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Moakley, Hawkins Interview Transcript (MS100/09.01#17)

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Recording Overview: Representative Joe Moakley and Representative Augustus Hawkins discuss the Brownsville Affair and proposed legislation to restore funding for job-training programs in both the public and private sectors. The discussion was broadcast on WILD as an episode of a radio show featuring Congressman Moakley and other members of Congress talking about issues concerning the community.

Transcript Begins:

JOE MOAKLEY: My guest today is a man who has already served more than forty years in the Congress and the State legislature, Congressman Augustus Hawkins. Rep. Hawkins, who represents the 21st District of California, is chairman of the Subcommittee on Equal Opportunity and sits on the Education and Labor Committee and House Administration Committee. I'm extremely pleased to have Congressman Hawkins on my show today.

Many of you probably remember Congressman Hawkins as the man who spearheaded the effort to give the black soldiers, based in Brownsville, Texas around the turn of the century, honorable discharges. I'm sure you'll remember that those men were wrongly accused of murder and summarily dismissed with dishonorable discharges. Last year, the Army finally righted this terrible wrong. Congressman Gus Hawkins, it's great having you on the program.

AUGUSTUS HAWKINS: Thanks, Joe. It's a very great honor for me to be with you.



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MOAKLEY: We talked about the Brownsville, Texas situation. Maybe you can bring your listening audience up-to-date just in exactly what is the status of the legislation that you filed?

HAWKINS: Yes, Joe. We won this particular case in the sense that we got the record corrected. We had the Army reverse the record so that the men will now be considered honorably discharged. In addition to that, we felt that it was necessary also to get some financial compensation for them. There's only one survivor left. This survivor will get approximately, twenty-five thousand dollars. But there are perhaps somewhere between seventeen and twenty-five widows who in turn will get a similar amount. I think that this will in a sense set the record straight, clear the history and at least be some recognition of the heroic services of these men who were certainly discharged in a way that is a disgrace, I think, on the service record of these men.

MOAKLEY: I can remember your floor fight and then taking the *Congressional Record* home and reading in depth exactly what you did and how you substantiated the case in the letters and how you went back in the history. And it was really a masterpiece of reestablishing a case that was many, many years old, and I'm sure that the Army wasn't too happy to release any information that they had on the matter?

HAWKINS: It was quite a battle, as you say, Joe. And I think that the Army recognized that in their efforts now to get enlistments, particularly in a voluntary Army that they had to demonstrate that they had some ethics or some morality about these things themselves. And I believe that this case certainly is a good example of what we can do in a sustained drive here in the Congress. We have many other battles to win though, however.

MOAKLEY: Yes, I guess we will talk about some of them today. Congressman, I know that when you were in Boston on March 24th and 25 with your subcommittee, many of the people of my district told vividly of the desperate conditions they were in because we had, for all intents and purposes, stopped funding job-training programs. And you and I know that these programs



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were designed to help those people. And yet we seem to have a president who is not committed to that idea. And I know that since you are the leader in this effort, I would hope that you'd tell the listening audience just exactly what the present situation is today with the job training programs?

HAWKINS: It's a very difficult one, Joe, because the cutbacks, the impoundment of money, and the philosophy of this administration, which seems to be that the money should be given to corporations, private corporations. And by stimulating them through tax incentives and otherwise, that there will be plenty of jobs. Well, the type of jobs that are being talked about are the so called "bed pan" jobs referred to by President Nixon. His idea being that no job is demeaning and that consequently there are a lot of these low-paying dead end jobs that individuals should accept. Well, we know their logic of that type of approach to our problems. The fact is that jobs should be creative they should be meaningful, and they should be paid enough so that individuals can survive.

In spite of the cutbacks and in spite of what is happening, the committee which I head, the Committee on Equal Opportunities, is seeking to work out with the administration some sort of adjustment. I believe that we have reached this point that between now and December the community-action agencies that are now sponsoring programs will continue to be funded. Between January and June, they will reassess the various community-action agencies and I would assume that most of them will be continued. During that time, however, it will be necessary for us, however, for us to pass a bill which would authorize their continuation after June of 1974. I have already introduced such a bill, HR-10865, which will contain the money necessary to continue the programs beyond June of 1974.

It is my hope that through your efforts and others here in the Congress that we will be able to pass this authorizing legislation, and I hope next year, demonstrate to the White House that there is sufficient sentiment among the people throughout this nation to continue the war against poverty.



MOAKLEY: I agree, Gus, that the administration many times thinks that just because so and so gets a job, regardless of what caliber of job it is, that they've done their part. And I think that the job training program is a very important part of what should be going on. We all waited for the war to end. We felt we'd have a peace dividend, that the money would come back into the urban areas in the form of housing, job opportunities, and this just doesn't happen. And I have to commend you and your committee for taking the steps that the president should have taken so that we could have these jobs funded until the president or other legislation is passed.

Gus, we were met by the OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center) people last week down here in Washington. We were both visited by representatives of the organization who quite inspiringly told of their concern that the Congress had failed to approve funding for the organization. I talked with Chairman Perkins and he feels that we are very close to funding this. And I was just wondering what your opinion is. Are we any close to passage of that bill now than we were two weeks ago?

HAWKINS: Yes, I think we are. The Manpower Bill, which will be referred out of the subcommittee, the [6:46] Subcommittee, the House Education and Labor Committee hopefully will be acted on next week. This is the major piece of legislation pertaining to the development of our human resources, often called the Manpower Bill. In this bill, it is our intent to get an amendment which will authorize funding of national organizations such as OIC, which the organization so ably led by Dr. Leon Sullivan of Philadelphia. It's a self-help group. It's a type of training which I think fits in with both the private sector, as well as public employment. We hope, as I say, to get an amendment into this bill. I believe that it will be accepted by Congressman Daniels.

Then in the report we specifically intend to devote several paragraphs to a description of the OIC program. As a result of this, I think the OIC activities, not only the Northeastern section of our country, but hopefully, as far west as Los Angeles and my own district, these activities will be



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continued. It's an excellent program and I think the Manpower Bill will be the vehicle that we will use for the continuation of this program.

MOAKLEY: I've talked with members of Congress as far as the OIC is concerned and many of them feel that this is a good working program. I know in our area that we have a lot of private money into the OIC and it's really done a great job. In fact, I think some of the members are almost surprised to hear that they had been operating without federal funds for a certain period of time. And although it slowed the program down a little bit, it didn't fatally do away with it.

Gus, there is another program that you and I have talked about and are working on, that's the Office of Economic Opportunity. We all know that the President tried in every way he could to dismantle it, to kill it. He put people in charge of the program whose only orders were to dismantle it and do away with it and try to cut the programs back, do away with community participation. We haven't heard too much about the program lately. I was just wondering what is happening with it?

HAWKINS: This, I think, is another example of the efforts of this administration to demolish all of the so-called Great Society, New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontiers programs largely because they are not to the credit of this administration. I think they want to abolish these programs and then try to establish some new ones. Well, we know what happens in the meantime to the people who are served by the programs. Here again, I think that it's going to be necessary to pass a bill which will continue them. This will be included in the bill which I previously referred to. In the meantime, many of the components of the program are being transferred to other old-line agencies. The Job Corps for example, is being transferred to the Department of Labor, the Head Start program to the Department of Health Education and Welfare. Legal Services is still to be determined by this Congress. We have, as you well recall, passed a bill in the House to continue legal services in a private corporation; that is an independent corporation. The Senate has passed a bill. We will go to conference on this. It's my hope that we will work out the differences and we will be able to continue the question of legal services for the poor.



In other words, Joe, unfortunately, whereas we battled under the previous administration for one program, under one piece of legislation, we're not forced to continue the war against poverty on a hundred different fronts. We have got to do it with each and every department. It's a frustrating experience and certainly, it's only due to the efforts of such a great support as we have received from you and some of the other congressmen at this session that we were able to even keep the programs alive. It's a holding action, which I think that if we can hold on for a few more months, we will be able to continue these programs next year. Because I believe the political climate is changing and that the people are beginning to assert themselves now. And they're going to demand the continuation of these programs, rather than see the affects of poverty and increased crime and social tensions and a lot of activities going on on our streets today which are directly traceable to these cutbacks and this new philosophy of this administration.

MOAKLEY: Gus, you've introduced several bills, one in particular which I'm proud to be a co-sponsor, which would provide ten billion dollars a year for the millions of public service and private sector jobs which are attempting to meet the enormous employment needs and correct serious public service deficiencies. And I'm sure these are some of the matters that we've just been discussing. But what's happening on that particular piece of legislation?

HAWKINS: There again, we were slowed down by this administration. Obviously, anything that calls for the expenditure of ten billion dollars is--

MOAKLEY: That's a no-no.

HAWKINS: That's a no-no. It's part of this administration's effort to blindly reduce certain appropriations, while escalating others. It's a question of priorities. The bill is being pushed. I can assure you we have not given up. I think we need these services, not just the employment that would be generated, but the services which these programs would provide. Services in education and health and recreation and law enforcement, environmental control, and so forth. I



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think that it would be criminal and certainly very costly for us to let our resources go down during this period. And we intend to continue pushing this particular bill in order to provide jobs in this sector in order to provide these services. It's a combination of both the providing of services, badly needed services, and jobs which would be generated. And incidentally, I think the private sector would be benefited greatly by this type of stimulant. I think this is the way we should stimulate the private sector.

I'm proud to have you as a co-author, Joe, as I have on so many of my other bills, and I think together in 1974 we have got to make this a priority of ours in order to see that we get back to recovery and that the country itself returns to the condition that it was prior to 1969 of moving ahead on a progressive wave.

MOAKLEY: Gus, I agree with you. I think this bill will go a great way in solving a lot of the problems, plus giving jobs and allowing the private sector to meet the great employment needs and correct many of these public service deficiencies. And I just hope that this bill does get some priority when it does hit the floor of the Congress.

Gus, it's great to have you on the show this afternoon. And as I say, I look forward to working with you on all of the bills that we've discussed. You have been a great leader in this type of legislation. And as I say, once again, I want to thank you very much for coming up to Boston and to having that great meeting and to listening to all of the people in my district tell you just exactly what is on their mind and how this legislation would help them.

My guest today has been Congressman Gus Hawkins from California. Thank you very much, Gus.

END OF INTERVIEW