

39th Mayor of Providence Brett P. Smiley Inauguration Speech

Welcome

Good afternoon, and welcome to the City of Providence!

It is no exaggeration to say, serving as the 39th Mayor of our capital city is the honor of a lifetime.

Whether it's walking through our neighborhoods that represent cultures from around the world, being a part of our vibrant arts and culinary scenes that attract national admiration, talking to our innovative small business owners that are the backbone of our economy, or meeting families who want to provide their children every opportunity to succeed— you have always inspired me.

And like all leaders, I would not be here without an incredible team of people who believed in me and invested in a shared vision of what Providence can be.

To my amazing husband, Jim, the first-ever First Gentleman of Providence, thank you for always supporting me and loving this city as much as I do. You know, they say that when you marry a Rhode Islander, you marry Rhode Island. I would say those people are right, and I am so glad Rhode Island welcomed me with open arms so many years ago. Jim, I am excited to lead with you by my side and know that together, we will grow Providence's reputation as a welcoming city.

I also want to thank the hardest working campaign team in Rhode Island, who have also led a robust transition effort so that we entered City Hall today ready to get to work. Thank you Emily, Zach, Mike, Trent, Shastery, Anthony, Matt and so many others. Thank you to our canvassers, all of our interns and the hundreds of volunteers that were on the doors and phones day-in and day-out.

One of our dedicated phone bankers, my mom, is here today and really exemplified the incredible support I've also gotten from my family. So thanks mom, and thank you to my dad, stepmom, my sister Alex, brothers Adam and Ben, and my close friends like Sumi, who have supported me along the way.

Lastly, I, of course, want to thank the many union members, city hall employees, first responders, artists, advocates, activists and community members that made this happen. The coalition we have built these past few years is truly reflective of our city.

We are standing here, in a newly renovated Providence Public Library, on purpose. The transformation of this beautiful and historic building is emblematic of the journey we are about to take together. This is one of our city's oldest gathering places in the heart of our Downtown. People of all walks of life have always come here to share ideas and learn something new, to make and create, to fine-tune a skill.

But as time has gone on, it was clear investments were needed to bring the library into the 21st century— create better meeting spaces, integrate more technology and online services, and make critical infrastructure updates.

Now that the renovation is complete, the Providence Public Library will be able to meet the new needs of residents, engage people it could not reach before and serve as a center of innovation for our city.

That is what I will do as Mayor of Providence.

We will invest in the potential of our people and make thoughtful improvements.

We will work with the community to do so in a way that will improve their quality of life.

And in doing so, we will make Providence the world-class city that we all know it can be.

Together, we will turn around our education system, restore a sense of public safety, and bring high-quality city services to every resident and business in our 20 square miles.

Today, I am proud to start the next chapter of our book as a city— decidedly turning another page, toward a better, brighter future.

Schools

So let's start by focusing on how we empower students, parents, teachers and our community in our school system.

Right now, our state has some of the best pre-k programs in the nation. It's a critical part of our education system worth celebrating, strengthening and expanding. As Mayor, I am committed

to working together as a community to provide every student with a pre-k education, so that ALL Providence kids have the same opportunity to start school, ready to succeed.

Along the campaign trail, I met many incredible educators who are passionate about what they do. Teaching our young people is among the most noble callings. It's never easy, and in the past few years it's been harder than ever. But that hasn't stopped our educators from showing up every day with smiles on their faces, excited about the critical work they do. I believe nobody knows what a job requires better than the people who do it every day, which is why as Mayor I want to empower school leaders to make the decisions they know are best for their schools.

As Mayor, I am optimistic about where we will go next because we have a strong foundation—parents who are tireless advocates, teachers and principals who are passionate and dedicated, smart and resourceful students, and strong partnering organizations who know the success of our students means the success of our city.

Now is when we take the next step, and together, make our education system everything it has the potential to be.

That's why my first event as Mayor will be a community education listening session, happening this Saturday at the Juanita Sanchez Education Complex, where we take a closer look at how to build high-quality facilities; create better out-of-school supports; and work toward a successful turnaround of Providence Public Schools. I encourage you all to sign up, be a part of the conversation, and help us forge the path forward.

Public Safety

I hope to bring that community approach to all of our work. We *can* build a public safety system that addresses our concerns with a focus on quality-of-life crimes.

And once again, Providence has a strong foundation to accomplish this goal.

We have been national leaders in community policing, and under my administration, we will continue to be at the forefront of community-based violence prevention.

I've met our officers. I know the immense respect they have for this city and for our community. That's what we will build on.

Under my administration, I want every neighbor to know the officers protecting their neighborhoods by name, officers will be visible within the community walking the beat or on

their bicycles, and we will stop at nothing to get illegal guns off of the street and prevent violent crimes.

Our approach to public safety will be improved by integrating behavioral health supports and providing kids employment, recreation and education as tools to prevent crime.

This past year, the Behavioral Health Crisis Response program launched— a critical step toward getting residents the right care when they call 9-1-1. Let's build on that. My administration is committed to reducing overdose deaths and supporting those struggling with substance use.

Our ever-growing youth employment program has helped thousands of kids find jobs that allowed them to prepare for school, pick up new skills, and prevent mistakes that can alter the course of their life. As Mayor, I will work to further expand earn and learn opportunities and bolster year-round recreational programming.

I am optimistic about our future and know that together, we can restore trust, raise morale, and ensure everyone who lives, works, and visits our city can do so safely.

But that is not where our efforts stop. I believe it is possible to take another step forward and address those quality-of-life crimes that hold our city back too.

As a community, we will work together to stop illegal ATVs and motorcycles that make our streets less safe. We will work together to address noise pollution. And we will work to rehabilitate blighted properties run by absentee landlords that deteriorate the pride residents have in their neighborhoods.

We've never shied away from tackling the big problems; instead, we've chosen to take some of the biggest challenges of our generation, head-on.

So let's add another challenge to the list.

Let's commit now, that by the end of this administration, Providence will be the best-run city in the United States of America!

City Services

The Providence we are standing in today is different from the one of decades past. We have seen leaders of integrity shepherd our city to new prosperity, reclaimed our identity as the Creative Capital, and reignited our spark.

To the past mayors and city workers that have made that change possible—

That restored dignity and honesty to City Hall;

That cleaned up our reputation for how we do business and jump-started our economy;

That took on fiscal challenges and survived recessions;

Thank you.

I know that public service is not easy. It's incredibly difficult, selfless work, but it can change the narrative of an entire city when done right.

Thank you to the mayors before me, the current and past city councils, and the hundreds of city employees who rose to the challenge and chose to lead by example.

In this next chapter of our story, we will build on your work with the ultimate goal of making city government a center of high-quality customer service for our residents, businesses and visitors.

That means improving those daily city services our residents depend on. I know we can fix potholes and repair our sidewalks the right way, the first time. We can clear snow quickly and efficiently. We can keep our streets clean and welcoming to visitors near and far. We can make meaningful investments in green infrastructure that prepares us for the future.

As Mayor, I want to make Providence **the** place to open your business, with City Hall providing excellent customer support and easily-accessible resources. We can start by streamlining services so that it's convenient to do business in Providence. We can continue to steward the arts, culture and culinary scenes that we all treasure by supporting our local small businesses.

And we will invest here, in our Downtown community, that is ever-changing and in need of support after the pandemic, to ensure that it is a place folks from every neighborhood can enjoy and visitors from across the country add to their list of places to visit each year.

And as Mayor, I want to ensure every Providence resident has housing that is safe and accessible for people of all income levels. Providing affordable housing is a pivotal part of being a well-run city— it's how we can protect the integrity of our neighborhoods, support our local economy in an equitable way *and* bring in new business.

This is a challenge that many other cities are facing right now too, but I am proud to say we have a motivated city leadership and a plan for how to get this done. As Mayor, I will work on increasing housing units at all price points and across every neighborhood. And by providing wrap-around services in new affordable housing – things like childcare care, after-school programs, and healthcare– more residents will be supported through a housing-first model. That is how we will meet people where they are, provide better access to supports, and ultimately, stop people from experiencing homelessness.

Every investment in housing helps keep generations of Providence families here, improves economic mobility, and welcomes new residents to fall in love with this incredible city.

That’s the future we all deserve.

While some might say becoming the best-run city is a lofty goal, I say this is within our reach. And it starts with a City Hall that is laser-focused on providing people with excellent city services.

A Brighter Future

Together, we will make Providence the world-class city we all know it can be.

The future of Providence is bright. We all know that.

I am excited to get to work, and I am asking all of you to stay engaged and to be part of our next chapter.

I’ve had some great political mentors in my career and was able to learn some important lessons along the way. Perhaps most importantly, 20 years ago, someone back in Chicago said:

“There are two kinds of elected officials, those who run for office because they want to be someone, and those who run for office because they want to do something.”

This administration is about getting things done.

I will forever be thankful to the people of Providence for giving me this incredible opportunity.

Our best days are ahead.

Thank you!