Thank yous

Thank you, Jacky. I'm Fritz Kaegi, your new Assessor.

This is so much fun, I see so many familiar faces here, it's such an honor to be here with you. I'd like to take a moment to recognize my dad, Walter Kaegi. We lost my mom this year. So many of you have been so great in supporting us. It's been hard on all of us, but I know she's smiling ear to ear and bursting with pride at this gathering. Isn't that right, dad?

I'd also like to recognize my other family members for being here today, too. Sorry to say I won't be offering you jobs, but I wouldn't be here without you, and I am SO grateful for your support on this journey.

And what an amazing gathering of dignitaries, community and labor leaders, and elected officials. [...] It's so great to see our coalition right here.

It's a tremendous honor that Kenwood Academy and the Chicago Public Schools are hosting us. I'd like to especially thank Principal Karen Calloway. Some of my former teachers and classmates, along with many of the school's alumni, parents,

and current students are here today. Any Broncos in here? Please stand up and be recognized, I am proud to stand with you!

Acknowledge the specialness of this moment

We're holding this ceremony here at Kenwood for a few reasons. **First,** Kenwood is special to me, and it's a special place. My journey at Kenwood got started in the fall of 1985 right up on the second floor of this building, where my division 966 met in the art room. I entered here as an underachiever—a little bit of a troublemaker—who was more interested in baseball than grades. But also entered as someone with an early interest in cities, politics, and the rest of the world.

The teachers here, as well as my multi-talented classmates, supported these interests. They created an atmosphere of sincere enthusiasm, and a desire for creativity, originality, and high standards in all things, whether it was in academics, music, art, sports, or activities. You had to bring your A-game to Ms. Stein's English class and that made you a better writer. Ms. Tarta's enthusiastic lectures made you hunger for outside reading and she made you go the extra mile on your research papers. As students, in and out of class, we learned so much from each other. The debate team and the school paper deepened my interests in Chicago,

politics, and the world. Playing baseball in the Public League introduced me to schools and neighborhoods elsewhere on the South Side. This environment shaped my worldview, my values and launched me on my career, as it I know it did for Dan and Judge Hunt. When I arrived on the east coast at my liberal arts college, Haverford, I started looking around for others who went to high schools like Kenwood. Only after several years passed did I realize that there IS NO other high school like Kenwood. Without this wonderful public school and the people who are a part of it, I would not be here today. I am so proud to be a Bronco, and always will be.

Second, we're also here because Hyde Park is where I grew up, so it still feels like home. My parents have lived here for over 40 years. My dad retired last year after 52 years of teaching Roman and Byzantine history at the University of Chicago. My mom was an undeniable force in neighborhood organizing in her own trademark energetic, frenetic way. She lived a life of service, as one of the first Peace Corps volunteers, serving in Tunisia in North Africa, and then later working for Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign. One of the first things she did after moving to Hyde Park was to go out canvassing to register new voters on the

South Side with her new friend Jacky Grimshaw, who became one of Harold Washington's most important advisors.

Growing up in Hyde Park, in the 1980s, you couldn't escape a political education. The conversation around our dinner table wasn't about Roman and Byzantine history, it was all about the Council Wars. In the neighborhood, the excitement and energy was everywhere, and it is unforgettable for anyone who lived through it, even a teenager. Hyde Park and Kenwood Academy remain huge influences in my life, and so it is a real treat having you here in my old neighborhood, on such an important day.

[PAUSE HERE] But there's a **third** reason why we are holding this ceremony here. It goes beyond my PERSONAL story and directly to the heart of our campaign and my progressive vision for this office. For the students in here, this is about YOU. Are there any students in here? [PAUSE]. You see, property taxes are how we invest in YOU. THIS right here is where our property tax dollars go. About two-thirds of property taxes fund our public schools. That is as it should be, because education is the best investment we know of for driving equity, productivity, earning power, and citizenship. You are our future. Every child in

Cook County deserves the kind of education I received at Kenwood. When we talk about fixing the assessment system, what's at stake is nothing less than our children's education. You see, my job, property assessment, really is about how we divide up the bill for investing in YOU. We can not afford to allow our assessment system to be hijacked for purposes of favoritism and profit, because that gives folks an excuse for not investing in you. Too often, we get mired in a conversation about property taxes that completely ignores this. If people don't have faith that the levies and taxes, which pay for our children's education, are fairly and equitably divided amongst us, then we will never adequately fund the education that we know is so vital to the future of every child.

[PAUSE]

Fairness, ethics, and transparency

I'm here with you because we want fairness, ethics, and transparency from our Assessor. The 5.2 million people of Cook County deserve it! THIS is THE office that is supposed to be about equity, crunching data to fairly divide up the property tax bill. But as we know, it's never been run this way. Instead, this office has been organized to deliver favors to a small handful of winners, at the expense of the rest of us. It's an approach that is an out-of-date relic of urban machine patronage politics, completely idiosyncratic to Cook County. No other place is like this.

This was told to us through the vivid reporting of the *Chicago Tribune* and *ProPublica* and through the researchers at the University of Chicago, the Lincoln Land Institute and the Civic Consulting Alliance. They've all run the numbers, and told us this is what they learned.

What the Tribune and ProPublica found was quote *"a property tax system that harmed the poor and helped the rich"* unquote. They go on to say quote *"for years the county's property tax system created an unequal burden on residents, handing huge financial breaks to homeowners who are well-off while punishing those who have the least, particularly people living in minority communities"* unquote.

This is a travesty. We will bring it to an end, starting today.

[PAUSE HERE]

We deserve fairness, ethics, and transparency from our Assessor. When I see all of us here, I see our coalition. Yes, Our win in the election is about a new coalition—a coalition of people who realize that cronyism in this office is wrong

and it damages the place we live in and love. It's our job to eliminate all vestiges of unfairness from this office through ethical, fair, and transparent stewardship.

Our coalition began assembling a year and half ago, before the *Tribune* series first hit, with progressives, experts, good government advocates, and, most notably, folks from Cook County communities, especially on the West and South sides of the county, who thought they were being hurt by this unfair system.

Our coalition expanded when the investigations and media coverage entered the wider consciousness of the city.

Our coalition grew further with endorsements from friends like now-former County Clerk David Orr, Congressman-elect Chuy Garcia, the great Congresswoman Robin Kelly, who is here today, members of Congress, state legislators, local mayors and many, many other elected officials.

But our coalition goes beyond that. Our coalition includes our friends in labor, prominent leaders in the real estate industry and in business, neighborhood chambers of commerce and more. They all see that the current, cronyistic

assessment process creates uncertainty, risk and volatility that deters investment. We are increasingly out of step with the rest of the United States, and the world.

Our coalition also includes the taxing bodies: cities and towns, school boards, libraries and parks. They want better data to so they can govern better, to serve the public better. They also don't want the budgetary chaos of issuing millions in refunds in each year based on appeals, which only forces tax levies HIGHER.

So, our coalition is strong. And now, we're here.

[PAUSE HERE] Since March, my team and I have been hard at work on a plan to make our Assessor's office ethical, transparent, and fair. It's been a long wait since the primary and we're eager to get going. This is Day One. And that work begins now. Here's what we have in store..

Fair, equitable, transparent assessments. How do we get there?

This morning, we ended the employment of *anyone* in our office who received his or her job purely due to patronage or nepotism.

We've brought in a whole new team. It includes a highly respected legal authority on the property tax code; a senior data scientist, a published expert, who has studied and documented the inequities in Cook County assessments. We've brought in a manager from a successful assessment system in another state. We've brought in experts on geographic information systems, which are at the forefront of technological leaps in this field. Not only that, we have recruited recognized leaders in county and city government, with track records of achieving reform and restructuring major offices. *Your* assessor's office will now be known as a place that hires based on how you will serve the public, not on who you know.

This morning, I signed an executive order on ethics, pledging ourselves to uphold the highest standards. Starting today, and over the next couple of weeks, we will roll out these new ethical standards to the employees in the office.

Here's one commitment: I will eliminate the culture of pay-to-play in this office and will never accept donations from the property tax appeals industry.

Today, we are also inviting the International Association of Assessing Officers, the IAAO, to Cook County, to conduct a thorough audit of our office, to identify risks, and to identify ways we can bring best practices to our office.

Today we're also releasing a 100 Day Plan, which will be available on our website. Transparency will be our watchword. You will be hearing it a lot. But it's ethically and economically crucial.

The keys to fairness and transparency are the data we use. In our first 100 days, we will not only make publicly available our data and methodologies, we will reveal our models and open our programming code up for inspection by anyone who wishes to view it. We will develop a next-generation approach to residential assessments, improve our methods of data collection and modernize our legacy technology systems, including, it must be said, a way, WAY overdue relaunch of the website.

All of what I've described so far can be done through the office's executive powers. But to truly modernize and transform the way this office gathers and uses *commercial* data, we need to turn to Springfield.

We are working on a bill that modernizes our data collection practices, so that, like major Assessor's offices across the country, we are equipped to effectively value commercial properties. The bill would require commercial property owners to submit income data each year, like our peers in other major markets in the U.S. and as property owners do when they file appeals. We've already had substantive conversations with legislators and real estate market participants of all kinds, who support this legislation because it reduces risks and costs in our assessment system, and will make it much more accurate.

Some of the reforms that we have planned will be immediate, others will take time before their full effect can be seen in people's bills, and felt in their pockets. That is the nature of this work. But as we move forward, we do so with urgency. Knowing that we will have a governor next month who supports a graduated income tax as well gives me confidence that we will finally see *structural change* at the state level that will support the work our office will do at the county level.

We are clear about both the gravity and the importance of the task ahead of us. It's about our homes, our neighbors, our communities and our collective way of life. Few things are more important and it is a responsibility we don't take lightly.

We're not naive, we know there will be obstacles ahead of us. I can't tell you how many times we get told each day that we have our work cut out for us. And it's true. These are problems that began way back when I was sitting in Ms. Stein's English class. They won't be fixed overnight, some fixes may take years, but the time to fix them is now and it's way overdue.

These are our plans, this is our vision. They aren't pipe dreams. There is profound consensus behind them.

Who would oppose this? We know the answer. There are folks out there who profit from a broken, opaque, antique system. There are folks out there who need cronyism as an economic advantage, because otherwise they can't compete on their own merits.

Some will try to bog us down, to undermine the changes we make. Some will want to starve this office and prevent it from functioning.

But the powers behind those interests have never been weaker than they are right now.

In their desperation, they may say they are trying to protect the business community.

But *we* know that real estate developers and property owners correctly equate transparency with predictability. They see that our vision will de-risk the system and encourage growth, serving the skillful rather than the connected. A fair, accurate and transparent assessment system will motivate investors to create jobs, grow our economy and enhance Chicago on the world stage.

The system has been broken for decades, but it CAN be fixed. Voters elected a new group of officials at all levels because they have an urgent desire to move away from the old way of doing things.

THIS message is equally clear: Fairness, transparency and integrity are not too much to ask; they are what we our all entitled to. In creating an assessor's office that matches this message, we lay a foundation for the future. We have an

opportunity to create a fairer, more just system for the residents of Cook County, one that has been denied to them for way too long. In doing so, we are creating a more prosperous future for our children and transforming Chicago's reputation around the country and the world.

It's time to get to work.

Thank you so much for being with me today I look forward to serving you.