FROM THE FRONT

"All life is the same, as citizens of the human State: the animating limits are within, to be killed and mourned, over and over again."
INFINITE JEST DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

Volunteer again represents New Haven in Yale talks

FERNANDEZ FROM PAGE 1

"I don't feel the need to win at the expense of somebody else," he said. "What I want is to be able to win and have the other side feel like they won too, because then we can enter into negotiations again."

Back to the negotiating table

Fernandez led the city's delegation in negotiations with the University in 2021, when Yale and New Haven leaders reached a landmark agreement that lasts through June 2027.

Under the terms of that deal, the University agreed to pay New Haven annual sums of some $23 or $24 million — except for the final year, in which Yale's payment was slated to drop to $16 million. In 2021, then–University President Peter Salovey referred to the decrease as "a reminder that we need to get down to business" and begin negotiations on the next deal.

A Yale official confirmed Friday that the University had agreed to head off the drop, after Elicker announced a budget proposal relying on at least a consistent contribution from the University next fiscal year.

For Fernandez, Yale's lump sum financial commitment reflects respect for New Haven's democracy.

"All of that money goes to the Board of Alders, and they decide how to spend it — just like if you pay property tax, that money goes to the Board of Alders," he said. "It is not earmarked."

In the 2026 fiscal year, New Haven's budget was $702.3 million. Just under half of that revenue came from property taxes, and Yale's $24.3 million contribution is equivalent to around 7 percent of the total tax revenue.

The city could face "massive layoffs" and cuts to "a lot of services" without Yale's payment, Fernandez speculated.

Elicker "obviously tapped him for a reason," said Karen DuBois-Walton '89, who worked alongside Fernandez in city government for several years in the 2000s and now leads the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. "Absolutely he's thought of as a very strong negotiator."

As former Mayor John DeStefano's economic development administrator from 2000 to 2005, Fernandez said he "did a lot of the negotiating with Yale."

Fernandez brokered the sale of the land on which the University would eventually build the Yale Health Center and the Yale Police Department headquarters along Lock Street — a process that was, in his telling, "rocky." And he also helped bring Gateway Community College to downtown New Haven and IKEA to Long Wharf, according to previous reporting by the News.

In 2021, Fernandez and the rest of the city's team secured a $10 million increase in Yale's annual payment to New Haven, which local leaders heralded as "historic."

Alexandra Daum, Yale's associate vice president for New Haven affairs and University properties, and Jack Callahan '80, the former senior vice president for operations, previously wrote in a statement that the University's contribution to New Haven's budget is "the most significant commitment to the local community" made by any American university.

The pair is working together on the University's side of the ongoing negotiations, after Callahan represented Yale in the 2021 talks.

"Henry is very smart, tough but fair, and deeply committed to the community, both New Haven and Yale," Callahan wrote of Fernandez in a text message Tuesday.

A New Haven stalwart

The son of a computer programmer and an activist, Fernandez grew up in Poughkeepsie, New York.

He characterized Poughkeepsie as a college town, but added that, in his youth, Vassar College had almost no involvement in the local community. Growing up, he said, "none of us ever thought about" a town-gown relationship in Poughkeepsie.

Fernandez said his parents — a Black father and white mother — both impressed the value of public service upon him from an early age.

As a Harvard undergraduate, Fernandez worked at an after-school program in a Mission Hill housing project, he said. But when he came to Yale for law school, he was disappointed by the University's community service offerings.

And so in 1992, while still a law student, Fernandez founded Leadership Education & Athletics in Partnership, a nonprofit that aims to "address the historic disinvestment in young people of color" in New Haven, as its website says. The organization now serves over 1,000 children.

In electoral politics, Fernandez's track record is uneven.

Immediately after graduating from Harvard, he helped elect Kenneth E. Reeves to the Cambridge City Council. Later, in 2006, Fernandez managed DeStefano's campaign for Connecticut governor, during which DeStefano narrowly won the Democratic primary but lost in the general election.

Elijah Hurewitz-Ravitch / Staff Photographer

As New Haven and Yale renegotiate the University's voluntary contribution to the city's budget, Henry Fernandez — a nonprofit and business leader with a Yale degree and a long local history — is playing a central role behind the scenes.

In 2013, when DeStefano announced he planned to end a two-decade tenure as mayor of New Haven, Fernandez ran for the office himself. Despite an early fundraising lead and an endorsement from the New Haven Register, he came in third place in the Democratic primary. Toni Harp ARC '78 won that race, and Elicker — who would go onto unseat Harp in 2019 — came in second.

These days, aside from his work as New Haven's negotiator, Fernandez also runs two businesses: the African American Research Collaborative, a polling firm, and the consulting group Fernandez Advisors. And he has served as LEAP's executive director since 2014.

At the nonprofit's annual fundraiser last Thursday, Fernandez emceed and drummed up donations, though in a very different context from his volunteer work for New Haven. The organization had fallen $40,000 short of its target of $600,000, and so Fernandez staged an impromptu auction to make up the gap.

Yale's Office of New Haven Affairs donated $10,000 to the LEAP fundraiser, according to an event webpage and a guide to sponsorship levels.

Negotiator-in-chief

By now, Fernandez said that he has built a strong "rapport" with "the Yale folks," although he added that the relationship was once more strained.

One early lesson in negotiation came from his friend Miguel Pittman — a local restaurateur who has, in the past few years, mounted several unsuccessful bids for alder in hotly contested races — when Fernandez, then a relative newcomer to New Haven, was preparing to buy his first car.

Fernandez said Pittman taught him to recognize that in negotiations, the other party is "not trying to rip you off; they're trying to meet their obligations to their employer."

Fernandez recalled that advice as he described current talks with Yale.

In the negotiation process for the next voluntary contribution deal, he said he had an "early meeting" with Elicker, Callahan and Yale President Maurie McInnis. After that, Callahan and Fernandez have "really engaged," and their "last couple of meetings" have also included Daum.

"I have learned something from every one of my conversations with Henry," Daum wrote in an email Tuesday. "I admire his impressive historical background on every nook and cranny of City Hall."

Talks have taken place at Yale, at the Q House, at a couple of coffee shops and over Zoom, according to Fernandez. He added that "every face to face meeting has been me and Jack," referring to Callahan.

State Sen. President Pro Tempore Martin Looney said in an interview that Fernandez, whom he has known for many years, "sets ambitious goals and knows that sometimes you have to reach them incrementally."

If New Haven and Yale reach a "good" updated deal, Fernandez said, "it will be better than all the deals that any universities in this country have ever done with their host city."

Fernandez predicted that the negotiations will finish before June.

"Both sides are confident that we will be in a position very soon to announce a multi-year contribution," Daum wrote in a statement last week.

Fernandez said that he met most recently with Callahan and Daum last Wednesday over Zoom, though they "have communicated briefly since then."

In the University's first voluntary contribution agreement, signed in 1990, Yale pledged to give around $1.5 million to the city each year.

Contact
ELIJAH HUREWITZ-RAVITCH *at elijah.hurewitz-ravitch@yale.edu.*

'System worked' in Jacobson arrest, governor tells News

LAMONT FROM PAGE 1

chief's behalf. "This is the beginning of a very long process. I urge everyone to keep an open mind and avoid a rush to judgment."

Online gambling, Lamont said, is "everywhere around the world. There's not much I can do about it, except for try and regulate it. So we try and make sure people under a certain age don't have access to it." But, he added, "it's really tough to control that."

Lamont said that he is more concerned with prediction markets like Kalshi and Polymarket, which he deemed "the Wild West." The platforms are less regulated than typical sports gambling apps, according to The New York Times.

"We're trying to keep up with the new technologies — make sure we provide at least some guardrails to protect people," the governor said, although he acknowledged that the state is not able to act nimbly enough to effectively regulate.

The patchwork system of state-by-state regulation makes things more difficult, Lamont added.

"It's happening at such breakneck speed," he said. "And then the idea that 50 states are all going to do their own thing is a bit of a confusing mess."

Meanwhile, Lamont is running for a third term, but he tries to "keep the politics in the back seat," he said.

Currently, negotiations between Yale and New Haven for the University's next voluntary contribution deal with the city are coming to a close.

Asked whether he thought Yale should up its annual payment — as city leaders have called for — Lamont said that "Yale is a big piece of New Haven, and got to be a good partner there."

"Yale will tell you they contribute more to the New Haven economy than probably any other Ivy League does to their community," he pointed out.

Indeed, Alexandra Daum, Yale's associate vice president for New Haven affairs and University properties, has pointed out several times in emailed statements to the News that Yale's "voluntary financial contribution to the city is the most significant commitment to a local community made by any higher education institution across the country." Daum and Jack Callahan '80, Yale's former senior vice president for operations, are representing the University in talks with the city.

And the city's negotiator — Henry Fernandez LAW '94, who also headed the city's negotiating team in 2021 — said in an interview last week that "our deal is the best deal ever," referring to the current deal between Yale and New Haven.

"Does that mean they can't do more? No, they can do more," Lamont said. "They're a big piece of that community, and they own a big piece of the community, which is tax exempt."

"Every mayor is asking the state to pay them more or their local not-for-profits — in this case, Yale — to pay more," Lamont added. He said that city leaders "also have got to figure out, 'Am I managing my way in the best way possible for the taxpayers?'"

Connecticut cities like New Haven are also facing federal cuts, and the governor acknowledged a "challenging federal environment."

He said that Connecticut has "probably doubled" municipal aid to cities through its payment in lieu of taxes program. That aid to New Haven increased by more than 100 percent in 2021, and in the city's most recent fiscal year, it received around $101.1 million from the state.

"We're trying to keep up and do our part in these very inflationary times," Lamont said. "I also understand the incredible stress our municipalities are going through."

The governor identified one issue that keeps him up at night.

"I want to make sure this is a state where people like you and your friends want to stay," Lamont told a News reporter.

For about 20 years, Lamont said, people streamed out of the state. General Electric left, he added, and "the cool kids were all moving to New York City or Boston."

"We're beginning to turn that around," Lamont said. "Our cities are coming back to life, a lot more vibrant than they were 20 years ago. You know, really good job opportunities, trying to make sure that pipeline is clear, so even the Yale students say, 'Hey, I'm going to take a second look at Connecticut.'"

Contact
ELIJAH HUREWITZ-RAVITCH *at elijah.hurewitz-ravitch@yale.edu.*

'Fast' organizers object to change

FUNDRAISER FROM PAGE 1

Three student organizers interviewed by the News said they believe the compressed timeline could affect donations and would make campaigning for the fast more challenging.

"I think we're going to definitely see a decrease in sign ups just because with the 10-day sign-up period we could have a huge tabling campaign where we would have volunteers at different dining halls," Kate Johnson '27, a fast co-chair, said. She added that the shortened donation window "is tough just because we can't speak to as many people as we would have been able to."

The spring 2025 fast generated $8,326 from meal plan donations. In fall 2024, the fast raised $18,360, of which $13,176 came from meal swipe donations.

A Yale Hospitality spokesperson wrote in an email to the News that the changes to the fast were done in collaboration with student organizers.

"In close partnership with YHHAP, we reimagined the structure of the YHHAP Fast. This year, students are able to donate both meal swipes and dining points over an extended three-day period, March 4th, 5th, and 6th," the spokesperson wrote, adding that "Yale Hospitality is actively supporting and promoting the initiative across all dining units to ensure broad awareness and participation."

The spokesperson did not address the News' questions about whether the reduced window for donations is related to budget constraints. In light of an upcoming endowment tax hike, Yale has required schools and divisions across campus to shrink their budgets.

Student organizers said they plan to pivot to social media and emails to encourage student donations before the donation window ends. Additionally, YHHAP opened its online donation page earlier this year to allow for more monetary donations.

On Wednesday evening, Ward 1 Alder Elias Theodore '27 posted a video on Instagram encouraging students to donate to the fast.

Other changes to the fast, such as allowing students to donate meal points, earned praise from organizers for the flexibility they provide to students, though they still expressed worry that students would be less willing to donate their limited points, which they need to get meals at Commons — another dining change this school year.

"I feel like a lot of people I know would prefer to donate their swipes for the day over points," Jung said, but she is "glad that both are options."

The spring 2024 fast had an 11-day donation period, according to a poster by the student organization.

Contact
JERRY GAO *at jerry.gao.jg2988@yale.edu.*