The 1983 Mayoral Election: Tradition Trumps Change

Charles Riether
Professor Ronald Schatz
History of Middletown
Michael Cubeta’s Rise in Politics: 1979 Mayoral Election

In the autumn of 1979 incumbent mayor Anthony Marino announced that he was retiring from politics. The young, upstart councilmen Michael Cubeta indicated to Democratic officials his interest in running for the office. However, the Democratic Town Committee nominated his close friend Vincent Loffredo by an overwhelming 46-7 margin. Cubeta ignored this political setback by collecting the necessary number of signatures to force a primary. The Democratic primary set for September 11\textsuperscript{th} was the party’s first since 1969.\textsuperscript{1} In the primary Cubeta defeated the party endorsed Loffredo by a 2,611-2,607 vote margin. The 1979 Democratic primary was the closest in city history. Moments after Cubeta had been declared the winner city officials met to organize a recount. Under state law any election ending in a plurality of twenty votes or less requires an automatic recount.\textsuperscript{2} The following day city officials and representatives from both campaigns met at Casserino’s Waterhouse to administer the recount. Election officials disregarded one vote from Cubeta’s total. Evidence revealed that a registered Republican was accidentally allowed to vote within the primary. Under state law only registered Democrats could vote in a Democratic primary. Even independents were restricted from participating. Vincent Loffredo immediately decided to appeal the election. On September 14, 1979 both candidates appeared before Judge Henry Naruk of the Superior Court. The Loffredo campaign alleged that a broken machine in the fourth district denied people the right to vote. They argued that the delay lasted for a half an

\textsuperscript{1} S.C. Beinhorn, “Opponents Confident as Primary Starts”, Middletown Press, September 11, 1979
\textsuperscript{2} Jeff Kotkin, “Cubeta Held Lead, But Primary Night Still Long, Agonizing”, Middletown Press September 12, 1979
hour and probably cost them several votes.\textsuperscript{3} The Cubeta campaign asserted that the voting process had not been disturbed. Election officials had voters utilize a replacement machine while the broken machine was being fixed. On September 28, 1979 Judge Naruk upheld the three vote primary victory of Michael Cubeta and denied Loffrendo’s request for another primary. Naruk justified his ruling by stating, “Since there is no showing that the result of the primary might have been different because of the improper actions of the election officials, or that there were any errors in the recanvass of September 12, 1979, the court denies all the contestant’s prayers for relief.”\textsuperscript{4} Loffrendo graciously decided against appealing the case to the Connecticut Supreme Court. A drawn out legal battle would only leave the Democrats vulnerable in the upcoming election.

In the general election Michael Cubeta defeated Republican challenger Thomas Lineberry by 2,488 votes. Not since the early sixties had the results been so one sided. Only two years earlier incumbent mayor, Anthony Marino had squeaked out a victory by only 177 votes.\textsuperscript{5} Michael Cubeta was sworn in as mayor of Middletown hours after his improvable victory. Cubeta would be the second youngest mayor in the city’s history. Emilio “Mim” Daddario was a slightly younger when he assumed office.\textsuperscript{6} The 1979 election was a major success for the Democratic Party. The Democrats would have control over every civil office including City Council, the Board of Education, the Board of Tax Review, and the Selectman’s Office. Moreover, the Republican Party was

\textsuperscript{3} S.C. Beinhorn, Loffredo Asks Court Hearing”, Middletown Press, September 14, 1979
\textsuperscript{4} S.C. Beinhorn, “Judge Upholds Cubeta Victory, Loffrendo Apppeal Undecided”, Middletown Press, September 27, 1979
\textsuperscript{5} S.C. Beinhorn, “Cubeta Paces Democrats in City Sweep”, Middletown Press, November 7, 1979
\textsuperscript{6} S.C. Beinhorn, “Cubeta Paces Democrats in City Sweep”, Middletown Press,
seemingly crumbling. As the minority party the Republicans needed an outspoken critic of Cubeta’s political agenda. However, many of the city’s notable Republicans decided to leave politics. During his concession speech Thomas Lineberry announced his retirement. Max Crovo, publisher of the Middletown Bulletin and considered by many to be the party’s leader claimed that he was getting out of politics after thirty years.7

Furthermore, the immensely popular Sebastian Garafalo squashed rumors that he was interested in running for City Council in the next election. The Republican Town Committee appointed Ernst Appellof as party chairman. However, during his tenure on City Council Appellof had not established himself as a strong Democratic foe. Therefore, Michael Cubeta assumed office with his Democratic Party controlling every facet of municipal government, while the oppositional Republican Party struggled to identify itself.

The Aetna Relocation Project

The most pressing issue facing the newly elected mayor was the development controversy surrounding the vacant 290 acre lot in the Westfield region. In the early seventies a racetrack owner attempted to build a thoroughbred racing track on the property. This proposal raced several ethnical questions. City officials wondered what type of message they were sending residents by authorizing legalized gambling. However, the proposal was never voted on by City Council. The developer lost critical funding from investors, which forced him to withdraw his offer. In early January Michael Cubeta received a phone call from Governor Ella T. Grasso. Governor Grasso

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7 The Middletown Press, “Leadership of the GOP Left In Doubt”, Middletown Press,
instructed the mayor to visit her office that afternoon. Cubeta traveled to Hartford where he met with the governor and executives from Aetna Life and Casualty. The executives revealed their interest in relocating their pension department to Middletown. They wanted to build an 800 square foot building on the vacant lot in the Westfield region. The proposed one hundred million dollar building project was the largest economic development in state history.\(^8\) However, the deal was dependant upon two factors. Aetna executives demanded that an interchange be constructed off Interstate 91 near the Cromwell border. They worried that the city’s roadways would be unable to handle the increased volume of traffic. In addition, the city would have to grant the company full tax relief for the first seven years. Governor Grasso assured that the state legislature would provide the necessary six million dollars needed to build the interchange. Aetna executives were pleased and agreed to meet with the mayor in the future to negotiate the tax abatement.

Cubeta called upon prominent members of the Middletown community to offer their advice regarding Aetna’s proposal. Colin Campbell, president of Wesleyan University, warned the mayor that his decision would set a new precedent for any future economic development within the city.\(^9\) David Carson, president of the Middlesex Insurance Company, argued that the city was not accustomed to major corporations. Many local businesses may feel threatened by the presence of larger companies. However, local businessmen convinced residents of the proposal’s enormous potential. Local realtor, Tom Frisell speculated that Aetna relocating to the city, “would raise land values in the area tremendously, not only in Middletown but in Meriden, Cromwell, and

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\(^8\) Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
Berlin as well.'" This appealed to residents who had seen their property values stumble during the 1976 recession. George Raymond, president of Raymond Industries Inc, believed that Aetna's presence would invite other companies to relocate to Middletown. However, negotiations were at a complete standstill as both parties couldn't agree upon the tax abatement issue. According to state statute, towns or cities could freeze taxes at a specific level for as many as seven years in order to attract new developments worth at least three million dollars. Aetna representatives demanded full tax abatement for the first seven years, which was quickly rejected by the mayor. Cubeta believed that a fixed percentage would cheat the city out of millions in tax revenue.

After weeks of tireless negotiations both sides reached an agreement on February 20, 1980. Aetna abandoned their original demands of full tax abatement by agreeing to sixty per cent over seven years. Once the seven years passed the company would no longer receive exemption from local taxes. Mayor Cubeta acknowledged that even with the tax relief the city would receive an additional ten millions in revenue during the first ten years. Middletown had not witnessed an economic development project like this since Pratt and Whitney acquired the abandoned Connecticut Aircraft Nuclear Engine Laboratory in the late sixties. In addition, the mayor revealed that Aetna had initiated plans for a second phase of construction, which involved expanding the building to accommodate their Data Processing department. This would not only increase tax revenue, but bring an additional 1,000 employees to the area. This increased volume of

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people would surely help local businesses. The local economy would definitely benefit from Aetna’s promise to hire local residents. In the agreement the company agreed to, “make a good faith effort to hire or cause to be hired local crafts, trades, and laborers” for the construction of the various buildings.\textsuperscript{13} One way the company planned to honor their promise was through the construction of a recruitment center. Middletown residents were encouraged to visit the center in order to receive information regarding employment opportunities at the facility.

**Outsourcing Civil Jobs**

In a recent interview, Michael Cubeta acknowledged his deep admiration for President John F. Kennedy.\textsuperscript{14} President Kennedy filled his Cabinet with Ivy League intellectuals eager to change the way government functioned. Cubeta, like his political ideal, wanted to change the way local government was run. He had witnessed the shortcoming that rendered municipal government insufficient during his two terms on City Council. For decades the city had been governed based upon a patronage system. Former mayors made appointments to reward individuals for their political support. Others hired close friends or members of their families. The majority of these individuals weren’t properly qualified. Cubeta recalled one particular instance in which an individual with no background in economics was appointed to the finance committee.\textsuperscript{15}

Mayor Cubeta wanted to assure that only the most qualified candidates were hired to fill vacant positions. One of his first measures was opening all vacant positions to national job searches. Previously job searches had been restricted to only residents,

\textsuperscript{13} S.C. Beinborn, “Council to Examine Agreement with Aetna”, Middletown Press, February 29, 1980
\textsuperscript{14} Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
which weakened the applicant pool. Applicants were also required to complete a written and oral examination. All applicants were personally interviewed by the mayor and members of his staff. Furthermore, candidates were asked to take a polygraph test. The mayor reinforced that these measures were not meant to exclude residents. The only ensured that the most qualified candidates were hired. However, residents did receive a slight advantage. If all things were equal then the resident was offered the job first.

In April of 1980 Mayor Cubeta created an efficiency panel to improve the efficiency of local government. The mayor asked several prominent citizens to join the panel. They included Colin Campbell, president of Wesleyan University; David Carson, president of Middlesex Mutual Assurance Company; Attorney Henry Naruk, former Superior Court judge; Gordon McWilliams, president of Middlesex Hospital; Gerald Daley, an aid to former mayor Anthony Marino; Irwin Sitkin, vice president of Aetna; and Kathleen Gallagher, a school teacher and labor member. The mayor wanted to change local government by involving highly reputable people. He hoped that these extremely successful individuals would offer several suggestions that could improve the efficiency of local government.

Oil Crisis and Conservation Policies

On July 4, 1979 President Jimmy Carter outlined his emergency energy plan in a national televised address. President Carter urged Americans to participate in voluntary conservation as oil prices reached record highs. He encouraged people to car pool when traveling to work as well as utilizing alternative forms of energy to heat homes during the

15 Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
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winter months. Solar panels were installed on the White House roof while a wood-burning stove was placed in the family’s living quarters. However, these measures only provided temporary relief as thousands of gas stations were forced to close. By mid summer 90% of gas stations in New York City were closed, 80 percent in Pennsylvania, and 50 percent in Rhode Island.\textsuperscript{18} Americans were in a state of panic as the Reza Shah was overthrown and Imam Khomeini was restored to power. A cutback in Iranian oil would only send the economy into further recession. On June 21, 1979 the odd/even rationing program used in California was adopted by the District of Columbia, Connecticut, Virginia, and Maryland.\textsuperscript{19} Citizens with an odd number license plate could only pump gas on odd numbered days, while only citizens with even numbered license plates could pump gas on even numbered days. Commuters in Washington D.C. woke up as early as 4:00am to wait in Monday morning gas lines.

The newly elected mayor decided to take a very bold risk as oil prices continued to skyrocket. Mayor Cubeta decided to purchase oil at a fixed rate. J.J. Vinci Oil Company agreed to provide the city with enough oil to cover all their energy needs. The oil would be sold at the current price, which was $1.00 per gallon. An additional, fifteen cents would be added onto each gallon to cover storage costs. The mayor’s office believed that oil prices were only going to continue to increase. The mayor believed that the unique deal would save the city around $200,000.\textsuperscript{20} However, not all members of City Council supported the proposal. The Republicans attacked the mayor for offering

\textsuperscript{17} S.C. Beinhorn, “Mayor Names Efficiency Panel”, Middletown Press
\textsuperscript{20} S.C. Beinhorn, “Oil Purchase Plan Approval Seen”, Middletown Press, April 17, 1980
the deal exclusively to J.J. Vinci Oil Company. They argued that a one million dollar
deal should be offered to other distributors. Purchasing Director Guy Niocera argued that
this criticism was misguided. The city had contacted several distributors such as Wyatt
Oil Company, Mason Oil Company, and Peterson Oil Company of Portland. Wyatt, a
large wholesaler sells to J.J. Vinci, is not interested.21 Mason lacked the necessary
storage capacity and Peterson wasn’t prepared to make a bid. Sebastian Garafalo
criticized the city’s efforts by claiming that the Cubeta administration received several
responses by phone. Garafalo suggested that the phone inquiry was a minimum effort
and more might have been done.22 Despite these objections, the oil deal approved by City
Council.

In March of 1980, Middletown was one the eighteen cities in the nation to secure
federal funding for energy conservation. “I have come with good news.” announced
Congressmen Christopher Dodd in relating the availability of an approach to combat the
problem of rising costs and occasional shortages of power.”23 The city was selected to
participate within the program because Mayor Cubeta had already initiated plans to
conserve energy. He hired Howard Brown to serve as chairman of his energy
conservation committee. It was the committee’s responsibility to provide residents with
ways to conserve energy. For example, city officials mailed out pamphlets that provided
helpful tips. They encouraged residents to utilize a wood-burning stove to heat their
homes during the wintertime. Another suggestion was to carpool to work. However, the

21 S.C. Beinhorn, “Vinci Oil Firm Only One Interested in City Deal”, Middletown Press,
March 5, 1980
22 S.C. Beinhorn, “GOP Councilmen Make Last Minute Decision to Oppose Oil
Purchase”, March 18, 1980
23 S.C. Beinhorn, “City One of 18 in Nation Picked for Energy Program”, Middletown Press, March 7,
1980
federal sponsored program allowed the Cubeta administration to even further expand their energy reforms. Using the money from the federal grant, the city provided citizens with insulation for their homes. The city even provided elderly residents with assistance as they hired contractors to install the product free of charge. Residents also received shower nozzles that reduced the amount of water. Cubeta also arranged for Middlesex Community College to sponsor a series of discussions concerning energy and related issues.24 The community college even arranged an essay contest for local high school students. A Middletown high school student would win a cash prize for submitting an in depth essay investigating the importance of energy conservation. Mayor Cubeta was extremely confident that the federal program would help the city save money. The federal grant helped the town of Fitchburg, Massachusetts had cut their energy costs by twenty five percent.25 Francis Luzzato, representing the federal government believed that Middletown could achieve a similar result.

The Historic 1981 Election

The enormous popularity of Michael Cubeta was demonstrated in his historic landslide victory in the 1981 municipal election. On November 4, 1981 the incumbent mayor defeated William Corvo by 3,410 votes. This was the largest landslide in the history of Middletown. Cubeta’s margin of victory exceeded the previous record held by Mayor Harry Clew who defeated Joseph Babor in the 1958 municipal election.26

Councilmen Vincent Loffrendo attributed the lopsided victory to the fact that Middletown was headed in the right direction. In an interview with the Middletown Press he stated, “This is a Democratic town and it takes issues to get people to vote Republican. Since the primary ended, it’s been clear there is no desire for change. There’s got to be a desire for change.” However, Michael Cubeta would provide the residents of Middletown with reasons to vote Republican in the next election. In his third term the mayor would isolate several factions, which were directly responsible for his previous two victories. Residents would become disenchanted with his hiring policies that allowed non-residents to receive civil employment. Their frustration was magnified when the mayor refused to change his policies during the economic recession of the early eighties. Moreover, Cubeta would lose the support of his own party. Disgruntled Democrats joined the organization Democrats for Garafalo and actively campaigned for the Republican nominee. The unions would discontinue their support as both the municipal and police unions would endorse Sebastian Garafalo. This was one of the few instances in which a Democratic nominee didn’t receive overwhelming support for the city’s unions.

Rift with the Middletown Police Department

In November of 1981 Police Chief Eugene Rame resigned. The majority of Middletown residents assumed that Mayor Cubeta would select a member of the local police department to fill the vacant position. The mayor recalled that the majority of residents wanted him to promote a low level patrol officer. The patrolmen had only

recently joined the police force, but was a member of a prominent family. Cubeta refused to nominate him because he lacked the necessary experience. Instead he hired an independent Pennsylvania company to administer an extensive examination process. The Middletown Police Department had developed a reputation for adhering to corrupt practices. Rumors circulated that certain officers were involved in an illegal gambling operation, which was sponsored by the mob. Others accused police officers of working alongside local drug dealers. Michael Cubeta was fully aware of these allegations. He instituted a hiring process that would ensure that the next chief was motivated by political interests.

After an extensive search, Mayor Cubeta nominated Lt. William B. DiFedrico of Stratford to become the next Chief of Police. The mayor admitted that his selection was not popular amongst the police department. Several officers were upset that they had been passed over for promotion. However, DiFedrico resigned before City Council could vote to confirm his appointment. The twenty three year old lieutenant provided a wide range of reasons for his sudden change in mind. While he mainly cited family and financial conditions the contentious nature of the position may have pushed him away. Meanwhile, Cubeta was on an official trip to Melilli, Italy. Upon his return city officials informed him that DiFedrico had received several threatening phone calls. DiFedrico rejected the mayor’s offer because he was not willing to risk his families’ safety. Although, unable to prove his theory, Michael Cubeta believed that the majority of the phone calls came from disgruntled police officers. They hoped their intimidation tactics would force him to promote an officer from within the department. However, after a

28 Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
29 James Morales, “George Alyward as Middletown Police Chief”, Wesleyan University,
grueling four month search Cubeta nominated George R. Alyward, a former New York City detective. Alyward had an impressive resume, which included nineteen years with the NYPD and previous experience as a police chief in Wilkes-Barre Township. Many wondered whether City Council would confirm such an unpopular appointment. Yet, City council surprisingly confirmed his appointment unanimously and George Alyward was sworn in as police chief on November 22, 1982.

As in the case with DiFedrico, members of the police department were not supportive of the mayor’s decision. They were infuriated that Cubeta had broken with the tradition of hiring from within the department. The tension surrounding his appointment manifested on September 1, 1981. The Middletown Press reported that City Council had received an anonymous letter from a group of Middletown police officers. The “group of concerned police officers” criticized the current state of the police department. They specifically criticized Alyward for conducting a drug search on a group of officers. Alyward alleged that he was only acting on an anonymous tip, which suggested that certain officers were involved in trafficking illegal drugs. Several squad cars were searched, but nothing incriminating was discovered. However, the authors of the letter accused Alyward’s search tactics as “bordering on being criminal” and said it was “just one example of the total breakdown within this department.” The most disturbing part of the letter was the attached list, which threatened the lives of eight to ten police officers. Although, it was never confirmed many people believed that the chief

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Essay for History of Middletown, Professor Ronald Schatz
30 James Morales, “George Alyward as Middletown Police Chief”, Wesleyan University, Essay for History of Middletown, Professor Ronald Schatz
32 Lucas Held, “Anonymous Police Criticism Downplayed by City Officials”,...
was one of the names mentioned. Several officers petitioned the mayor to hire a new police chief. They contended that their personal safety was threatened as long as Alyward remained in charge.

City officials attempted to downplay the effects of the letter. James Marshall, president of the police union Local 1361 of American Federation of State argued that the intention of the letter was to unfairly discredit the new police chief.\textsuperscript{33} He contended that any discontent towards Alyward was confined to a small minority of officers. Mayor Cubeta publicly denounced the letter by assuring that no changes would occur within the near future. However, despite their earnest efforts city officials were unable to convince the general public. When asked about the current state of the police department, Councilmen Edward J. Dzialo conceded, "There are clearly people who are upset, and they will continue to be upset."\textsuperscript{34} Max Crovo, an outspoken critic of the mayor, believed that the tension within the department was caused by a variety of reasons. The main source of discontent stemmed from Cubeta's decision to hire from the outside. Many officers believed that this curtailed any possibility of them being promoted when future positions became vacant. Corvo also believed that officers were upset over the recent restructuring programs claiming, "I know there's trouble down there because of the shift of officers, including commanding officers of the various divisions, and it seems that many of them resent that and think its politically motivated."\textsuperscript{35} Many officers believed that the restructuring programs were sparked by the drug trafficking rumors. They felt

\textsuperscript{33} Lucas Held, "Anonymous Police Criticism Downplayed by City Officials", Middletown Press, September 1, 1983

\textsuperscript{34} Lucas Held, "Anonymous Police Criticism Downplayed by City Officials", Middletown Press, September 1, 1983

\textsuperscript{35} Lucas Held, "Anonymous Police Criticism Downplayed by City Officials", Middletown Press, September 1, 1983
insulted that the mayor didn’t trust them, especially when no drugs were discovered.

Corvo estimated that around 30%-50% were currently dissatisfied with the overall status of the police department.

Corvo’s estimations proved to be accurate as James Marshall, president of the local police union endorsed Sebastian Garafalo. This was surprising since the police union had previously supported Cubeta during his first two campaigns. Plus, James Marshall and the mayor were close friends. In a recent interview Cubeta remembered that Marshall approached him a few days before announcing his endorsement of Garafalo. He explained that he was unable to endorse the mayor because the majority of the union was dissatisfied with his policies. Union members had voted overwhelmingly to support the Republican. However, Marshall was confident that he could change their minds. Cubeta would have to promise that all future vacancies would be filled by residents, especially the position of police chief. In addition, the mayor would have to curb his restrictions on the amount of overtime an officer could collect. Much to Marshall’s surprise Cubeta stubbornly rejected his offer. This resulted in the mayor losing support for another union.

The mayor’s decision to hire George Alyward as police chief was extremely unpopular within other factions of the Middletown community. Many citizens had become accustomed to receiving certain favors from members of the police department. Police officers would often take away tickets that had been given to their close friends. Other times officers would give breaks to politicians or other prominent members of the community. Alyward’s appointment signaled an end to this practice. Since he was a

Middletown Press, September 1, 1983

36 Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
relative outsider, the new police chief was not interested in involving himself in political games. Shortly after his confirmation the president of the local Italian Society approached the mayor. He informed Cubeta that many of his fellow group members were growing increasingly upset with the new police chief. Alyward refused to lessen any penalties and people wanted to know where to go to have their fines reduced or taken away. Cubeta sarcastically responded, "You can bring these petitions to me and I will show you where to pay for them."\footnote{37}

In a similar instance several members of the Garibaldi Society approached the mayor regarding the new police chief. The general desire of small town residents is to have distinctive roles in society reserved for a specific group of people.\footnote{38} Members of the Garibaldi Society were outraged that the mayor had broken with the established precedent of hiring an Italian-American. The Italian-American community had developed a sense of pride in the fact that the police chief descended from their ancestry. Cubeta's decision to hire Alyward alienated the largest cultural demographic in the city. Councilman Vincent Loffrendo stated that large amounts of Italian-Americans felt that, "Cubeta was being unresponsive to them, a lack of communication, of not being able to meet with him, and a lack of jobs."\footnote{39} Their frustration was demonstrated as members of the Garibaldi Society worked tirelessly for the Garafalo campaign. They held several pasta dinners and other fundraisers at their hall. Their hall would even serve as the location for his victory party on Election Night. Although, the city records don't indicate how certain nationalities voted it was extremely unwise to upset the largest voting

\footnote{37} Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
\footnote{38} James Morales, "George Alyward as Middletown Police Chief", Wesleyan University, Essay for History of Middletown, Professor Ronald Schatz
\footnote{39} S.C. Beinhorn, "Top Vote Getter May Be Denied Leader Role", Middletown Press
demographic within the community.

**Fallout from Outsourcing Jobs**

In October 1983 Michael Cubeta recommended that a Manchester firm be hired to evaluate job reclassification within the civil government. A classification system rates employees on the basis of skills and responsibilities and matches wages to each person’s standing in the order. Reclassification projects were not uncommon, but in the past had been handled by an internal investigation. The mayor claimed that the outside firm would offer an objective opinion. Often certain civil employees received higher grades because of their personal relationships with individuals involved within the reclassification process. According to Cubeta, the important thing was having someone do it, who would focus on the positions, not personalities. Personal Director Thomas Mackley agreed with the mayor claiming that reclassifications have not been changed in twenty-five years. This created the impression that some employees had been unfairly compensated. Mackley also pointed out that the Manchester firm would have the work done by December. An internal investigation would take four months to complete. This could only occur if employees gave up all their assignments, including the negotiation of labor contracts.

Despite these valid arguments City Council voted against the proposal.

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Members of city council did not disagree with the mayor in his desire to re-evaluate civil employees, but believed that any reclassification process should be handled internally.\textsuperscript{44} This belief was shared by the general public. Several residents considered Cubeta's decision to hire the Manchester firm as another example of him prioritizing the interests of non-residents. Members of the council couldn't pledge their support with Election Day approaching. If they supported the measure it would create the impression that they agreed with the mayor's hiring policies. This risked their chances of being re-elected, especially with an energized Republican Party. Three Democrats, Thomas Serra, Francis Marino, and Gerard Roccapiore crossed party lines by voting against the measure. This demonstrated that even Cubeta's own party members were against outsourcing civil jobs.

Mayor Cubeta's policies towards reclassification also made him extremely unpopular amongst civil unions. During a candidates night at Kegwin School Cubeta blasted union leadership for rejecting his proposal to implement a comprehensive reclassification system for over 350 employees.\textsuperscript{45} This was extremely bold move since the candidate's night was sponsored by the Local 466 union. In addition, Salvatore Russo, the union leader was in the audience. Surely, both Russo and union members were outraged over the mayor's remarks. At the same event Sebastian Garafalo reinforced his support for an in-study study, which could be finished within six months.\textsuperscript{46} This position was instrumental in Garafalo securing the endorsement of local labor. In the previous two elections local civil unions had supported Michael Cubeta. However, his decision to hire a Manchester firm was enormously unpopular amongst the unions.

\textsuperscript{44} S.C. Beinhorn, "Council Coalition Defeats Mayor's Reclassification Proposal", Middletown Press, October 4, 1983
\textsuperscript{46} S.C. Beinhorn, "Mayor Raps Labor Leaders", Middletown Press, October 7, 1983
Employees were threatened by an independent and objective reclassification system. Many had retained their employment because of their personal relationships with the individuals in charge of the study. Therefore, Stefan Ozga, president of the Central Labor Council, announced that all civil unions had overwhelmingly voted in favor of endorsing Sebastian Garafalo. Ozga estimated that his union was comprised of approximately 17,000 workers. This endorsement crippled the Cubeta campaign which had counted upon local unions in their previous two campaigns.

Mayor Cubeta’s decision to hire non-residents couldn’t have come at a worse time as the recession in the early 1980’s was the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. In 1980 inflation rates soared to the unprecedented level of 13.5%. U.S. Steel was forced to slash its manufacturing capacity by over twenty percent as well as lay off four thousand employees. Ford Motor Company ordered the closing of three manufacturing plants and eliminated work turns at four others, idling 15,000 employees.\footnote{Robert Mackay, "Economic Downtown Noted", Middletown Press, April 17, 1980} In total over 200,000 auto workers would lose their jobs. Americans were further disenchanted by the increasing levels of employment. By December of 1982 the unemployment rate reached 10.8%, the highest since the Great Depression. Although, slightly better than the national average the state of Connecticut witnessed its highest levels of unemployment. In 1982 the state unemployment level would reach as high as seven percent. Middletown residents expected the mayor to assist struggling families. Residents that had been laid off from work began to inquire about vacancies within civil government. They were extremely upset when a non-resident was hired. One disgruntled citizen stated, “We’ve lived here all our lives and we’re supposed to come
first.”\textsuperscript{48} The results on Election Day confirmed that Mayor Cubeta’s hiring policies were extremely unpopular amongst the general public. Hundreds of citizens began to celebrate after Garafalo was declared the winner. After he was declared the winner close to one hundred people vented their jubilation on the sidewalks of Main Street. They believed that the newly elected mayor would end Cubeta’s policy of hiring non-residents to fill vacant civil positions. One joyous supporter exclaimed, “We had to get rid of the other guy. He was giving our town away.”\textsuperscript{49} The Republicans had successfully convinced the electorate that Cubeta was unfairly prioritizing non-residents.

**Democrats for Garafalo**

Joe Lombardo, a popular barber in the north end, was one of Cubeta’s largest political supporters. Lombardo actively campaigned for the mayor during his first two campaigns. In the historic 1981 election he had served as one of his campaign managers. In 1982 the director of Parks and Recreation resigned to accept a position in state government. A customer informed his barber that the position was vacant. Lombardo immediately contacted the mayor asking him to appoint his son, Teddy. However, Mayor Cubeta refused to appoint Teddy because of his personal relationship with his father. He instead encouraged his son to apply for the job, but made no promises. After an extensive search the assistant Parks and Recreation director from Wethersfield was hired. Teddy Lombardo had finished seventh in the list of ten possible candidates. He had performed poorly on his written and oral examinations. Moreover, as an elementary

\textsuperscript{48} Ted Funsten, “Garafalo: He Had to be Sure. And When He Was, It Was Pure Joy”, Middletown Press, November 8, 1983
\textsuperscript{49} Ted Funsten, “Garafalo: He had to be sure. And When He Was, It Was Pure Joy”, Middletown Press, November 8, 1983
school gym teacher he lacked the valuable experience other applicants had. Joe Lombardo was outraged that his son had been unfairly passed over for the job. Less than a month later Thomas Serra approached the mayor regarding the vacant position within the Water and Sewer department. Serra suggested that Cubeta appoint the former mayor Anthony Marino. Marino had retired from politics three years ago, but was anxious to return. This was a perfect opportunity for the mayor to quiet his critics who criticized his hiring policies. However, Cubeta recognized that the former lacked the experience other candidates had. It was also extremely dangerous to appoint a political rival to such a high post. As in the case with Teddy Lombardo, Mayor Cubeta encouraged Anthony Marino to apply for the position, but made no promises.

The mayor's behavior had upset several prominent Middletown residents. They had become accustomed to the patronage system in which individuals received political favors for supporting the mayor. Joe Lombardo felt slighted as the popular barber had worked tirelessly on Cubeta's previous two campaigns. He expected the mayor to reward his hard work by hiring his son. Moreover, Anthony Marino was insulted that Cubeta had encouraged him to apply for the Water and Sewers vacancy. As a former mayor Marino felt above the position. Many prominent Democrats felt that the mayor had isolated members of his own political party. Therefore, a disgruntled Joe Lombardo formed the organization Democrats for Garafalo. Members of the organization waged an aggressive telephone campaign in which they encouraged registered Democrats to vote for Sebastian Garafalo. Democratic Town Chairman, Lawrence Cacciola, was extremely critical of their telephone campaign. He believed that the organization was deceiving voters by claiming to represent the Democratic Party. This created the impression that
Cubeta was unpopular within his own party. This was untrue since no Democrat had challenged the incumbent in a primary. Cacciola told the Middletown Press that, "These so-called 'Democrats for Garafalo' are phoning voters, claiming to be calling for the Democratic Party, but refusing to identify themselves by name."\textsuperscript{50} James DeToro, the president of the organization denied any wrong doings. Group members called registered voters and immediately identified themselves as Democrats who were dissatisfied with the incumbent mayor.\textsuperscript{51} They encouraged others to join them in supporting Sebastian Garafalo in the upcoming election. In addition, the organization hold fund raisers at the local Garibaldi Society and campaigned door to door. On Election Day group members campaigned outside of voting areas in hopes of convincing some last minute voters. Their efforts paid off as Sebastian Garafalo was elected mayor. Members of the organization celebrated with him at his campaign headquarters. Joe Lombardo jumped atop the platform to congratulate the victorious Garafalo. Thomas Serra who was recently re-elected as city councilmen arrived at the Garibaldi Society to personally congratulate the Republican. Anthony Marino, a prominent group member stated, "We worked hard all day and it paid off."\textsuperscript{52}

Their celebration was well warranted as the organization was directly responsible for Garafalo's victory. In 1983 city records indicated that 11,000 citizens were registered Democrats while only 3,000 citizens were registered Republicans. Five thousand voters had no party affiliation. This meant that even if the Republican and Independent voters

\textsuperscript{50} S.C. Beinhorn, "Phone Calls Deceiving Voters, Cacciola Claims", Middletown Press, October 18, 1983
\textsuperscript{51} S.C. Beinhorn, "Phone Calls Deceiving Voters, Cacciola Claims", Middletown Press, October 18, 1983
\textsuperscript{52} Ted Funsten, "Garafalo: He Had to be Sure. And When He Was, It Was Pure Joy", Middletown Press, November 8, 1983
were combined the Democrats would still have a majority by three thousand votes. Republicans relied upon voters crossing party lines to offset the Democrat’s 3:1 advantage. Although, unprecedented, similar cross over votes helped Republican Anthony Marino win the mayor’s seat three times over three Democratic challengers. Democrats for Garafalo were extremely influential in securing the necessary cross over vote. Anthony Marino revealed that a group sponsored poll revealed that 2,000 registered Democrats intended to vote for Garafalo. This estimation proved fairly accurate as election officials revealed that close to two thousand registered Democrats voted for the Republican nominee. However, even with those votes Garafalo wouldn’t have been available to erase Cubeta’s margin of victory in the 1980 election. The Republican would have still trailed by over one thousand votes. In the 1983 election voter turnout was sixty two percent, which was an increase by more the ten percent from the previous election.

This demonstrated that voters were upset with the current direction of the city. Garafalo received the necessary one thousand votes from an increased turnout. It seems unlikely that he would have been able to win if turnout numbers remained low.

The most important aspect of the cross over votes was that the Democrats were not upset with the party, rather just their leader. Besides Garafalo, no other Republican candidate received votes from registered Democrats. The Democrats retained eight of the eleven seats on City Council as well as maintaining their control over the Board of Education, Board of Selectman, and treasury department. Moreover, several councilor candidates received more votes then both Cubeta and Garafalo. Edward Dzialo, Thomas

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Serra, Vincent Loffredo, David Gallitto, Steven Leinwand, and Emmanuel Pattavina all received more votes than the incumbent mayor. Thomas Serra, a leading member of Democrats for Garafalo, received the highest amount of votes. These statistics revealed that the Democrat’s displeasure was solely concentrated around the mayor. If Cubeta hadn’t agitated members of his own political party then he would have easily won re-election. Since President Franklin Roosevelt, no Republican candidate has won an municipal election without a divided Democratic Party.

The Failures of the Aetna Relocation Project

By September 1983, the entire insurance industry was plagued by economic difficulty. Aetna was unable to avoid the economic shortcomings which gripped the insurance industry. Executives announced that the company faced a bleak third quarter, mainly because claim costs involving Hurricane Alicia could reach thirty five million dollars. The company was also ordered by the federal Securities and Exchange Commission to drop 203 million in tax benefits from their 1982 earnings. Bob Nolan, administrator of corporate communications, conceded. “I think it’s a difficult time for the industry.” Nolan assured that construction would continue, but suggested that certain changes would occur. The company would now look to fill vacancies by promoting from within rather then hiring new employees. The recruitment center, which had been built to attract local employees, would continue to operate. However, Nolan admitted that Middletown residents faced bleak chances of employment. Aetna would look to employ

54 Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
55 Ted Funsten, “Cutbacks Won’t Affect Aetna’s City Plans”, Middletown Press, September 27, 1983
56 Ted Funsten, “Cutbacks Won’t Affect Aetna’s City Plans”, Middletown Press,
individuals already working for the company. This upset residents who had been promised employment opportunities. They were further agitated when the company announced that the relocation project had stalled. Employees would not be transferred until the following spring.

Sebastian Garafalo was extremely critical of the economic developments initiated by Mayor Cubeta. He complained that the current administration had developed the city on a “helter-skelter basis.” 57 Massive building projects such as Aetna threatened to destroy local neighborhoods. Westfield residents feared that any additional developments would force them to relocate. This concern was only heightened when Richards Brook Industrial Park inquired about expanding their facility within the region. In order for this to occur several residents would have to sell their homes. Westfield residents voiced their concern to Mayor Cubeta to flooding his office with countless phone calls urging him not to consider the company’s proposal. However, Cubeta met with representatives from the industrial park. This created the impression that the mayor supported the Richards Brooks expansion project. Unlike his opponent, Sebastian Garafalo promised, “I will not sacrifice the character of our city on the altar of economic expediency.” 58 Garafalo suggested that citizens should become more involved in developmental issues. This message appealed directly to Westfield residents who felt that the current administration ignored their concerns. They were appreciative that Garafalo sympathized with their situation. Cubeta ignored the common man by only listening to the opinions of wealthy, more prominent citizens such as Colin Campbell or

September 27, 1983
58 S.C. Beinhorn, “Garafalo Decries ‘Economic Expediency’”, Middletown Press,
David Carson. It was beliefs such as these that forced Westfield residents to discontinue their support for then mayor. In the 1981 election Cubeta received 1,063 votes within the district. However, in the 1983 election that total would shrink to only 291 votes.\textsuperscript{59} If the mayor had carried even half of his 1981 total he would have won the election by more than four hundred votes. This dramatic shift was caused by his support for continued economic development within the Westfield region.

**Political Scandals of the Cubeta Administration**

On the evening of October 23, 1983 Town Clerk Anthony Sbona was working late at his office in City Hall. While packing up his things he noticed the lights go on in the outer suite. Expecting to find a custodian, Sbona was “stunned” to encounter Mayor Michael Cubeta and Betty Matteo in the room.\textsuperscript{60} The town clerk accused the mayor of breaking into his office. Cubeta alleged that he was only searching for absentee ballots that had been made available to city officials earlier that day. Mrs. Matteo and Mr. Cubeta were unable to view the information because they were in meetings all day. They had brought along Nicholas Salafia, the building’s superintendent and director of security to avoid any claims of improprieties. City officials accused the town clerk of unfairly accusing the mayor breaking into his office. They argued that Sbona shouldn’t have been in a darkened office with access to the ballot data, while “blatantly” siding with the Republicans.\textsuperscript{61} The two men had remained close friends until Sbona’s children were

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\textsuperscript{59} Election Results, Middletown Press, November 9, 1983

\textsuperscript{60} S.C. Beinhorn, “Bitter Feud Erupts Between Mayor and Clerk”, Middletown Press, October 24, 1983

\textsuperscript{61} S.C. Beinhorn, “Bitter Feud Erupts Between Mayor and Clerk”, Middletown Press, October 24, 1983
arrested on charges of bookmaking. Sbana pleaded for the mayor to intercede by having the charges dropped. However, Cubeta refused since the state police had been following them for the past six months. The mayor also refused to give anyone treatment that would denied to the average citizen. The state Election Commission refused to investigate the situation. Jeffrey Garfield, director of the commission said that the events contained no evidence of any violation of state law.\textsuperscript{62} Garfield alleged that the mayor was within his jurisdiction as state law granted municipal leaders the right to examine absentee ballots prior to the election.

The alleged break-in would have stirred enormous public concern, especially in the post Watergate era. In August of 1972 five men were arrested for breaking into Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C. The FBI, Senate Watergate Commission, and the national press would later discover that these men had been hired by the Nixon administration. In the early months of 1972 Nixon had slipped badly in the polls.\textsuperscript{63} A January Gallup revealed that the president was only one point ahead of Democratic challenger Senator Edmund Muskie, while a Harris poll had the two candidates tied at forty-two percent. Several advisors speculated whether the president would be defeated in the general election. Therefore, Nixon dispatched five employees of his re-election campaign organization, known as CREEP, to steal valuable information pertaining to the Democratic campaign. This action was highly illegal, but Nixon believed that the president was above the law. Arthur Schlesinger writes, “If his public actions led towards a scheme of presidential supremacy

\textsuperscript{62} The Middletown Press, “Mayor’s Nocturnal Visit Won’t Get State Probe”, Middletown Press, November 1, 1983

under a considerably debilitated Constitution, his private obsessions pushed him towards the view that the Presidency could set itself, at will, above the Constitution. It was this theory that led straight to Watergate." The American public was outraged over the president’s sense of arrogance. Watergate was unlike any previous political scandal since it threatened to disrupt the essence of democracy. Senator Ervin stated, “What they seeking to steal was not jewels, money, or other property of American citizens, but something more valuable- their most precious heritage, the right to vote in a free election.” Facing certain impeachment and mounting public pressure, Nixon resigned from office on August 8, 1974. It was the first time in American history that a president was forced to resign from office. However, the effects of Watergate would continue to plague American politics. On September 8, 1974 President Ford gave Nixon a full and unconditional pardon for any crimes that he committed while serving as president. The president’s decision was widely criticized. For example, a journalist from the New York Times wrote, “profoundly unwise, divisive, and unjust act. That in a stroke had destroyed the new president’s creditability as a man of judgment, candor, and competence.”

Many historians believed that Gerald Ford’s decision to pardon the former president was the main reason why he lost Jimmy Carter in the 1976 election.

The Watergate scandal clearly had an effect on the minds of most American citizens. Despite being cleared of all wrongdoings, the Republican Party utilized the incident against the mayor. In an interview with the Middletown Press, Republican Councilmen Stephen Gionfriddo branded the mayor’s appearance in the clerk’s office as

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65 Arthur Schlesinger, The Imperial Presidency, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 197, pg. 268-269
“arrogance”. City regulations prevented candidates from examining absentee ballots until after the election. He was not protected by state law since the mayor was a candidate for public office. Gionfriddo believed that, “Mr. Cubeta was not in the office of the Town Clerk as Mayor of Middletown, for as such he would no reason to be there. Mr. Cubeta was in the office as candidate for Mayor Mike Cubeta and in this role, his presence there was completely inappropriate.” Cubeta had entered the office to gain information valuable to his campaign. Several citizens wrote letters to the editor of the Middletown Press condemning his actions. One concerned citizen wrote, “The fact is they used their position and access to City offices after business hours to further Mike’s political position. Imagine, using the Mayor’s office to betray the public trust! Nothing is sacred to this person!” Sebastian Garafalo recognized the public’s frustrations and blasted the mayor for the alleged break-in. In a televised debate the Republican challenger argued that his opponent had “no rhyme or reason” for being in the town clerk’s office.

Cubeta decided to examine the absentee ballots because he was extremely nervous about his chances of being re-elected in the upcoming election. Polls taken at local schools revealed that the incumbent was well behind his 1980 numbers. Moreover, Sebastian Garafalo was his toughest opponent as Cubeta previously defeated two political lightweights. Thomas Lineberry was one the downside of his political career when the

December 28, 2006
70 S.C. Beinhorn, “GOP Seizes On Cubeta and Sbona Rift”, The Middletown Press,
two faced off in the 1979 election. Only moments after discovering his defeat, Lineberry would announce his retirement from politics. In the 1980 election, Cubeta faced William Corvo, a member of a prominent Republican family. Corvo’s weakness was that he had never served as an elected official. Cubeta successfully labeled him as political novice that wouldn’t be able to properly administer the city. Unlike his previous opponents, Sebastian Garafalo was an extremely viable candidate. Garafalo was an extremely popular councilmen who had twice before run for mayor. In the 1977 election, he lost to the incumbent mayor Anthony Marino by only 155 votes. Just like President Nixon, Michael Cubeta felt vulnerable as his unpopularity continued to mount. The mayor needed a reassurance that victory could be achieved in November.

The Third Party Candidate

The 1992 presidential election demonstrated significant impact a third party candidate can have upon an election. Ross H. Perot, the Reform Party’s nominee for president received over nineteen million votes. His vote total was the largest total for a third party candidate since Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. Historians speculate that Perot took away critical votes from the incumbent President George Bush. This allowed Arkansas governor Bill Clinton to win with only forty-five percent of the popular vote. It was the first time since 1968 that a candidate won a presidential election with less then fifty percent of the popular vote. If Perot had remained out of the race President Bush would have easily won re-election.

The 1983 municipal election, much like the 1992 presidential election,
demonstrated the effects of a third party candidate. Third party candidates were not uncommon in municipal elections. However, they never impacted the outcome of the election. Gus Schwarzkopf, a 31 year old independent, collected the necessary 117 signatures required to appear upon the ballot. On October 27th, three parochial schools had their students participate in a mock election. Early returns revealed that Cubeta was the early leader as he collected 104 votes. Republican challenger, Sebastian Garafalo collected 69 votes and Schwarzkopf finished in third with 8 votes. Despite his poor showing S.C. Beinhorn speculated whether the extremely liberal Schwarzkopf would take away votes from Mayor Cubeta. Beinhorn writes, "A substantial return for Schwarzkopf could be interpreted as potential danger for Cubeta because Schwarzkopf probably would be attractive to liberal voters." This theory seemed logical since the Democratic platform appealed to liberal voters.

August Schwarzkopf would receive 158 votes in the 1983 municipal election. However, Sebastian Garafalo had only defeated Michael Cubeta by 115 votes (6,333-6,207). If Schwarzkopf's supporters had voted for Cubeta instead, then the mayor would have squeaked out a 6,365-6,333 victory. This seemed likely since the liberal minded voters would probably have voted for the Democratic candidate. Schwarzkopf shared many of the mayor's ideas, including reforms to ensure that the most qualified candidate was hired, a continued emphasis on energy conservation, programs to help maintain a cleaner environment. This idea closely resembled the 1992 presidential election when many Republicans were attracted to Ross Perot's conservative economic agenda. Schwarzkopf himself acknowledged his role in the defeat of Mayor Cubeta. When

reporter, Lucas Held, asked him if he had played spoiler for incumbent mayor Michael Cubeta, Schwarzkopf said that it was “very possible.” The independent candidate was fully aware that he had cost Cubeta the election.

**Additional Rifts of City Council**

During his four years as mayor Michael Cubeta had exercised unprecedented power within municipal government. He had personally negotiated the tax abatement with Aetna Life and Casualty. The mayor was also responsible for securing the 1.3 million dollar oil deal with J.J. Vinci Oil Company. Residents overlooked these actions of unilateral power because of Cubeta’s enormous popularity. In 1981 Cubeta had defeated William Corvo by the largest plurality in the history of Middletown. However, by 1983 the mayor had squandered most of the support that had propelled him to his historic victory. An unpopular leader often has to work with other forms of government to ensure that their agenda is met. For example, an unpopular president has to work closely with Congress to pass legislation, while an extremely popular president can push legislation through the legislative branch. President Franklin Roosevelt pushed his unprecedented New Deal agenda through Congress during his first one hundred days. This could have never occurred if the nation was not plagued by the Great Depression.

Despite his increasing unpopularity, Cubeta refused to work with City Council. Several members of City Council would complain that the mayor kept them widely uninformed. In addition, the mayor no longer consulted the council for advice. Cubeta only conferred with the newly created efficiency panel, which was made up of prominent

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citizens. City Council believed that mayor was ignoring elected officials, while seeking the advice of friends. Sebastian Garafalo criticized his opponent for pushing aside the Council aside on the $1.3 million oil deal with J.J. Vinci Oil Company. Several Republicans including Garafalo argued that the process had been rushed. They urged municipal government to wait in order to see if oil prices would decrease in the near future. However, the efficiency board urged the mayor to accept the deal. The suspicions of the council proved to be accurate as the price of crude peaked in 1980 at $30 per barrel, but decreased to under $10 by 1986. Industrialized nations no longer demanded oil in high quantity. Many industrial nations were enduring economic recessions, which forced them to emphasize conservation efforts. Yet, oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia continued to produce oil in large amounts. The price of oil dropped off significantly since the supply no longer met the demand. In TIME magazine David Beckworth writes, "...the world temporarily floats in a glut of oil caused by Saudi overproduction."\(^{74}\) The decision to purchase oil at a fixed rate no longer appeared to be the cost effective. Many members of the Council argued that this clearly demonstrated their problems with the Cubeta administration.

Sebastian Garafalo agreed with his counterparts and promised to restore the balance between the mayor's office and City Council.\(^{75}\) City Council had lost political power during the Cubeta administration. They were often informed of certain issues only moments before a vote was scheduled to either confirm or deny a proposal. This left councilmen very little time to debate. Debate was further discouraged as the mayor presided over the meetings. As the presiding officer, he determined the structure and

format of the meeting. Many times Mayor Cubeta would interject himself within councilor debates, while previous mayors had abstained from this practice. During a campaign speech to municipal employees at Kegwin School Sebastian Garafalo pledged that his involvement in council meetings would be restricted to answering questions. He would further respect the council’s decision if they wanted him to abstain from presiding over councilor meetings. This attitude appealed to many voters that believed that the mayor had assumed too much power.

Appearance of Elitism

In the 2004 presidential election a national poll revealed that fifty-percent of Americans would rather have a beer with President George Bush rather then John Kerry. In the USA TODAY Richard Benedetto writes, “President Bush, despite his many problems, strikes most American people as a pretty nice guy- the kind of guy they would comfortable with if he showed up at their front door. The more standoffish Kerry projects little warmth.” This sentiment allowed the Bush campaign to label the Massachusetts senator as an elitist who looked down upon average Americans. This attitude helped George Bush win critical votes in the blue collared swing-state of Ohio. If Ohio had voted Democrat then John Kerry would have been elected president. This comparison was extremely similar to the candidates in the 1983 municipal election.

Much like John Kerry, Michael Cubeta was plagued by the accusations of elitism. This occurred partly because Cubeta had grown up in an upper middle class family. In a recent interview, the mayor admits that his family was by no means rich, but was far

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better off then many Middletown families. While many residents were forced to work
two jobs to provide for their families, the Cubeta family sent their son to private schools.
However, the former mayor points out that he transferred from Xavier High School after
his freshmen year. After graduating, Michael attended Fairfield University for two years.
During his sophomore year the university was closed down after a series of student
protests turned violent. Protests were not uncommon on college campuses during the
1960’s, especially as the Vietnam War heightened. After returning home Cubeta decided
to enroll at Middlesex Community College before transferring to the University of
Hartford. Cubeta’s academic and financial background made it difficult for him to appeal
to Middletown residents. Most citizens never attended college and worked
predominantly blue collared jobs.

Unlike his opponent, Sebastian Garafalo could relate to the blue collared
demographic. After graduating college he enlisted in the Army and once he returned he
married his high school sweetheart Marie Barbieri. The couple has lived in the same
house Schuyler Avenue, while raising two sons. Marie found a job at Pierson nursery in
Cromwell to help support their family. Garafalo didn’t receive a formal education since
he couldn’t afford tuition. Therefore, he took several banking classes at Williams
College on company time. This hard work was rewarded as Garafalo gained a position in
which $9 million in loans went out under his name. Despite his relative success as a
banker Garafalo personally felt the effects of the economic recession. A few years ago,
he left banking to accept a controlling position at a small firm in Durham. However, he
was laid off in September after the company eliminated his position due to economic

77 Richard Benedetto, “Who’s More Likeable, Bush or Kerry?”, USA TODAY, September 17, 2004
restraints. This experience allowed him to relate with the ordinary citizen that just lost their job.

In many elections voters are influenced by the likeability of a particular candidate. Although, Michael Cubeta was an terrific administrator, but lost touch with the personal aspect of politics. In a recent interview, the former mayor admitted that he neglected to be more visible within the community. \(^{80}\) Unfortunately, Sebastian Garafalo’s strength was his personable demeanor. The councilmen was known for strolling around Main Street, while always stopping to talk to someone. The Republican nominee described the needs of the community by stating, “They want somebody to talk to. They want you to know they have a problem. Even in most cases there isn’t anything you can do. But, they want you to know they have a problem.” \(^{81}\) Mayor Cubeta had a very different interruption of the mayor’s office. He believed that the chief responsibility of the mayor was to properly administrate the city, while the political role of the profession took a secondary role. The former mayor revealed a conversation he had with a city official leading up to the 1983 election. The anonymous official told him, “Michael, you can mayor of this city forever. You just need to play the game.” \(^{82}\)

Final Analysis

President Woodrow Wilson once prophetically stated, “If you want to make enemies, start by changing things.” \(^{83}\) In many ways Michael Cubeta was a politician before his time. Many of the reforms he enacted are not practiced by the current government. For example, civil jobs are no longer expected to be held solely by

\(^{80}\) Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
\(^{82}\) Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta
residents. Applicants face an extremely similar hiring process that involves a written and oral examination as well as a standardized background check. Although, his policies were aimed at creating a more efficient local government, the Middletown community was not ready to accept change. The political entities that had governed the city for decades were not prepared to lose their authority. For example, members of the Garibaldi Society complained that the new police chief didn’t descend from Italian ancestry. Moreover, prominent political families didn’t want to revoke the patronage system, which kept them in power. Thomas Serra, Anthony Marino, and Joe Lombardo felt threatened when Cubeta stopped relying upon the “old guard” for advice.

The political downfall of Michael Cubeta revealed a very important aspect of Middletown politics. It demonstrated the enormous difficulty a Republican candidate faces within an election. Although, Mayor Cubeta had isolated the unions, upset the largest demographic within the community, and divided the Democratic Party he only lost by less then three hundred votes. Michael Cubeta could have probably retained his position as mayor. He could have given into mounting pressure by firing George Alyward or quieted his critics by hiring one resident to fill a low level job. Michael Cubeta was a man of principle who refused to have politics corrupt his moral vision.

83 Personal Interview with Michael Cubeta