NEWS

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SCREAM WES CRAVEN

Governor hopefuls diverge on taxing Yale, immigration, data centers

BY NELLIE KENNEY
STAFF REPORTER

With under a week until election day, gubernatorial candidates Gov. Ned Lamont SOM '80 and State Sen. Ryan Fazio have staked their ground on Immigration and Customs Enforcement, automated licence plate readers, data centers and Yale's tax status.

In two debates over the last week, the candidates sparred over responsibility for high costs and their respective records on tax policy. Lamont, a 72-year-old Democrat in his second term as governor, lauded the state's fiscal position, which he said is in a "better place" than when he first took office in 2019, while Fazio, a 36-year-old Republican, accused Lamont of failing to "hold the line" on taxes. Lamont has led Fazio by around 20 points in recent Quinnipiac University and Sacred Heart University polls.

One point of contention centers around whether the state should impose new taxes on Yale.

Fazio's platform includes a tax plan which he has said would enable large-scale tax cuts for Connecticut's middle class. One branch of the plan involves taxing the investment income from the endowments of wealthy universities.

In a Tuesday interview, Fazio decried the impact of Yale's long-time tax exemption on New Haven, which he described as a "kind of reverse redistribution" that is "hurting the working class and small businesses in New Haven."

Yale's property tax exemption, which has roots in the Connecticut constitution and Yale's founding charter, excludes academic properties and some nonacademic properties from taxation. The University's tax exempt property is worth around $4.5 billion, according to the city's assessor.

Fazio said he does not want Yale to pay "full freight" on its property taxes — a number which local organizers last year estimated would come out to around $110 million — but advocated for a statutory compromise that would require Yale to contribute more to the city.

In an August video filmed on Yale's campus, Fazio also called for the University to pay capital gains and dividends taxes to the state.

According to Yale's charter, the governor and lieutenant governor of the state are ex officio trustees of the University. Fazio said he thinks "maybe the state constitutional system could be reformed" to eliminate those ex officio positions. "Maybe you don't want the governor to be a member of the board, ex officio or not," he said.

In an interview earlier this month, Lamont said that he would likely not support changes to Yale's tax exemption. He cited recent pressures from the federal government affecting Yale, including a federal endowment tax hike written into President Donald Trump's signature One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which will cost the University an estimated $299 million this fiscal year.

"I'm trying my best to keep our colleges afloat," he said, although he noted that Yale's financial position is stabler than that of some other schools in the state.

Yale could "probably" give more to New Haven, Lamont said in that interview. Outside of monetary payments, he encouraged students to contribute by becoming more involved in the local community.

Curbing ICE activity in Connecticut

The candidates on Tuesday disagreed about the extent to which the state should cooperate with ICE amid an uptick in federal immigration enforcement. The state's Trust Act, which was first passed into law in 2013, limits when and how municipal law enforcement agencies can aid in federal immigration operations. The Trust Act was updated in 2019 and again in 2025.

In April, the Department of Justice sued Connecticut over the Trust Act, as well as the City of New Haven for its "sanctuary policies." A Department of Justice press release described the policies as "illegal" and claimed that they have "allowed dangerous criminals to be released into Connecticut communities."

In a press release responding to the suit, Lamont rejected the idea that the Trust Act prevents federal authorities from enforcing immigration law. Rather, the law reflects "a longstanding principle: the federal government cannot require states to use their personnel or resources to carry out federal enforcement responsibilities," Lamont said.

On Tuesday, Lamont said that the state would work with "ICE and DEA and FBI and anybody" to apprehend "a dangerous criminal," referring to the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but condemned recent operations in the state which he said have treated immigrants as "guilty until proven innocent if you even look Hispanic."

Fazio said that he supports the 2013 version of the law, which he characterized as preserving the state's autonomy, but said that he disagreed with the 2019 update, which limited the range of criminal offenses of which an immigrant must have been convicted in order for local police to aid in apprehending them.

Fazio claimed that the restrictions have prevented state and local law enforcement from "transferring" individuals guilty of offenses that are not in that range, which he said include some manslaughter and sexual abuse offenses.

Automatic license plate readers

In August, Lamont called on municipalities to pause their installation of automated license plate reader cameras, or ALPRs. The cameras have drawn national attention as critics have raised concerns about privacy and suggested that ICE may use data obtained from the cameras to target their operations.

New Haven currently contracts with ALPR company Rekor. City officials have maintained that the cameras do not share data with ICE.

Lamont declined to endorse a permanent ban on ALPRs, instead suggesting that the final decision should be left to municipal leaders. The state should implement guardrails for camera use, he said, such as requiring them to delete data within a limited time span.

Fazio described backlash against ALPR installation as the "right" response, citing concerns about privacy. He released a campaign video in August bashing the cameras, which the video described as a "symptom of failed state leadership."

"We don't need to constantly be monitoring our population. We need to be constantly monitoring our government," Fazio said in that video.

In Tuesday's debate, he cited Lamont's August statement against the cameras, which came after his own denouncement, as evidence that he is "already influencing gubernatorial policy."

Data centers

Last month, New Haven approved a year-long moratorium on data center development as the city plots its policy moving forward.

In 2021, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a bill which offers tax incentives to data centers. Lamont pushed for the bill at the time, and it passed with bipartisan support.

"I want to stay competitive with other states, but no big AI data centers," Lamont said in response to a debate question about whether he would support changes to those incentives. He said he was concerned about the energy use of large data centers.

Fazio slammed the data center incentives.

"The people watching don't get a special exemption from paying their sales tax or paying their property tax," he said. "They're the ones having to foot the bill for the special tax break for data centers."

Election day is on Tuesday, Nov. 3.



NELLIE KENNEY / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Two-term Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont SOM '80 and Republican challenger State Sen. Ryan Fazio will compete in Tuesday's general election. The candidates disagree on the state's fiscal picture and whether Connecticut should raise taxes on Yale.

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Yale AAUP leaders show support for national group's endorsements

BY NICOLE HUANG
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The national American Association of University Professors has broken 110 years of precedent in endorsing candidates — all Democrats — in this year's midterm elections. While Yale's chapter did not have a say in that process, its leaders defended the endorsements.

Yale's chapter of the AAUP, which has advocated around issues like academic freedom and the University's negotiations with the Trump administration since its revival in November 2024, stayed out of the national organization's endorsement decisions because of the chapter's lack of union status, said Daniel HoSang, an American studies professor and the president of the chapter.

While some critics have said the endorsements could harm the group's legitimacy as a neutral defender of higher education, HoSang said the national group's shift "makes perfect sense" given the rise of partisan hostility to higher education.

"The terrain of higher ed has become much more politicized these days," he said. "I think it makes perfect sense why, if the organization is getting dues from its members and is obligated to represent their best interests and understands that those interests are tied to the political arena and political decisions, it would become active in electoral politics in that way."

The national AAUP announced its 12 endorsements on Oct. 13, months after it endorsed Abdul El-Sayed in the Democratic primary for Michigan's Senate race in July, marking the group's first-ever electoral endorsement. Its voting members had pledged in a national meeting in June to engage more directly in political campaigns "to resist authoritarian policies."

James Bhandary-Alexander, a Yale Law School professor and co-chair of the membership committee of Yale's AAUP chapter, said he does not think the national endorsements should be controversial.

"In every other sector of the economy, when a group of people or an individual is interested in affecting outcomes, one of the best places to do it is through the democratic processes in the United States," he said. "It's not always going to work, but it seems almost so accepted. So I wonder, why is it controversial for us to do it?"

Alessandro Gomez, a mechanical engineering professor and the treasurer of Yale's AAUP chapter, echoed that sentiment.

"In general, I think it's perfectly legitimate to take a position on candidates, especially if they have a role to play with respect to what's going on in the academic world," he said.

While the leaders of Yale's chapter showed support for the national organization's decision to endorse candidates, the chapter did participate in those electoral choices because of its status as a non-union, or advocacy, chapter.

Professors at public universities generally can unionize under labor law, but tenure-track and tenured faculty at private universities are considered to have managerial authority and cannot unionize, HoSang said, adding that "many of us would dispute that we feel like managers, but that's the law."

"Almost all unions that represent workers engage in political endorsements," HoSang said. "But as advocacy chapters, we are outside of that process."

Instead of electoral advocacy, HoSang said, the Yale chapter prioritizes work on University policy, such as academic freedom, shared governance and budget decisions, helping faculty recognize the potential impact that policy at various levels can incur.

"We really focus on both university policy, if it impacts faculty, and national policy as it impacts faculty," HoSang said. "But we don't do that through electoral work."

The chapter is also part of Democratize Yale, a coalition of student, faculty and alumni groups that has called for an end to Yale's negotiations with the Department of Justice, among other demands. Some members of Yale's AAUP chapter recently participated in a protest on Beinecke Plaza that echoed the coalition's demands, especially in urging Yale administrators not to strike a deal with the Trump administration.

After the Justice Department released findings that accused the Yale School of Medicine's admissions program of engaging in racial discrimination in May, the University has begun to seek a voluntary settlement with the department. Part of that process has been providing the government admissions data "that they have a legal right to request," Yale President Maurie McInnis told the News last month.

"I think our AAUP chapter has done a magnificent job raising this issue," Bhandary-Alexander said. "I know that there's alumni, students, and unaffiliated faculty who are also very, very concerned about negotiations with the Trump administration because many of us think that, from the information we have, the university is not under any obligation to provide any information or negotiate anything with the Trump administration."

The national AAUP was founded in 1915.

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ZOE BERG / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

The American Association of University Professors endorsed political candidates this year for the first time in its 110-year history. While Yale's chapter was not involved in those decisions, its leaders said the political shift makes sense.