

# Harvard Law Record

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## IN MASSACHUSETTS SENATE RACE, KHAZEI BETS ON GRASSROOTS

*Candidate and City Year founder seeks to carry mentor Ted Kennedy's torch*

By Matthew W. Hutchins  
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*The pace of the short race to get on the ballot for the special election to Massachusetts' vacant U.S. Senate seat is accelerating to a full sprint. Two Harvard alumni are running, Alan Khazei '87 and Steve Pagliuca HBS '82, and both came to HLS last Thursday to discuss their campaigns and rally support. After the event, the Harvard Law Record was able to meet briefly with Khazei to discuss his grassroots strategy for getting on the ballot. Khazei, who founded the non-profit community outreach organization City Year and was instrumental in the enactment this year of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, shared insights into the influence of Senator Kennedy on his strategy and his purpose for participating in the election.*

**What is your strategy for challenging the leading contenders in this race to become the next Senator from Massachusetts?**

I think it's important for whoever takes over this very big Senate seat to be connected to the grassroots. Senator Kennedy did that extremely well. It's the kind of politics I believe in, and it's also frankly a good strategy to win the special election. As the Herald pointed out today, 93% of the people don't even know that a special election will be happening. So, what I am doing is organizing a grassroots movement of young people, older people, anyone who's willing to give a weekend or two and go door to door. If this were a yearlong campaign, I would go around and meet people all across the state. It's a very short campaign, but I still think it's important to connect to the voters and the citizens. I'm asking for help because I can't do it all personally, but I'm going to be out there too to ask citizens, "What do you care about? What are your concerns?"

As I've been campaigning I know people have lost their jobs, their homes, their savings, their dreams of a college education. I want to send a message that I understand that. Tell me what you care about, and I will help you get it set up. And then I want to take that message and then get my message out. I don't have a personal fortune, like other candidates that can rely on that to get their message out.

I'm relying on citizens to get my message out. "Here's who Alan Khazei is, here's why he's different. He's been a public servant, not a career politician. He's not taken money from the special



Matthew W. Hutchins

Alan Khazei '87 debates Steve Pagliuca, a Harvard Business School alumnus who is running against in the race to be Massachusetts' next U.S. Senator

Paid for by Citizens for Alan Khazei.

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interests. He has got a very bold agenda, that's available on his website." And so anyone from Harvard Law School, and we've got a great group already signed up, can come for one weekend, November 21st and 22nd, and join this movement with a thousand people to knock on 50,000 doors. And I'm going to do it the weekend after that and the weekend after that.

But all I'm saying is come for this one weekend. It's going to be a ball; we're going to have fun. It's going to be part of a movement of grassroots politics to show that a citizen candidate, with just citizen support, can be a citizen-senator. I have faith in the voters, and I have faith in volunteers.

**Does your experience in community organizing give you insight into the legacy of Senator Kennedy and the issues you would be pressing in Washington?**

Oh absolutely. I had a chance to work very closely with Senator Kennedy for more than twenty years. He was my mentor, he was my champion, he was my friend, and he was an incredible leader. I learned so much from him that I could write a book.

First of all, he believed in supporting people from the grassroots. He believed that as his senator it wasn't just his job to cast a vote or give a speech; it was about how do you empower people to achieve the American dream. I became who I am because he empowered me as a 26 year-old graduate of Harvard Law School. You know he discovered City Year, and he put his arm around me and said, "Alan, I'm going to help you make this a national cause. I want to work with you."

And so I learned that you've got to get behind movement leaders. I learned that you have to have outstanding constituent servants. I learned that you have to first of all listen to peoples' stories. The incredible thing about Senator Kennedy is that he dined with Presidents and Prime Ministers, kings and queens, with CEO's and rock stars, but the people he cared about most, the people he kept in his heart and in his mind every day, were the every day people he met across Massachusetts from places like New Bedford.

You know, the factory workers, the entrepreneurs, the young people who were signing up in droves to do City Year and then AmeriCorps, the people working at community health centers providing healthcare for people who can't afford it, the people who were doing legal aid, the people who were coming off the boat as new immigrants, just as his grandparents did, trying to make it here in America.

What was so extraordinary about him, was that he heard peoples' stories and he never forgot them, and that's what I'm going to try and do. I'm not going to be Senator Kennedy, but I do stand on his shoulders, and I learned a lot from him.