



**Remarks of Josh Kraft**  
Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Dorchester, MA  
February 4, 2025

As we celebrate black history month, it is an honor to be here today in this historic location that honors the abolitionist and leader of the free black movement in Boston, Prince Hall.

His life of service, along with lives of the many civil rights heroes that followed him are captured in a quote by Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress, she said, "Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth."

I am honored to be surrounded by my family and so many friends.

I want to start by thanking my daughter Anna, and my daughter Becca, who is on FaceTime. I love you...

And my partner Michelle and her sons Matthew and Michael for being here today. You inspire me each and every day.

I also want to acknowledge the many friends behind me here today from the Boys and Girls Club. The Urban League. The Patriots Foundation. The community.

You are the people who make Boston the best city in the world -- and help keep all of our neighborhoods strong.

My name is Josh Kraft. For those of you who don't know me, for the past 35 years, I've been doing community-based work in and around Boston, including twelve years as CEO of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston, in my role with the Patriots Foundation and as volunteer board chair of the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts.

I've spent my entire career in the neighborhoods of Boston – from Roslindale to East Boston, from Mattapan to Charlestown, from South Boston to Roxbury.

From the moment I started working in Boston, I fell in love with this city – its many unique neighborhoods, and its people ... especially its people – hard working, humble ... and above all, proud of this city, no matter which neighborhood you come from.

Serving Boston has been my passion and a great source of joy and purpose in my life. But I also know there's more for me to give to this City.

And that's why, today, because I love this city and its people, I am excited to declare my candidacy to be the next Mayor of Boston!

I enter this race as an underdog. And I know that this will be an uphill fight.

But I am excited for the challenge. Excited for the opportunity to listen and learn from the people of Boston ... Excited to share my ideas and vision for this great city.

I am asking the people of Boston to set aside any ideas they might have about me based on my last name and let me tell you about the path of service I've forged ... the experience I've gained along the way ... and the plans I've developed to make life better for Boston.

For the past thirty years, I've had the honor of meeting with and listening to the people of this city.

It's been incredibly energizing – and I want to hear more of your stories, your challenges, and most importantly your ideas for how city government can work better. Because we **MUST** make it work better and give you a government worthy of your hard-earned tax dollars.

In all my conversations, perhaps the one thing I've heard the most is that Boston is one of the greatest cities in the world. And it is.

But if we've learned anything these last several years, our standing is not something that any of us can take for granted. It's something we have to earn and nurture.

We are at a critical juncture in our city's history. The post-pandemic world is simply a different place.

How we work and raise our families is changing.

As a result, Boston is a very different city than when I first started working here in 1990. Let's be honest: it's also a different city than the one the great Tom Menino led just over a decade ago.

And right now, we face some serious, serious challenges.

Challenges that Mayor Wu has not risen to.

In fact, when it comes to the mayor's big campaign promises—to make the MBTA free for Boston residents ... to put in place a rent control program ... and to launch a Green New Deal for Boston's schools—she is 0 for 3.

On the #1 challenge facing our residents—access to housing that regular people can afford—production under Mayor Wu has ground to a dead halt.

In fact, among similar sized cities across the nation, we have fallen to the very bottom when it comes to new housing production. As a result, rents are at an all-time high, and so is the median price of a home which is \$900,000.

Sure, this is a complex problem, but at its core: you can't solve a housing crisis if you're building less of it.

On schools, we spend more per pupil than any other big city school system in the nation, about \$30,000 per student – all for a school system that regularly fails our kids on virtually every measure, including the ability to provide even the most basic services.

Can you believe this? Our city spends \$171 million every year to provide bus transportation for about 20,000 students. Eighty-five hundred bucks per student each year for buses that can't even make the opening bell. How can a family trust a school system to educate their kids when they can't get them to school on time? That is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, our neighborhood streets have become jammed up by poorly conceived, hastily installed bus and bike lanes that all too often have increased congestion and eliminated parking. As a result, moving around has become a burden for families, seniors, and members of the disabled community – and the small businesses who rely on them. It's a mess!

Don't get me wrong: I'm all for being creative about how we solve our transportation challenges. But our "transportation problem" under this administration has quickly spiraled into a "quality of life problem."

And of all the things I've heard from residents, perhaps the most worrisome is that they don't feel like they have anyone they can reach out to in City Hall.

For decades, one of the hallmarks of Boston city government has been neighborhood services residents can rely on – someone on the other end of the line who can hear your concerns—whether it's a broken light on your street or a tax issue—and help you get it resolved.

Today, you get a recording! You get an app. You get everything except a live person and a response.

And that to me gets to the heart of the problem:

We have a leader that just does not listen.

Too often, Mayor Wu acts as if she alone has all the answers.

Whether it's housing, schools, neighborhood services or bike lanes, instead of listening to community voices—trying to understand what families and businesses need—too often she's tuning them out.

On issue after issue, the mayor has become less and less receptive, and more and more disconnected from the communities, their feedback and their needs.

Perhaps the most obvious example is her approach to the city budget and taxes. Since taking office, the Mayor has added over 300 new jobs most of which pay north of \$100 thousand dollars –and city spending has grown at an unprecedented rate – a total of 20%.

But when pressed to find savings so taxes don't need to be increased, the mayor says there isn't a single program to be reformed ... or a single penny to be cut.

This is not only irresponsible ... it's just not believable.

Listen, I know being a leader can be tough. When I got my first job at the South Boston Boys and Girls Club in the fall of 1990, I did outreach work with kids living in the D Street, Old Colony and Old Harbor housing developments. These kids were struggling in school – or not showing up at all.

I saw up close the harm caused by truancy, teen pregnancy, substance abuse ... and decided I wanted to do something about it.

So, I jumped at the chance to start a Boys and Girls Club in the basement of a Chelsea public housing development. This was at a time when the city was in state receivership.

I know Bob Monahan remembers those days. We went door-to-door raising money from local businesses to support the club. I ~~also~~ organized and funded a summer basketball league coached and refereed by local police officers that I recruited – things people thought I was crazy to even try.

But we had a lot of success there ... building community and bringing people together.

Bringing people together is also what we need to solve big problems and run big organizations. That's what I did as CEO of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston and how we forged a historic 132-million-dollar capital campaign.

We expanded into 3 additional neighborhoods: Roslindale, Jamaica Plain and Mattapan. And we doubled the number of kids we served.

And, when we built a new teen center in Mattapan, we completed the project with almost 70% local labor from Mattapan, Roxbury, and Dorchester, including my late friend, David Lopes who helped make it happen.

Now, I didn't do any of this alone. We put together a great team, had a great group of volunteer board members, engaged partners and committed staff.

We fostered a community of more than 200 program partners --- from Mass General and the Museum of Fine Arts to smaller organizations like The Children's Room --- that helps young people with grief when they've lost a parent.

The point of all this: when we face a big challenge or a tough job, we never succeed on our own. No one person has all the answers.

We succeed when we bring lots of people to the table and hear them out – especially people with different views than our own, or who we may not agree with. And then, we get to work.

Over the course of this campaign, I will offer my vision for Boston – forged not only by my own experiences, but more importantly, those of the people I've met along the way.

And it starts with housing, the number one challenge facing our city.

Today, there are projects ready to be built that would result in more than 20,000 units of housing. But they are stuck, stuck due to regulations imposed by the current administration. To jump start new housing construction, I will put in place one-time incentives aimed at projects that are priced for middle-class and first-time homeowners.

Having all these projects sit on the shelf generates no new housing, no new affordable housing, no new jobs, and no new tax revenue. Getting new construction going again must be a top priority because availability is the path to affordability.

In addition, I will put in place a rent control program that can work for both tenants and building owners.

So, this is how the plan works. In exchange for capping increases in rents over a 10-year period, the city will provide a cut in real estate taxes to building owners. This program would be targeted at properties that serve middle- and lower-income residents and would exclude luxury rentals. Renters deserve to be protected from massive year-over-year increases and my plan will do that.

Mayor Wu promised us rent control three years ago, but I will deliver it.

Finally, I will take the tax revenue generated by jump-starting the 20,000+ permitted units sitting unbuilt and create an affordable housing fund to help first-time homebuyers and provide rent relief.

To improve our schools, we need a school committee that challenges city leadership and holds BPS accountable. It is time to have elected members along with appointed members on the school committee. And as Mayor, I'll make that happen.

I will work hand in hand with the community and our partners at the state to bring an end to the human tragedy that is Mass and Cass. Listen, addiction doesn't have to be a life sentence. And among Boston's many prized possessions, is a robust and resilient recovery community who proves that one day at a time.

I will breathe new life into Operation Exit – a powerful program started by Mayor Marty Walsh – and make Boston a national model when it comes supporting individuals emerging from the criminal justice system and helping them gain skills and employment so they can build a new life and make our communities stronger.

And, I will offer a common-sense transportation plan to deal with the congestion clogging our streets – and that starts with an immediate pause for all new bike lane construction.

On all of these issues—housing, transportation, schools, city services—this isn't about ideology.

It's about results.

I have been very fortunate in my life. In fact, I wasn't just born on third base, I was born at Homeplate.

But I chose a career of community service – and along the way, I've met so many remarkable and resilient people that call Boston home.

Each of them has taught me some pretty important lessons:

That leadership is not about talking -- but about doing the work and getting results.

That it requires bringing people together to solve problems – especially people that might disagree with me.

That the teachings of my faith and my family matter.

My mother, Myra, taught us to always look out for the marginalized groups – the ones that are overlooked and don't have access to opportunities.

And, lastly, you can learn from anyone, and that everyone has something to share, everyone has something contribute.

Perhaps the most important learning experience I've ever had was during my second semester in graduate school while I was volunteering at a methadone clinic.

I met a man in his late 30s who was struggling with substance abuse and was also HIV positive.

He asked me if I could help him with something: --- would I teach him how to read? Over the course of several months, I sat with him twice a week for an hour and did my best to teach him the basics of reading.

Now, looking back, I guess I did help this man learn to read. But he taught me something just as valuable: about pressing forward with your life even in the face of almost unspeakable adversity and obstacles.

Over the past 35 years, I have had the opportunity to meet so many different people – single parents and their kids. Police officers. Non-profit leaders. Community leaders. Teachers and advocates. People returning from incarceration. People fighting addiction.

And let me tell you: Every Single One of them has something to teach us about how to press forward. Every single one.

Here in Boston, we are fortunate to be the home of so much history and so many firsts, but what has always defined us is our focus on the future – on our relentless desire to adapt and grow and innovate and lead.

And today (start to build towards the end!), when the future is uncertain, and the challenges are real – a healthy and vibrant Boston has never been more important to our citizens and our region.

Yes, we have a lot to be proud of. But for me, I want to be more than proud of what we've already done – I want to be proud of where we're going. I want us to take these challenges head on no matter how hard they are.

That's why I want to be your next Mayor – and that's what this campaign is going to be about. And I ask you to join me. Thank you!