NEWS

"Vegetables are a must on a diet. I suggest carrot cake, zucchini bread and pumpkin pie."
JIM DAVIS CARTOONIST

New Haven commemorates Veteran's Day at City Hall ceremony

BY KELLY KONG
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

New Haven held an hourlong ceremony on Tuesday morning at City Hall to commemorate Veteran's Day. The celebration featured speeches, music, a presentation of colors and the placement of commemorative wreaths at the World War I memorial on the New Haven Green.

The event, hosted by the Mayor's Veteran Affairs Advisory Committee, welcomed retired Lt. Col. Alison Weir, the executive director of the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, as its main speaker.

"I appreciate that the city of New Haven, which is not known for a huge veteran population, does go out of its way to celebrate veterans throughout the community," Weir told the News.

In her speech, Weir encouraged the audience to not only thank veterans, but ask about their time in service.

"If you really want to show interest in a veteran's service, ask them about it," Weir said in her speech. "Where were you stationed? What was your favorite memory? Once you get a veteran going, you might find it hard to get them to stop."

She added that the strength of the U.S. armed forces is its racial, gender and religious diversity.

Former Staff Sgt. Charles Pickett, a member of the city's Veterans Affairs Committee and the master of ceremonies, served in Iraq and Afghanistan. He said he has been on the committee for over a decade.

"It's a pleasure and an honor to put on the town ceremonies every year for Veterans Day and Memorial Day," he told the News.

The Connecticut Minuteman Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol presented the colors. Music Haven, a music school in New Haven, played the "Armed Forces Medley," which combines the official marchpasts of the six branches of the U.S. armed forces.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal flew in the morning of the ceremony to offer his remarks. He spoke about the need to "leave no veterans behind," maintaining medical care for them at a time when there have been cutbacks on Department of Veterans Affairs services.

"We have a proud tradition of honoring veterans," Blumenthal told the News. "We should never try to balance our budget on the backs of veterans."

In July, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced its plan to reduce its staff by nearly 30,000 employees by the end of the 2025 fiscal year, but claimed that "VA performance continues to improve."

Bryan Standish, the commander of the New Haven chapter of Veterans of Foreign Wars, came to support local veterans and those who served throughout the nation's history.

"We're part of the original 13 colonies," Standish said. "It does make it more special having served and knowing that you are an extension of our forefathers who came a long, long time ago to start something that is still going on 250 years later."



KELLY KONG / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
The Mayor's Veteran Affairs Advisory Committee hosted a ceremony attended by Mayor Justin Elicker and Sen. Richard Blumenthal.

Retired Master Sgt. Cliff Potter led the Pledge of Allegiance and soloist Ruth Rosa sang the national anthem before Mayor Justin Elicker offered his remarks.

Elicker said it was important to commemorate those who have served in the U.S. military not just on Veterans Day, but also every day by being better citizens.

"That means truly focusing on this liberty: not our individual liberty, but our collective liberty to support people that disagree with us and to support the nation that we all work hard and believe in," Elicker told the audience.

Veterans Day began as a commemoration of the armistice that marked the end of fighting in World War I on Nov. 11, 1918.

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Student conference promotes reforms for elite universities

BY ASHER BOISKIN, LEO NYBERG AND ANAYAH ACCILIEN
STAFF REPORTER AND CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

Students and recent graduates from over 40 institutions across the country gathered at Yale Law School over the weekend and drafted a statement calling for major reforms to higher education.

The "Reimagining Elite Higher Education" conference drew about 200 students, alumni and professors to create a proposed contract for elite universities. The statement accused selective universities of being havens for elites and proposed transparency in admissions and the abolition of legacy preferences.

The three-day conference — organized by the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, or GPSS, and Class Action, an organization seeking to reform higher education — brought speakers and panelists to discuss the history of higher education and the roots of public mistrust in universities.

Seven attendees from Yale, the University of Texas at Austin, Barnard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford interviewed by the News listed frustration about their institutions' responses to President Donald Trump's attacks on higher education and curiosity about a new social contract for universities as reasons for attending the conference.

In an interview with the News, GPSS President Saman Haddad LAW '26 called the event a "massive success." Haddad said that attendees left feeling "empowered, equipped with organizing tools, and understood the main takeaways from each of the panels."

In 2024, Class Action successfully advocated for a law that bans universities in California from considering legacy and donor status in admissions. Stanford opted to withdraw from the Cal Grant program, which provides financial aid to California residents, to avoid being subject to the law.

According to the conference's program, Yale Law School affinity groups and the Yale College Council sponsored the conference. YCC Senate Speaker Alex W. Chen '28 wrote in a statement to the News that the council had voted unanimously over the summer to support the conference.

"As higher education changes faster than ever, the YCC supports the development of a more equitable path forward for the immense pipelines of power and opportunity that institutions like Yale must use for the good of society," Chen wrote.

The conference comes as the Trump administration has scrutinized higher education, freezing federal research funds and negotiating settlements with universities such as Columbia, Brown and the University of Pennsylvania.

YCC President Andrew Boanoh '27 tied the conference to University President Maurie McInnis' Committee on Trust in Higher Education, saying that he was "excited" for how the sentiments of the conference would "inform" the committee's report.

On Sunday, Boanoh and Chief Financial Officer Aaron Chen '27 introduced a bill to provide $3,000 in "emergency" funding to the GPSS to cover conference costs. According to the bill, the GPSS had "insufficient budgeted funds."

The senate ran out of time at its Sunday meeting to consider the bill.

'Recycling the elite'

To kick off the conference, Evan Mandery, the Class Action board chair, said he hoped the conference would produce a "Port Huron Statement for our time," referring to the 1962 manifesto written by Students for a Democratic Society that called for participatory democracy and social change.

Ryan Cieslikowski, the director of Class Action, said the relationship between private universities and society has broken down, citing President Donald Trump's proposed compact with some universities to provide preferential funding in exchange for policy changes.

The organizers of the conference provided a draft document called "An Academic Social Contract for our Time" and participants proposed changes with markers on large sheets of paper.

While the "academic social contract" drafted at the conference was not final, it called for larger incoming class sizes, an end to legacy admissions and ethical investments from universities, such as in affordable housing and local businesses.

The draft condemned universities for creating student pipelines to business consulting, Wall Street and Silicon Valley. On Sunday, organizers sported t-shirts reading, "Is this a college or a country club?" Attendees were given a shirt with the same message in gift bags throughout the conference.

The statement referenced inequity in the makeup of the student body. The draft contract referenced a study by Harvard professor Raj Chetty, which said elite institutions admit more students from the top one percent of earners than from the bottom sixty percent combined.

Haddad echoed that concern, noting that "Yale admits roughly five to six times the number of students from the top one percent of the income distribution as from the bottom 50 percent."

"One thing I wish people knew is that our admissions systems fail horrifically to understand and value the amount of human capital that exists in that bottom fifty percent," Haddad said.

Cieslikowski and other conference leaders acknowledged that although the contract from the conference would not get the same national publicity as Trump's compact, they hope their message can gain traction because it is written by students.

Krasi Staykov, a senior organizer at Class Action, said the contract is a "tool" for students to start thinking about their priorities and demands from higher education. He added that highly-selective universities are "recycling the elite and making them more powerful."

Emily Hettinger '26, a conference co-chair and the former YCC Speaker, said Yale encourages careers in tech or finance instead of in public service or education. She pointed to recent blog posts from the Yale Office of Career Strategy, which she said focus too much on tech, finance and consulting. She called for Yale to "compete with McKinsey" with stipends for summer work in the public sector and for the University to celebrate students who pursue public-oriented careers.

"I don't think individuals are responsible for the extent of the harm," Hettinger said in an interview. "I think the universities are doing a lot to enable this, and I think these companies have a lot of power, and they're exploiting students' anxiety about the future."

During a Saturday panel titled "A conversation on Fighting for Change," Wendy Kopp, the founder of Teach for America, criticized universities for drifting from their stated missions. Kopp also expressed concern about students increasingly pursuing lucrative jobs in finance and consulting rather than taking public service paths.

Kopp recounted a conversation with her son, a Princeton student, about whether the university lived up to its motto of service to humanity.

"What percentage of anything you experienced at Princeton has anything to do with that motto?" Kopp said she asked her son.

"His answer was zero," she said.

Debating universities' role in public life

Participants discussed aspects of the academic social contract in small groups and in back-and-forth exchanges on the large posters.

They debated a section of the contract which accused universities of selecting their trustees for their "wealth and power" instead of for their expertise or academic connections. Some argued that the contract should not antagonize trustees, who need to be convinced by it in order to implement the policies proposed at the conference. Others said appeasing trustees is the exact opposite point of the conference.

"There was a moment where I was worried things were getting heated," Jared Rhee '27, a conference co-chair said in an interview. "But it wasn't that things were getting heated. Everyone just cared so much about this discussion."

Daniel Markovits B.A. '91 J.D. '00 restated his concern that schools were similar to a factory instead of a space for "spiritual realignment amid students, a new understanding of what it is to believe or to know something, and a new sense of a person's own self and their relationship to the world."

National Urban Fellow Addys Castillo said to the delegates, "Universities take advantage of the fact that students are only here for a little while." She believes that universities underestimate the difference students can make to bridge the gap between elite universities' wealth and the impoverished communities that surround them.

"You can't have a one-sided relationship with a community; both sides need expectations and accountability," she said in an interview. "No matter how white the ivory covered towers are — everything else is black and brown."

Trump signed an executive order on April 23 to reform the higher education accreditation process to ensure universities prevent unlawful discrimination and ideological bias.



ANAYAH ACCILIEN / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
About 200 students convened at Yale Law School over the weekend to critique the character of universities and propose solutions.

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