewhere new.

At an event for prospective students from the city, former Ward 1 and current Ward 7 Alder Eli Sabin said something that stuck with me: that being an undergraduate at Yale is an entirely new experience of New Haven. Eli’s words reassured me as I accepted my spot and have absolutely proven true.

I loved that my first-year dorm looked out onto the green: the murmurs of music, chanting and passing cars were a thrilling reminder that I lived downtown. But I was also struck by the city’s extreme wealth inequality, which I now witnessed every day. I grew increasingly frustrated that Yale, with all of its resources and espoused commitment to humanity, watches on as one in four New Haveners live below the poverty line.

Having a Yale ID completely changes how you experience downtown. I explored Yale’s dining halls and creative spaces. Like many students, I spent a lot of time in the libraries, and gained a love for archival research. As a sophomore, I found myself doing much of my academic work on New Haven and other small post-industrial cities. In the spring, I had the choice between exploring these issues in the classroom or putting what I’ve learned into action. I am running for alder because I want to directly affect change.

Campaigning has been another new experience of New Haven, one full of joy and shaped by conversation. Parents of friends, people I knew from carpooling and playdates, have become mentors. Their work as New Haven Public School teachers, housing policy experts and mental health service providers have shaped my understanding of how a Ward 1 Alder can contribute to a thriving New Haven.

Again and again, I’ve been reminded how much knowledge exists in New Haven outside of Yale. I want to help more students experience this too. These kinds of exchanges don’t just enhance a college education, but are

fundamental to a better relationship between Yale and New Haven.

I’ve registered more than 200 Yale students to vote, from seniors ready to cast their first ballot in New Haven to first years ready to vote in their first election. I’ve been inspired by these conversations with my peers: they care about New Haven and want to be involved. It’s my job to make that easier.

In my hours on the green, I’ve listened to unhoused residents describe the challenges of finding a bed. Shelters are often full and unsafe, and it can take years to secure permanent housing in one of the most competitive rental markets in the country. By advocating for pro-development changes to our zoning laws and new approaches to developer incentivization, I will work to expand affordable housing and address homelessness at its root causes.

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I’ve walked the ward with a disability rights activist, taking note of the ways in which our sidewalks are dangerous and uninclusive. I’ve talked with members of the green’s faith communities, absorbing their perspective on how proposed developments could disrupt the site’s history. As we invest in downtown, whether that’s adding new attractions to the green or creating more two-way roads, I am committed to ensuring that community input guides these changes.

I’ve heard such a range of priorities and visions for the city, but one message has been consistent: New Haveners want an alder who listens. They want an alder who works and votes solely on behalf of their constituents. And they want an alder who is present and responsive.

Over the last two months, my team and I have built a campaign that prioritizes accessibility and connection. We’ve developed an active social media presence, tabled for dozens of hours across the ward and helped hundreds of new people register to vote. Take my campaign as a preview of how I will serve: with open ears, commitment and joy. For you, for us and for New Haven.

ELIAS THEODORE is a junior in *Jonathan Edwards College studying urban studies.* He can be reached at elias.theodore@yale.edu.

GUEST COLUMNISTS
NORAH LAUGHTER AND SCOTT MARKS

Voter Laughter for racial and economic justice

As the director of New Haven Rising and a student organizer with Students Unite Now, or SUN, the two of us have seen what’s possible when people organize together in New Haven, including our coalition’s success increasing Yale’s annual fair share payments to the city through 2026. By standing shoulder to shoulder, workers, students and residents have secured local hiring commitments, stronger unions and increased city funding.

Since 2012, New Haven Rising has been developing leadership through popular education campaigns that bolster organizing across neighborhoods. Banding neighbors together to fight for racial and economic justice — New Haven Rising’s core mission — is also the foundation of Norah’s campaign for Ward 1 alder.

We’re glad to see more students engaging with this work. At the same time, we know racial justice in New Haven isn’t about saying the right things; it’s a sustained, collective practice. The struggles of working-class Black and Brown residents are inseparable from fights for union jobs, stable housing, quality healthcare and respect.

Scott’s father worked in construction and later as a custodian at what’s now Yale New Haven Hospital. That work was better than the sharecropping he left behind in North Carolina, but he still worked 80-hour weeks just to get by. In the 1990s, mostly Black men like him lined up by Yale’s dumpsters, hoping for a day’s work in a dining hall. That was what opportunity looked like for many New Haven residents: segregated, exploitative and deeply unjust.

Norah grew up white and working-class in Kentucky, the daughter of a union public school teacher. In that mostly white community, many Latine neighbors worked as underpaid, unprotected migrant farm laborers. Seeing how race and

class shaped whose labor was valued — and whose was exploited — left a deep impression.

Witnessing community members from her Catholic church underpaid for their work was infuriating. That anger, rooted in solidarity, fuels our shared commitment to racial and economic justice in New Haven. In any city, learning to turn values into action starts by showing up first to listen, then to organize.

In 2022, Norah attended her first Rally for Respect, led by Local 33, Yale’s graduate worker union that has improved the standard for work across academia. For her, it was the first time seeing thousands of workers unite and win. For Scott, it was the culmination of a decades-long fight against Yale’s history of union busting.

In 2023, Norah joined over 1,500 students and thousands of union workers who pushed Yale to reinvest in the Yale Health Center, improving care for students, workers, and dependents. The next year, New Haven Rising and SUN mobilized Ward 1 students in support of striking Omni Hotel workers with Local 217, who went on to win significant raises and health benefits for dozens of New Haven families.

That’s why we fight alongside organized labor to win for both workers and neighbors. We look to campaigns like Zohran Mamdani’s mayoral bid in New York, which connect racial justice to class struggle by confronting landlords, bosses and wealthy institutions alongside unions and working people. We are kin in that struggle. Just as UNITE HERE’s New York locals support Mamdani, New Haven Rising supports progressive candidates committed to building a movement of working people.

This campaign is just one part of that broader project. If we’re serious about justice, we need to connect electoral power with the places where people power is built: picket lines, church basements, tenant meetings

and union halls.

Norah’s campaign for Alder grows directly from that organizing. This includes efforts at the state level as Ward 1 co-chair of the Democratic Town Committee by testifying before the Labor and Public Employees Committee and leading teams of union members to lobby in Hartford for stronger labor protections.

Today, Norah’s shared slate with New Haven Rising member Alder Frank Douglass is rooted in hundreds of conversations with neighbors about rent hikes, evictions, school underfunding and job insecurity. Our shared platform calls for affordable housing, good union jobs, youth opportunity and education, and a fully funded city. To realize this vision, we need to support tenant unions, protect families from displacement and expand local hiring into good union jobs. We’ll also need major investments in afterschool programs, vocational training and youth mentorship.

And to pay for it all, we must build a coalition large enough to move real resources into the city. New Haven is special. We’ve built a working-class coalition that produces results. We can hold Yale and other wealthy employers accountable to the city they depend on.

Our coalition has done it before; the struggle and our wins come from decades of committed partnerships grounded in shared vision. In this Democratic Primary, vote for Norah Laughter. Then join a New Haven Rising canvas, and rally with Yale workers on September 25. Standing side by side, we all win.

NORAH LAUGHTER is a senior in *Pierson College studying American Studies.* She can be reached at norah.laughter@yale.edu.

REVEREND SCOTT MARKS is *Director of New Haven Rising.* He can be reached at marksscott16@gmail.com.

GUEST COLUMNIST
RHEA MCTIERNAN HUGE

Democracy is an active practice. Engage in it with me.

When I first visited Yale for Admitted Students’ Weekend in 2022, the contrast was striking. I arrived from Wilbur Cross High School, New Haven’s largest public school, where basic necessities like soap in bathrooms and adequate counseling staff were constant struggles. Our annual measure of success was simple: How many students graduated, not whether they found fulfilling paths to college or careers. Against this backdrop, Yale’s resources seemed almost unimaginable.

I saw the resources at Yale, a mere two miles from my high school, and I saw an opportunity to extend these resources to the communities and students I loved. This is a big part of why I’m running for Ward 1 alder. I want to build our ward into one that is engaged, informed and active. Local politics is truly the backbone of our democracy, and the place to begin broader movements. I’m inviting you to become a part of that. This is knowledge and understanding that I hope you will take with you even if you leave New Haven — that the place in which you live is important and the space you occupy within it is important, and you have a choice in how you relate to and engage with your community.

I would like to share a few stories that highlight the person I am and the way I operate in the world. You can read about my platform here, but I wanted to take this time to show you what it would mean for me to be your Alder. I’ll start here: I was born in New Haven, and grew up in Wooster Square, just a ten minute walk from campus. Wooster Square Park is where I spent many

childhood hours learning to ride my bike, playing with my siblings and attending the Cherry Blossom Festival each year.

The Christopher Columbus statue was a constant presence in the park. As I grew older, I began to consider what this statue’s presence meant, and what it communicated to the thousands who visited our neighborhood park every year.

In June of my sophomore year of high school, I wrote a petition calling for the removal of this statue. I spent hours researching and writing, finding the best way to communicate how the statue detracted from the purpose of this beautiful public gathering space.

The petition was met with widespread support, despite the divisiveness of the issue it addressed. Thousands of people signed it, from Italian American leaders to community activists, together advocating for the importance of welcoming public spaces. The statue was removed later that summer.

Collective community action is the reason the statue was removed; I was only the catalyst. I understand the power that we hold collectively.

After coming to Yale, I have found a variety of ways to stay connected to the larger community of New Haven. I continue to sing in the choir — located in Ward 1 — that I’ve sung in since I was 9 years old, and I started working with and earned the endorsement of Kiana Flores, the current Ward 1 alder.

Last spring, I had the opportunity to do something I’d been dreaming about for a while: to host a street market in New Haven which brought together New Haven small businesses and Yale student artists.

To execute this event, I navigated various city departments and complex permitting processes in order to close down High Street, get authorization to sell wares and source tables and tents to host participants.

Every day for weeks, from the moment I woke up to the minute my head hit the pillow, I planned, coordinated and executed each detail of this event. It took both immense dedication and persistence, but every second was worth seeing Yale students discover the vibrant art scene around them. This passion and unending love for my city is exactly what I would bring to the Board of Alders.

While taking a break from writing this, I read a speech delivered in 1988 by A. Bartlett Giamatti, the 19th president of Yale University, assigned for one of my classes. He spoke about the strength of cities and the necessary duty that exists when we choose to live in one: “The defining character of cities over time is that they are political ... and it is the constant activity of a city, as thousands of individual, private, personal decisions and choices all give way finally before one central choice: I choose not to live alone[e] but among others.”

It is the greatest joy to live in this incredible city, and you have before you the opportunity to fully realize your place within it. Your engagement at the local level matters so very much. Democracy is an active practice — engage in it with me as your alder.

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