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Moakley, Fauntroy Interview Transcript (MS100/09.01#13)

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Recording Overview: Representative Joe Moakley and Representative Walter Fauntroy discuss issues regarding the governance of Washington, D.C., also known as the District of Columbia, including the proposed Home Rule Bill which would change D.C.'s level of representation at the federal level and aspects of its local governance. The discussion was recorded as an episode of a radio show featuring Congressman Moakley and other members of Congress talking about issues of concerning the community.

Transcript Begins

JOE MOAKLEY: My guest today is the distinguished Representative from the Nation's Capitol, Congressman Walter Fauntroy. Walter is now in his second term in the House of Representatives. Representative Fauntroy was one of the leading forces in the successful fight this year to get the approval for the Home Rule Bill for the residents of the District of Columbia. Congressman, I know that you're still involved in Conference Committee reports and I'm pleased that you're able to join me on this program today.

WALTER FAUNTROY: Congressman Moakley, I'm very pleased to be here. It's a real pleasure to share anytime with you. I may say for the benefit of your constituents that we are extremely happy to have you in the Congress. And I am particularly grateful for the kind of support you've given to the interests of the District of Columbia, although you don't represent the people here.



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MOAKLEY: Thank you very much. That's the role we play as congressmen. I think we have many constituencies. First, we have the constituency of our congressional district. Then we have the constituency of the entire state, and then of the entire country. So, we have to vote accordingly. But I know that the people on the Roxbury and the North Dorchester District are very, very interested in this Home Rule Petition, as were the League of Women Voters, and I have received many, many calls. And as you know, I filed a very similar bill as the one you did and it was very easy keeping in touch since you and I serve on the same Committee on Banking and Currency. So, we were in touch constantly on this.

Congressman Fauntroy, you've sponsored a constitutional amendment which would permit the residents of the Nation's Capitol to elect two senators and as many representatives to the district as they would be entitled to. What do you think the chances are that this legislation would be enacted?

FAUNTROY: Well, I think the chances at this point are good that we will get voting representation in the House, and not so good that we'll get voting representation in the Senate. Joe, just let me explain again the situation in the District of Columbia. There are approximately, 800,000 residents of the nation's Capitol here who unlike any other residents anywhere in the country, do not have one voice-- now one voice-- but no vote on federal matters. We who live here pay 900 million dollars a year in federal taxes and don't have a vote on what the federal government does with that. Now, it's because the District of Columbia, unlike any other jurisdiction in the United States, is considered the federal city and therefore, not entitled to national representation. So, that when a person moves to the District and becomes a resident here and chooses to take up his residency fully here, he gives up his American citizenship with respect to the vote. And we have clearly a situation of taxation without representation on what at least the federal government does with the money that we pay for the delivery of federal services.



The result is that while we have more people in this city than there are in ten states, those ten states have two senators to represent the money which was raised on those states, which the federal government dispenses, and often two representatives. And that's the unfair situation and that's why I've introduced this legislation that would give this city, which is seventy percent black, voting representation in the House and Senate.

MOAKLEY: We had a situation like that in Boston a few years back, and we had a couple of Indians went on board a ship and threw some tea overboard. And they claimed that taxation without representation wasn't what it was all about. And I think you're probably doing the same thing without wasting all of that tea in the beautiful harbor out here.

Well, do you see that the recent approval of the Home Rule Bill which you fought so hard for, that is now tied up in conference committee; do you feel that since this was approved that this may very well be an encouraging sign for your change so that you can have federal representation here in the District?

FAUNTROY: It certainly is, Joe, an encouraging sign. To give you a full picture of it, I think I have to go back to my work with Martin Luther King, Jr. I was for ten years director of the Washington Bureau of SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Committee).¹ When I came on board with SCLC back in 1960, I told Dr. King that we would not be free in Washington, we would not have Home Rule, we would not have voting representation until our people in the south were free to register and vote and until that vote enabled us to form creative alliances based on mutual respect and cooperation with the representatives in the House and in the Senate. In the eight years since our Voting Rights Act in 1965, we have registered in the south some two million black voters and they have in the process of voting elected some 1,400 black elected officials and have become a real force in the election picture in the south. And because we have begun to recognize that we must judge candidates for office not on the basis of the color of their

¹ Southern Christian Leadership Committee was an organization formed during the Civil Rights Movement run by its President Martin Luther King Jr.



skin, but on the basis of the content of their character, as Dr. King used to put it, we found meaningful coalitions being formed in the south, which has resulted in many of the southern congressmen who over the years traditionally voted against Home Rule and against representation for this city because it was primarily black, changing their minds.

And the fact that we've got the bill through was a clear evidence of that change of mind based on not threat but a promise to work with those, whatever the color of their skin, if they are willing to deal with the basic problems confronting the nation that happened to be reflected most acutely in the black experience. So, I am very encouraged by what happened with the passage of the Home Rule Bill. It is a demonstration, I think, to our people, black people across the country, that when we cooperate and when we work together in league with those who have the same interests as ours, we can deal with the basic problems that confront the people of the country generally.

MOAKLEY: I think that that explanation was very much in depth. I didn't realize it myself just the fact that so many new black voters were put out on the rolls in some of the Southern states. They did have some pressure to bring upon the Congressmen that served in the Congress that would be eventually voting for this. I just didn't carry it through that much. But I know there was quite a change in the composition of the D.C. Committee this year. In fact, I think that something like seven or eight members that served on the D.C. Committee last year were defeated for public office.

FAUNTROY: And they were defeated because they were just not responding to the growing concerns of blacks in their districts, which blacks had the good sense to vote for other white candidates who were prepared to deal on a color blind basis with the issues that have come before this Congress. Again, without casting a lot of flowers at you, I appreciate the kind of color blind judgment that you have manifested in the time that you've been here on Capitol Hill.

MOAKLEY: I think that I agree with you and Martin Luther King in saying you don't look at the person's skin color, you look at the content of what the fellow is all about and where he is



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coming from. Actually, getting back to the additional voters that were put on the rolls, I'm sure that's responsible for Congressman Andy Young to come up here from Georgia, and also Maynard Jackson just being elected in Atlanta. These are two firsts.

FAUNTROY: Yes, without question. And what we are trying to do in the Congressional Black Caucus² is to encourage our people to understand the value of the ballot. Dr. King said the most important step that we can take toward the fulfillment of our freedom is a short walk to the ballot box. And while I can be very much encouraged by the extent to which the people in the South, for example, haven't been doing much marching in the streets in the last eight years, but they've been marching on ballot boxes, that has not been duplicated in our northern communities, unfortunately. Unfortunately, we've gotten bogged down in radical rhetoric and hate and turning off on the system with little coming out of the reduction end.

MOAKLEY: Well, maybe as a result of what's happening in the Southern states that this might just flow north and hope the same thing, ultimately, would happen up there?

FAUNTROY: I would hope so. And I would hope also that the horrendous Watergate revelations will not cause young people, in particular, to turn off on the political process.

MOAKLEY: Someone once said that Watergate has done for the politician what the Boston Strangler had done for the door-to-door salesman. Everybody just retreated to their own sanctuary. Walter, in discussing your constitutional amendment, it's very difficult not to talk about the discussions in the Senate/House Conferees and now on the questions about Home Rule. Maybe you'd like to tell some of our listeners just exactly what is going on in the Conference Committee and what you think will be the final result?

² The Congressional Black Caucus, formed in 1969, is a coalition of African-American members of Congress working to address the legislative concerns of black and minority citizens.



FAUNTROY: We passed what our opponents call a watered down Home Rule Bill in the House, which while it provided for an elected mayor and city council in the city for the first time in 100 years, it does not give us complete control over the budget of the city. We are in conference now working out some forty-five differences between the House version and the Senate version, the Senate version being stronger in many regards. And it's very clear now we're going to come out with a bill that will go before the President for signing. And while it will not probably give us all of the fiscal authority to which we are entitled in this city, it will be a significant step towards self-determination and I expect that you'll have an opportunity, Joe, to vote with us on November the 12th when the Conference Report comes back to the House.

MOAKLEY: We've got date then. November 12th the bill will be back before the House?

FAUNTROY: Yes. It looks very good as the date.

MOAKLEY: Will this bill be stronger than the House version?

FAUNTROY: Yes. I'm confident it's going to be stronger than the House version. I think it's going to probably eliminate some of the really denigrating amendments which were added in the House and probably strengthen the control of the city over its own budget. Again, for your listeners, in the District of Columbia we pay about eighty percent of the cost of running this city out of taxes raised from the people who live here. The federal government which takes fifty percent of the taxable land off the tax rolls contributes only about twenty percent to our full budget, which is unfair. And yet the Congress has in the past exercised complete control over the whole budget as to what we may spend it for and how. And the House version maintained that authority for the House Appropriation Subcommittee and its counterpart in the Senate. We're hopeful that if we're not successful in changing that situation with this bill in subsequent Congresses, perhaps the next Congress and hope you will be back to help us on that, we'll get the kind of full self-determination that we are entitled to.



MOAKLEY: I know that there was much debate and you showed your metal up there leading the charge in the House. But why was the Congress so opposed of allowing Washington to have the fiscal autonomy that you fought so hard for?

FAUNTROY: Well, I think it's a matter of voting from memory. We have members of the House who over the years were associated with reactionaries on self-government, like the former chairman of the District Committee from South Carolina. Quite frankly, it's much easier for an economic interest group in Washington to influence a couple of senior members of the House District Committee than it is for them to control the election of a mayor and the majority of the City Council. And in return for that kind of interest the members of the key committees tended to operate in the interest of a few in the city and were rewarded in various ways for that. And in return for their positions and seniority in the House, many members just voted to support them on legislation which really didn't bother them locally, and yet could provide a significant tradeoff of things which they wanted.

So, it's primarily voting from memory. And I think as time goes on and as more of those members of the House who had been opposed to self government leave the Congress as they have been, particularly in the south, we're going to see a change in attitude.

MOAKLEY: I know that the members of the local Black Caucus in Boston, Rep. Mel King, Rep. Doris Bunte, Rep. Royal Bolling Sr. and Jr. and Bill Owens were very, very much interested and wrote me quite a letter on it. And they did want me to contact you, which I did. So, I'm very happy that we got together not only in the national level but also the local level.

FAUNTROY: Just let me say thank you to all of those who wrote you, because the black elected officials across the nation are largely responsible for the kind of contacts with members of this House across the country that resulted in our passage of that bill.



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MOAKLEY: I'm sure that many people across the country didn't really realize how devoid Washington was of local representation and federal representation. In fact, just this year, Walter, you've had some additional powers. Last year as a delegate you just sat in. You couldn't vote. Now, you can sit in committee, you can vote in committee. But you still can't vote on the floor of the House?

FAUNTROY: I can't vote on the floor, although I have seniority. And I hope that this congress in the second session will be able to pass a bill that will give me a vote in the House and possibly representation in the Senate.

MOAKLEY: I'm sure that all indications that I have in seeing you and the other fellows that were fighting side by side, I think that this will come about very sharply. I'm very happy to have as my guest today Congressman Walter Fauntroy, who is now serving the second term of Representative here from the Washington, D.C. Capitol. Walter was very, very active and spoke on television, radio and did a lot of work buttonholing his colleagues to get this Home Rule Bill to the stage where it is. Walter, it was my pleasure to have you on the program.

FAUNTROY: Joe, it's a real pleasure to be here with you and I look forward to years of service together with you in this House.

MOAKLEY: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW