FROM THE FRONT

"To whom thus Eve, with perfect beauty adorned."
PARADISE LOST JOHN MILTON

Elicker challenger suggests threats to Yale's tax status



Courtesy of Jason Bartlett

Jason Bartlett, who has spent several years advising non-Democratic candidates in New Haven, is throwing his hat in the ring to challenge Mayor Justin Elicker. He suggested using Yale's state tax exemption as a bargaining chip for more voluntary contributions.

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Bartlett's plans, he said, include creating apprenticeship and training pipelines for young New Haveners, developing the city's waterfront and reviving a youth intervention program which he spearheaded under former Mayor Toni Harp ARC '78. He also suggested that legislators threaten Yale's state tax exemption, enshrined in Connecticut's constitution, in a potential state constitutional convention in 2028.

"I'm not going to do Democratic machine politics," Bartlett said in an interview last week. "I think people will be less about political party stuff if there's a vision that they can get excited about."

Bartlett has a long history in local and state politics. He served in the Connecticut House of Representatives from 2007 until 2011, the first openly gay Black man to do so. Beginning in 2014, he served as New Haven's youth services director under Harp.

In 2019, Bartlett fell under scrutiny during a probe into the Harp administration by the Federal Bureau of Investigations. Following accusations that he had given no-bid contracts to a friend, Bartlett was placed on leave. In 2020, Elicker, who had recently ousted Harp from City Hall, fired him. Bartlett has denied all accusations against him and filed a complaint at the time alleging that his firing was discriminatory.

Since then, Bartlett has worked on disrupting local unions' dominance over New Haven politics. In 2024, he organized a group that backed a slate of challengers in an attempt to unseat eight union-backed Democratic Town Committee ward co-chairs.

And in 2025, he launched a town committee for the Independent Party of New Haven. Five candidates ran for alder on the Independent Party line that season, though all fell to their Democratic opponents. In that election, Bartlett also served as campaign strategist for Steve Orosco, the Republican former mixed martial arts fighter who challenged Elicker for mayor. In a phone interview, Orosco described Barlett as "passionate about the city" and said that he has "trust and credibility" in New Haven.

Now, Bartlett is stepping into the limelight himself.

"I think that now, New Haven is sliding backward," he said. "We do not just need a change of leadership, we need a change in direction."

Bartlett also plans to support a slate of candidates in alder races this year, which will include Miguel Pittman, a resident of the Hill who has previously mounted three campaigns against Ward 3 Alder Angel Hubbard. Pittman confirmed his plans to run in a phone interview.

"He would get the whole city involved, so it's not based upon party lines," Pittman said of Bartlett's campaign. "It's going to be more or less like a rainbow coalition."

Bartlett's proposals in his mayoral campaign center on tax increment financing, a strategy that would have the city take out bonds to pay for capital improvements, then pay back the bonds using the profit made through higher taxes on the better-maintained properties. Bartlett suggested using that strategy to fund infrastructure improvement along New Haven's waterfront. And 10 percent of the city's revenue from tax increment financing would go to public schools each year, Bartlett said.

"Private development follows public infrastructure, buildings go up, the tax base grows, the bonds are repaid from the increment," according to a policy sheet Bartlett shared with the News. When the bonds are paid back, the "full tax base returns permanently to schools and city services."

Bartlett said the financing strategy will encourage economic growth, which in turn will make New Haven less dependent on money from Yale. In April, the city and the University reached a new voluntary payment agreement which will see Yale pay New Haven approximately $230 million over the next seven years.

Bartlett suggested that Yale's longstanding tax exemption could serve as a bargaining chip in negotiations over the amount of the University's voluntary payments. In 2028, Connecticut will have the option of holding a constitutional convention, during which Bartlett said legislators could threaten the University's constitutionally-enshrined exemption. He also proposed calling on legislators to send a percentage of the federal tax on Yale's endowment — which increased from 1.4 percent to 8 percent this year — back to New Haven.

Bartlett slammed Elicker over the size of Yale's voluntary contribution, which he said fell short of the $50 million a year Elicker campaigned on. He also critiqued Elicker's plans to build a pool at the English Station Power Plant and the city's adoption of automated license plate reader cameras, which he said are turning New Haven into a "surveillance state."

Bartlett said his decision to run for mayor did not stem from a personal grievance against Elicker. "It's really not personal. It's really about the future," he said.

In a Thursday phone interview, Elicker denied making promises he "can't keep" related to Yale's voluntary payment and pointed to a hike in the payment from around $13 million in the year he took office to around $30 million this year, a larger increase than the city has seen during any previous mayoral administration.

The mayor also emphasized that the city controls the data from its cameras and does not share it with the federal government. The cameras have "dramatically improved the safety in the city and have led to many arrests," he said.

Elicker said that he anticipates "lively conversation" with Bartlett on the campaign trail.

Elicker filed for reelection in April. As of September 30, his campaign had nearly $125,000 on hand, per campaign finance disclosures. Also running are Alex Taubes LAW '15, a civil rights attorney who has pitched himself as a "bad" candidate, and Anais Nuñez, who previously ran for a spot on the Housing Authority of New Haven board.

Joe Fekieta, a local artist who was part of Bartlett's slate of ward co-chair candidates, said he was "impressed by how passionate" Bartlett was during that campaign.

"He really was dedicated to getting rid of Elicker," Fekieta said. "I was really impressed with his commitment to that, even though he stood to gain nothing except a better New Haven."

Bartlett challenged incumbent Republican Michael McLachlan for a seat in the state senate in 2012. He lost by 3.4 percentage points.

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Socialist backed Calhoun change

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that University President Maurie McInnis articulated in messages to Yale affiliates this summer.

"While we respect the Congressman-elect's perspective, what he describes does not reflect Yale's actions or approach," Peart wrote to the News. "President McInnis would be glad to meet with Congressman-elect Rabb, as she has with other elected officials, and she congratulates him on his election."

During his time at Yale, Rabb was an early advocate for the renaming of Calhoun College, which was named for John C. Calhoun, class of 1804, a staunch defender of slavery. In 2017, 25 years after Rabb graduated, Yale renamed the college for Grace Hopper, who earned Yale graduate degrees in 1930 and 1934, after widespread student, staff and faculty activism.

Yale's negotiations with the Justice Department sparked backlash this summer as students, faculty and alumni called on the University to fight the federal administration in court.

The University has also faced political pressure from a growing number of elected officials such as Sen. Richard Blumenthal LAW '73, Rep. Rosa DeLauro — who won reelection on Tuesday night — and Mayor Justin Elicker.

"An autocrat is attacking and Yale is opening the front gates," Rabb said in the video. "That's why I'm standing with Democratize Yale and the Endowment Justice Collective, from Cross Campus to Congress."

Democratize Yale organizers connected with Rabb after he commented on one of its videos from September criticizing Yale's free expression policies. The video was posted on Instagram by six accounts, including the Endowment Justice Collective.

"I'd like the administration to try to silence me the next time I'm on campus supporting this cause!" Rabb wrote in his comment.

"I think that what we've seen is that Yale has chosen a strategy of appeasement," Diego Loustaunau '27, an organizer with Democratize Yale and the Endowment Justice Collective, said. "Especially after the results we saw across our nation last night, appeasement to Trump is a losing strategy. And there are students, staff, faculty and alumni ready to stand with Yale against these attacks."

Nicole Tsisin '28, who is from Philadelphia, praised Rabb's effort to ensure the University upholds "the values and principles of its community."

"I may be a Yale student, but first and foremost, I am a proud Philly native," Tsisin wrote in an email to the News. "I commend Chris Rabb for using his platform not only as an elected official but also as a Yale alumnus to speak up and engage university leadership by raising important questions about its decisions."

In the future, Democratize Yale will participate in more "partnerships with elected officials and other alumni," Loustaunau said.

Rabb formerly served as an adjunct professor at Temple University, according to CBS News.

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Martin Paralta / Head Photography Editor

Chris Rabb '92, a Democrat who won election on Tuesday to represent Pennsylvania's 3rd congressional district, blasted Yale in a Wednesday video for negotiating with the Justice Department over an investigation into Yale's admissions practices.



Ellie Park

As Democrats flipped seats across the country to take back control of both chambers of Congress, 16 Yale graduates prevailed. Three alumni candidates lost their campaigns, while results in three races involving Yalies remained uncalled as of Wednesday morning.

Elis win 16 races for Congress, governor

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New Jersey Republican and former Yale football player Joe Hathaway '09, Maryland Green Party candidate Nancy Wallace '76, Virginia Democrat Tom Perriello '96 LAW '01 and Ramaswamy were the only Yale alumni candidates who lost gubernatorial or congressional races on Tuesday.

Of the 45 seats Democrats are projected to flip in the House of Representatives, Manny Rutinel LAW '22 appeared to be the only Yalie to turn a House seat from red to blue. Rutinel, a state representative, will be one of the youngest people in Congress when he assumes office in January at age 32. Democrat Chris Rabb '92 cruised in the general election to win an open seat in Pennsylvania's 3rd Congressional district.

Former Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin '01 LAW '06 won the seat representing Connecticut's 1st congressional district after defeating 14-term incumbent Rep. John Larson in an August primary.

At least two Yale alumni will occupy the governor's seat in their respective states. Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont SOM '80 handily won re-election, while Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar '82 stepped down from the Senate to run for governor of Minnesota, a seat she won.

Two races with Yale affiliates remained uncalled as of Thursday evening, including the race for Alaska governor that pitted Democrat Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins against three Republicans. Kreiss-Tomkins, who was part of Yale College's class of 2012, dropped out to run for the Alaska House of Representatives.

Democrat Eric Jones '12 was around 3,500 votes ahead of Democrat Mike Thompson, the incumbent in California's 4th district. The AP has not called the race, in which 49 percent of the votes have been recorded.

Several Yale alumni will leave Congress after this year. Eleanor Holmes Norton GRD '63 LAW '64 will depart after representing the District of Columbia as a non-voting delegate for over 30 years. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis '01 has been term-limited out of his seat but could make a second bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 2028. Dan Goldman '98 lost a heated primary to fellow Democrat Brad Lander in June, during which Goldman's support for Israel was a major point of contention.

Of the current Yale alumni in Congress, 13 are Democrats and five are Republicans.

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