NEWS

"I make sure that I do everything that I can to be the best representation possible every time that I step on the court and even off the court."
TAYLOR TOWNSEND AMERICAN TENNIS PLAYER

Democratic socialist sparks excitement in special election triumph

BY NELLIE KENNEY
STAFF REPORTER



COURTESY OF CHRIS RANDALL
Maria-Threese Serana, a high school biology teacher and Democratic Socialist, defeated fellow Democrat Gavin Arnold in a special election to represent Ward 9 on Tuesday.

A Democratic Socialist who teaches high school biology will represent parts of East Rock and Fair Haven on the Board of Alders after winning a Tuesday special election.

Maria-Threese Serana, who was up against bank business analysis manager Gavin Arnold, was endorsed by the local Democratic ward committee and the Connecticut branch of Democratic Socialists of America. Her win marks the first recent win for the DSA in New Haven and follows a series of victories for DSA-endorsed candidates in congressional races this summer.

Serana received 186 votes on Tuesday and Arnold received 16. Seven residents voted early and two voted absentee, according to Shannel Evans, the city's Democratic Registrar of Voters. All of those votes were for Serana.

Tuesday's election is the second of three special alder elections this year. Former Ward 9 Alder Caroline Tanbee Smith '14 SOM '25 stepped down in August, spurring the contest. Ward 7 Alder Christine Kim '99 took office in March after former Alder Eli Sabin '22 LAW '26 resigned at the beginning of the year. Ward 24 Alder Evette Hamilton announced last month that she will leave her role at the end of September, launching an election this November to determine who will replace her.

Two other candidates in the race for Ward 9, Blaise Berglund and Conor Gilligan, also appeared on Tuesday's ballot. Both withdrew from the race earlier in the election cycle and endorsed Serana. Each received one vote.

In a speech after votes were tallied, Serana said the results of the election suggest that the "values" and "objectives" of the Democratic Socialists of America "align with community members."

"I'm happy that DSA ideas are supported in the community, because they know I ran as DSA," Serana said in an interview.

Justin Farmer, a DSA-backed candidate to represent western New Haven in the state house, lost his race in August.

Former Ward 9 Alder Charles Decker, who held the seat between 2017 and 2022, was also a Democratic Socialist.

Tuesday's polls were held at East Rock Community Magnet School. Ward 1 Alder Elias Theodore, Ward 7 Alder Christine Kim, New Haven Federation of Teachers President Leslie Blatteau and a group of New Haven DSA members gathered outside the school as the results were tallied. Arnold was not present when election officials announced the results.

In a phone interview, Arnold said that it was "fun to see so many people engage with a small special election on a random Tuesday," and added that "Ms. Serana and her team put a lot of work into engaging with the community."

Arnold said he's not sure what's next for him in the community. "I think I'll continue to try and be active and aware," he said.

New Haven DSA Member Erik Kuranko, who campaigned for Serana, said in an interview earlier in the day that he hopes to see her address the rising cost of housing in the city.

"A lot of people in DSA are excited for the possibility of having her in office. Just getting this perspective on the Board of Alders, I think, is going to improve the political discourse in this town," Kuranko said.

Ward 9 resident Karen Peckham, who has lived in the city for 35 years, said she voted for Serana.

Reckham said that she met Serana, who is her neighbor, while planting chrysanthemums last fall. Her vote was informed by Serana's "sincerity and devotion" to the community, she said.

Resident Karis Medina, who also voted for Serana, said that she wanted an alder who would "find ways of making community" in a ward that she described as "very transient."

Serana said that she plans to start her term by helping residents register to vote in advance of the upcoming midterm elections.

Tanbee Smith received 578 votes in the 2025 alder election, according to information posted by the Connecticut Secretary of State's Office.

Contact
NELLIE KENNEY *at*
nellie.kenney@yale.edu.

Alders back plan allotting $27 million to settle wrongful convictions

BY NELLIE KENNEY
STAFF REPORTER

City leaders are throwing their weight behind a plan that would have the city take out $27 million in bonds to pay for the settlement of two court cases.

The Board of Alders Finance Committee on Monday approved an ordinance amendment to cover the city's legal liability as suits alleging wrongful conviction pile up.

In August, the city agreed to pay $15.25 million each to New Haveners Marquis Jackson and Vernon Horn, who spent 19 and 17 years in jail, respectively, for a murder they did not commit. New Haven's insurance only covered about $5 million, leaving the city to pay the rest, according to City Controller Michael Gormany.

"We know that New Haven has had some challenges during that time span, and it's unfortunate that we now have to suffer because of what was done unjustly this many years ago," Ward 27 Alder Richard Furlow, a member of the finance committee, said in a statement before casting his "yes" vote.

Ron Gizzi, the city's deputy director of the Office of Policy, Management, and Grants, said the interest the city would pay on the bonds would total about $2.6 million a year for 20 years, although he added that the yearly amount is expected to decrease over time.

Finance Committee Chair Adam Marchand said in an interview that although the payments will add a "meaningful increment" to New Haven's yearly payments on its debt service, the city "can handle it."

Rating agencies are feeling positively about the city, which has "robust tax collections" and is experiencing economic growth, Marchand said.

On Monday, Fitch Ratings, which rates New Haven's bonds as A-minus, revised its outlook from positive to stable — meaning it no longer expects a rating upgrade in the near future. In a press release, the rating agency said the revision reflects "potential future budgetary cost pressures, primarily related to education, employee benefits and risks associated with current and future litigation."

The full Board of Alders is set to vote on the amendment in the coming weeks. If the amendment is approved by the board, the city plans to issue the bonds in November or December of this year, Gormany said.

Jackson and Horn are among around a dozen Black New Haven men who were jailed in the 1980s and 1990s and are now challenging their convictions. In April, the state legislature's judiciary committee voted to award over $5 million to Ward 21 Alder Troy Streater, who spent 23 years in jail for murder based on testimony that witnesses have since alleged was coerced.

In May, a jury told New Haven to pay $38 million to Stefon Morant, who spent 21 years in jail on charges of double murder that he has long asserted were false. The city is currently appealing that decision.

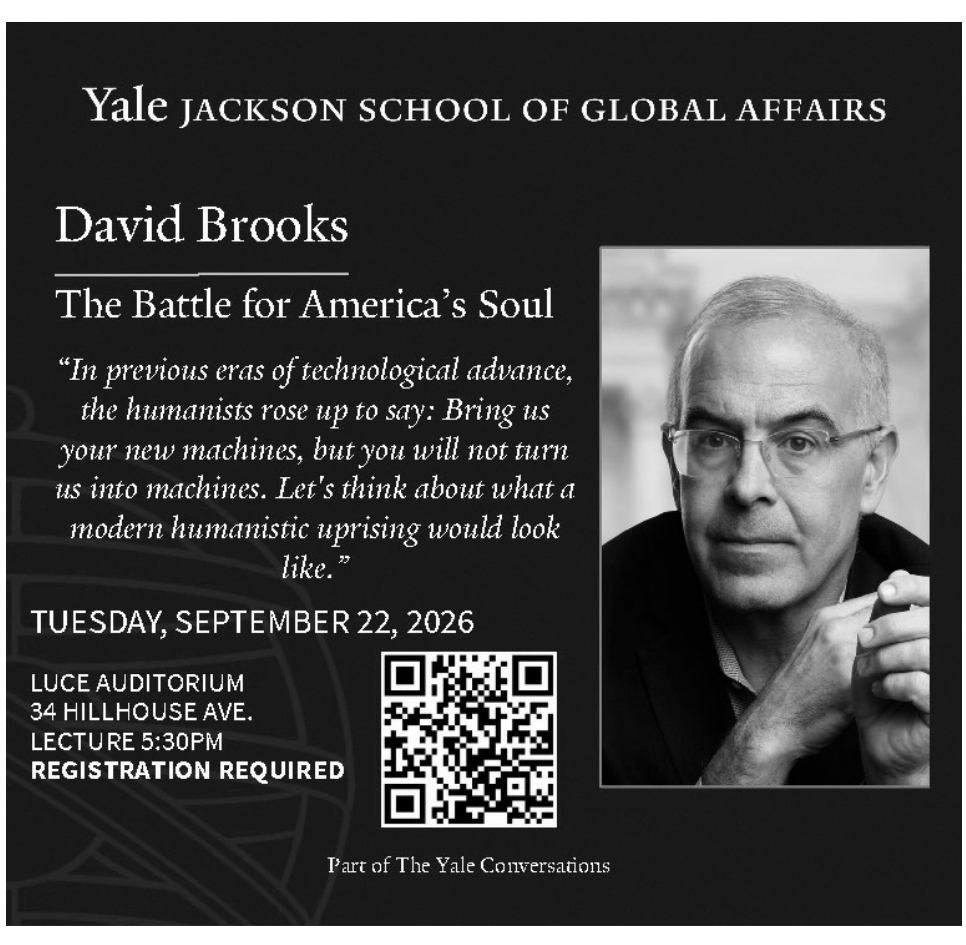
Board of Alders President Tyisha Walker-Myers, also a member of the finance committee, said that although "no amount of money can take away what everyone went through," the settlement is a "piece to that puzzle" of "healing" for New Haven's Black community.

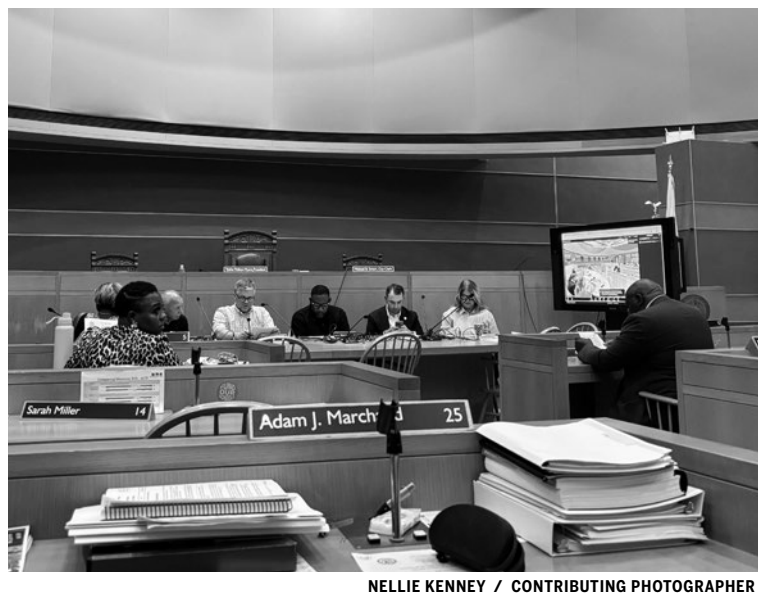
The committee also voted to back an increase in the money the city is allowed to pay to its outside counsel. That extra money would go towards Howd & Ludorf, a law firm which has represented the city in a number of cases, including defending it against Horn's, Jackson's and Morant's suits.

The amount of time that the trial took in Morant's case "exceeded everyone's expectations," Gormany said, contributing to a pay hike for the firm.

New Haven dropped Howd & Ludorf following the city's loss against Morant.

Contact
NELLIE KENNEY *at*
nellie.kenney@yale.edu.





NELLIE KENNEY / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
The Board of Alders Finance Committee moved on Monday to set aside bond money to cover payouts to two men who each spent nearly two decades in jail for a murder they did not commit.