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Presidential hopeful Cory Booker speaks on inspiration, values at Fenway bar

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by Daily Free Press Staff

By Angela Yang and Gabriella Finocchio

Fresh out of Yale Law School, Cory Booker didn't know what he wanted to pursue. But when his mother told him to make decisions out of faith rather than fear, the future presidential candidate packed up his life and moved to Newark, New Jersey to begin a career in advocacy.

Sitting inside a Boston sports bar at a grassroots fundraiser Monday night, Booker reflected on how his mother's words eventually led to his decision to run for the Oval Office and said to The Daily Free Press that this advice pushed him to overcome his inhibitions over entering the 2020 race.

"When I started weighing the pros and cons of running for president, I began to look at the lists," Booker said. "One was all about fears and the other one was all about courage and faithfulness. And so I when I saw that, it was clear to me what I needed to do."



Cory Booker speaks at a grassroots event at Fenway bar Game On! Monday night. GABRIELA HUTCHINGS/ DAILY FREE PRESS STAFF

Boston locals gathered at the Game On! sports bar in Fenway to hear the presidential candidate and New Jersey senator speak and hopefully interact with him as he made his way around to take selfies with attendees.

Booker opened the event with a speech that ended in him shouting out to the crowd after his microphone died mid-deliverance. Under the overarching umbrella of unity over partisanship, he spoke on issues such as the underfunding of public schools, lack of health care for pregnant women and inequity in the criminal justice system.

While the candidate's fundraising numbers are down, Booker said to reporters he remains confident in his ability to win the Democratic nomination.

"Right now, there's never been a point in history where someone who was leading in the polls this far out, in the Democratic Party, went on to win the presidency," Booker said, citing former presidents Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. "We're always getting shellacked in the polls right now, but they kept forging forward."

Previously, the senator has clarified that he believes in student debt forgiveness for individuals who work in public service. After his speech, Booker spoke with The Daily Free Press about his plan for those graduating into the private sector.

"We have a nation right now where the federal government makes billions and billions of dollars off of your interest payments — I think we should take that money, re-channel it so that we could freeze or eliminate interest rates," Booker said. "I believe that young people who've been built by for-profit colleges or colleges that have used insidious means, they should have their debt forgiven as well."

Chris Moyer, Booker's New Hampshire communications director, said organizers decided to host the fundraiser as a happy hour event to attract college students. The campaign has held similar grassroots events across the country, including another one in Boston this past summer.

"This is a fun, more casual way to just enjoy an event like this and learn more about Cory and hear what he's all about," Moyer said.

Harvard University student and founder of the Harvard College Democrats for Cory Selena Zhang introduced Booker at the event. Zhang said she became a supporter soon after the 2016 presidential election, when she was researching "sources of hope" to run for office within the next four years.

Zhang told The Daily Free Press that she approached Booker during a campaign event and shared her desire to promote his campaign at Harvard. Booker then connected her to another Harvard volunteer on his team and the students began organizing events on campus.

"I knew I had to see [Booker] speak because he was such a big role model and inspiration to me so I took a bus up to Manchester and I watched him do what he just did," Zhang said. "I was already convinced, but that just put me over the edge even more."

Brewster resident Benjamin Mogel, 29, said he has supported Booker for years. He said he was driving when he first received news of Booker's entry into the presidential pool, and celebrated with a fist pump.

"I first heard about him when he was interviewed by Tim Ferriss on the Tim Ferriss podcast and I was just really taken by everything he was saying throughout the entire conversation," Mogel said. "I thought, this guy needs to run for president. That was years ago."

President of Tufts Democrats and Tufts University student Conor Friedmann, 21, of Medford attended the event with his club after Moyer reached out. Students within the group said they support a variety of different candidates in the Democratic pool.

"To me personally, someone who isn't too polarizing, who can bring the whole party together, [is] what I'm looking for," Friedmann said.

Sam Gross, 25, of Cambridge said he came to see Booker because he remains undecided on who to vote for in the primary elections. Originally from New Jersey, Gross said he voted for Booker during Booker's Senate race.

"Pretty much all of these candidates have very similar positions in key issues like environment or in health care policy," Gross said. "So I want to hear him talk, understand what he's trying to do and hear about his policies on issues."

Melanie Johnson, a 21-year-old Brighton resident and Boston College student, said she had seen Booker speak once before and realized at that event how much she liked him.

"He's so passionate when he speaks; he's such an electrifying speaker," said. "He might not be [at] the top of the polls, but in terms of his attitude toward politics, I think more Democrats need to approach issues like this."



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