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## Moakley, Diggs, Dorn Interview Transcript (MS100/09.01#23)

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**Program Title:** "Representative Moakley with Representatives Diggs and Dorn (WILD)", n.d.

**Program Participants:** Representatives John Joseph Moakley, Diggs and Dorn

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**Recording Overview:** This recording includes two interviews with members of Congress that were broadcast on WILD and WCOP as episodes of a radio show featuring Congressman Moakley in the 1970s. Moakley interviews Representative Charles Diggs, chairman of the House District Committee, about 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 second interview is a discussion with William Jennings Bryan Dorn, chairman of the House Veterans' Services Committee about benefits for veterans and legislation such as the Veterans Healthcare Expansion Act of 1973.

### **Part I: Diggs Transcript Begins**

**ANNOUNCER:** From the Nation's Capitol, here is our Congressman Joe Moakley. Joe, who represents the Ninth Congressional District, will have a special guest today.

**REPRESENTATIVE JOE MOAKLEY:** My guest today is the Dean of the Black Caucus, the senior black congressman in the House of Representatives, Representative Charles Diggs, from



Michigan. Congressman Diggs, who was the first chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus<sup>1</sup>, is only the third black committee chairman in all years of Congress, since Reconstruction days. He currently heads the important House District Committee, and through his tiring efforts Home Rule legislation for the residents of the District of Columbia, is scheduled to come to the floor of the House very early next month. He is also Chairman of the House Subcommittee on African Affairs, and has had a very influencing role in awakening many Americans to the needs and concerns of the African continent. Congressman Diggs, I am very happy and very pleased to have you on the show today.

**REPRESENTATIVE CHARLES DIGGS:** Well, thank you very much Mr. Congressman for your invitation to appear.

**MOAKLEY:** Congressman Diggs, I know how hard you've been working on the Home Rule. In fact, I have to tell the listening audience of WILD, when you were named chairman of the Committee on the District of Columbia, there was dancing in the streets because they knew of your stand and how you felt about Home Rule. But what do you consider the chances of the Home Rule legislation when it does come to the floor early next month?

**DIGGS:** Well, I'm very sobered by the responsibility of being chairman of this committee. I was not one of those dancing in the streets because I knew that a great deal of focus would be on the committee. This House District Committee has traditionally been in control of the most conservative elements, and to be frankly, some of the most racist elements in the Congress; a committee which has been dominated by deep-south Southerners. So that when I came aboard, the responsibility for really putting district affairs in a more objective forum, and really considering all of the problems that beset the Nation's Capitol, takes on an entirely different concept because I brought along with me some new members, replacing some older members, so that I have a working majority on that committee.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.



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I think our chances for bringing self-determination to the seven hundred and fifty thousand residents of the city of Washington is good. I think, as a matter of fact, we have a modest edge in the prospective voting, which is going to take place on October the ninth and the tenth, when the House takes this matter up for debate. It is of particular interest to your constituency, of course, because there was a certain tea party in your town, many years ago, about representation that--

**MOAKLEY:** It think we call that Taxation without Representation.

**DIGGS:** Right. And that's what the people of Washington have been suffering all these many years.

**MOAKLEY:** Actually, it's unbelievable that Congressman Diggs really has two constituencies. He has got the Washington D.C. people that are always in touch with him on this type of legislation and also other things that really affect the district, and also he has got his constituency back in Michigan. And I really know he's a broad shouldered, well-built gentleman, but I just don't see how one man can take all this. But Charles, it seems to be agreeing with you.

**DIGGS:** Well, thanks. You touch on a very sensitive point there because a person with your experience having served in a Massachusetts House and the Senate, and on the Council there, knows how important it is to be relevant to your constituency back home. And I've had problems in the past, because some people have said, Well what has Washington D.C. have to do with the city of Detroit? And what does Africa have to do with some of the problems that we know beset our local communities? But there is a relevance. I look upon the city of Washington, one of the ten largest cities in the country, as being an opportunity for an urban-laboratory concept to resolve problems with respect to health, and housing, and employment, and human relations that once solved in Washington D.C., once some kind of progressive analysis is made in Washington D.C., that this kind of an example could be taken to Boston, could be taken to Detroit, and the other similar urban communities across this country.



**MOAKLEY:** Of course. And I'm sure what you're referring to, Congressman, is that for many years the rumors had it that if the majority of the constituency of Washington D.C. were white, then they probably would have had this Home Rule legislation a long time ago; but because there's probably eighty to eighty-five percent black that it has been stalled and put on a backburner by a very conservative Chairman in the past, who just felt that they weren't ready for self-determinations.

**DIGGS:** Well, there's no question that racism has been an important factor in holding back the granting of self-determination or self-rule in the District of Columbia. But the questions of the capacity of blacks to hold high public office is a question that is fast becoming mute across the country when you see a black man elected as mayor of Los Angeles, which is only fifteen percent black. We're going to elect a black mayor, in November, ourselves, in Detroit, and we don't quite have fifty percent. And when you see black people serving with you in the Congress and in other forums across the country, you know that the capacity for governance has nothing to do with the color of a person's skin.

**MOAKLEY:** I think we have a very dramatic example right here in Massachusetts. We have Senator Ed Brooke<sup>2</sup> serving on the United States Senate, doing a great job.

**DIGGS:** One of the most dramatic examples in the country. And, you know, black people had been supporting progressive people of other colors, and we have no problems with progressive minded Joe Moakleys representing us in Congress, or progressive minded other people that happen not to be black, representing us. So we just ask for equal treatment.

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<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Brooke III (1919- ), a Republican, represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate from 1967 to 1979. He previously served as attorney general of Massachusetts from 1963 to 1967.



**MOAKLEY:** Charles, getting back to the Home Rule. Home Rule to a lot of people is like the small print on an insurance policy. You know, they say, oh that's fine, and we're for Home Rule, I'm inundated with requests from the legal women voters in Massachusetts to vote for the Home Rule amendment. In fact, I filed a very similar bill, patent on your bill that you've put a lot of time into just so that I could send a copy back to these different groups in Massachusetts. But since you are the expert, and you are Mr. Home Rule, and I'm sure that when this legislation is passed that the name Diggs and Home Rule, in Washington D.C., have to be synonymous, I would like if you would just tell the listening audience here on WILD some of the specific parts of what would happen when Washington D.C. does receive Home Rule.

**DIGGS:** Well, it's relatively simple. Most people do not know that in the city of Washington, outside of a non-voting delegate to the Congress, and outside of a locally elected school board, that there are no elected officials; that the mayor is appointed by the President with advice and consent of the Senate, that the members of the City Council are appointed by the President with advice and consent of the City Council, and that the local people, despite the fact that they pay some eighty percent of the expense of operating this government in the city of Washington, that they have no direct say through an elected representative for these very vital decisions that are made on a day-to-day basis, over their lives.

So this will, first of all, bring to the city of Washington, as you have in the city of Boston and the city of Detroit, an elected mayor and an elected City Council. A Council composed of thirteen members, one each from the eight wards in the city, and five elected at large. In addition to that, it will continue the opportunity for and the responsibility of the federal government in protecting the federal interest, because this is the Nation's Capitol. Outside of the tremendous properties that are here, we have a responsibility for the diplomatic immunity, some 130 representatives of various countries in the world family of nations are located here, the President is here, the Congress is here. We preserve our oversight responsibility for that matter.



The only other chains that I might mention is one which affects the judiciary. The selection of judges will no longer be by the President because these are local judges. Now the bill will call for the selection of judges by a panel of distinguished members of the Unified Bar Association. And the mayor will make a selection from that list, and the City Council will confirm, rather than the Congress of the United States. Now, those are just some of the basic elements.

**MOAKLEY:** I think you brought it out. I think that most of the people in the United States were unaware that the people that lived in Washington D.C. were so disenfranchised when it came to the ballot box. I note that very recently you visited the White House to discuss the Home Rule bill with the President and his staff. What feeling did you come away with? Are they going to support you on this Home Rule situation, or is it going to be hands off and they're going to let the Republican Party and the House determine how they are going to vote, or what?

**DIGGS:** There has not been any advance indication of how active the administration is going to be with respect to the Home Rule debate. The Republican party and its platform is on record on behalf of Home Rule, but you put it so well when you indicated that it's like, a lot of people say they are for Home Rule, but you have to look at the fine print. And we have yet to get a firm kind of commitment from the White House, thus far. However, I am encouraged by the fact that they are talking about ways to improve the bill, instead of talking about how they are going to defeat the bill, so that it is presumed that if we could satisfy some of their concerns, for example, they are concerned about the emergency powers of the President in case there is some police problem. And they have some other concerns. If we can satisfy those concerns and they will support the bill, then I think that we'll pass this legislation without question.

**MOAKLEY:** That's very good news. This is Congressman Joe Moakley from the Ninth District, reporting from the Nation's Capitol, and with me, I've been very privileged to have the Dean of the Black Caucus, the fellow who has been working with this Home Rule problem for many, many years, and now he is the Chairman of the Washington D.C. Committee I personally feel that it will pass. And as I say, when the Home Rule does come to Washington D.C., there



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will be one fellow that's going to be getting a great deal of the credit, and he's the Congressman from Michigan, Congressman Charles Diggs, whom I've had the pleasure of talking with this evening on WILD.

**DIGGS:** Well, Joe, if this bill passes, it's going to be because of the kind of commitment and support that I get from progressive members such as yourself.

**MOAKLEY:** Oh, you're very kind.

**ANNOUNCER:** Be sure to tune in next week to WILD, as our Congressman Joe Moakley discusses matters of interest to our Roxbury community.

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### **Part II: Dorn Transcript Begins (00:14:30)**

**ANNOUNCER:** From the Nation's Capitol, here is our Congressman Joe Moakley. Today, Joe will be discussing Veterans Affairs with a guest.

**REPRESENTATIVE JOE MOAKLEY:** My guest today is Congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn, Chairman of the Veterans Service Committee of the House of Representatives. Mr. Dorn has been recognized for many years as one of the great orators and the best traditions of the House. When the needs of the America's veterans were at stake, it is always Bryan Dorn who steps to the rostrum to plead their case. His leadership on these issues were rewarded this year with his election as chairman to the Veterans Committee, where he has taken the initiative in paying America's debt to the veterans. Congressman Dorn, it's a pleasure to have you on the program, and of course everyone knows that the name Williams Jennings Bryan Dorn and veterans are almost synonymous in the House of Representatives. And I thank you for coming on



the program to talk about some of the things that have happened to the veterans this year on the Hill.

**REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN DORN:** Well, thank you Congressman Moakley. It's really a pleasure to join you on this program.

**MOAKLEY:** Now, Congressman, the comprehensive Veterans Healthcare Expansion Act, recently enacted into law, and I'm sure many of our Veterans would like to know just exactly what the bill does, and what new benefits would be accruing to them.

**DORN:** Well, this new act, Joe, is known of course as the Veterans Healthcare Expansion Act. It passed the House last year, and the President vetoed it, and then we had a little get together down there and we changed it a little bit, and so we passed the House and the Senate this year, and the President signed it. It does give certain benefits, or provide certain benefits, for veterans, particularly disabled veterans that have children and widows of totally disabled veterans, certain healthcare benefits, outpatient benefits, not otherwise granted to them in private clinics and things of that nature. And in addition, this bill hits at something very important. You know, unfortunately Joe, in our country today our hospital systems are largely nine to five systems. And this bill provides for increased benefits for nurses and technicians on Saturday and Sunday and at night, so our veterans can get better care and better emergency care. And this is a very important point, because unfortunately, I say again that a lot of our hospitals, if you happen to get sick at one or two o'clock in the night, you're kind of at a disadvantage. But this bill helps provide for better emergency care and on weekend care, which was urgently and desperately needed.

**MOAKLEY:** I know before your committee a great testimony was brought out that if they could get this outpatient care before the patient really gets sick that it would save the government millions and millions of dollars.





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**DORN:** Exactly. Instead of it costing a lot of money, some downtown here in the executive branch indicated it will save money.

**MOAKLEY:** Right. Now, many of our disabled veterans have been fearful of getting emergency care in private hospitals outside of the VA because the Veterans Administration wouldn't reimburse them. And I understand that this is one of the great changes that takes place in this law.

**DORN:** Joe, you're right. This is one of the changes. And incidentally, I want to commend you for helping us on veterans' legislation. We've passed several bills, and you have been of a great help to us, and the chairman is particularly grateful to you because we had to pass this legislation by a large majority in the House, and you're a disabled veteran of World War II. You helped us pass it by such a majority that it ensured the President signing the Medical Care Bill and the Cemetery Bill. And also, I think he will sign the Pension Bill, which you helped us pass in the House by a vote of 385 to zero. Yes, the Medical Care Bill, when it is implemented, it hasn't been fully implemented yet, but when it is implemented and carried out, a disabled veteran can get outpatient treatment and emergency treatment, and get reimbursed for it by the Veterans Administration if he goes to a clinic, for instance, on the same block or near where he lives. And this is a great advantage.

**MOAKLEY:** Just so the listeners would know. The first time I saw Congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn in action is when the President threatened to cutback the pension rights of the veterans, and Jennings Bryan Dorn took the floor of the House and he almost got everybody standing shoulder to shoulder and actually forced the administration to change their mind. And ever since that day, I have kept a close eye on this gentleman because I knew that he knew how to work within the system, and he's done a great job especially in the field of veterans.

**DORN:** Joe, you will recall that this was a shocking proposal. Here we were trying to become disentangled in Southeast Asia, get our men home from Vietnam, and here in the Executive



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Branch of the government, here were people who were saying, cut the disabled veteran, the man who was wounded in South Vietnam. And this was a shocking proposal, on the front pages of the news media all over the world to greet this man when he came home. And we couldn't have reversed that without, again, the support of you, and my colleagues, and the Congress. And we did go to see the President about it, and he backed down and removed from the VA the official who had made this incredible proposal.

**MOAKLEY:** I know what it did do; it really put all the veteran organizations—the VWF

**DORN:** It alerted them, yes.

**MOAKLEY:** And they really descended upon Washington in force. And it was great to see them rallying towards a cause.

**DORN:** They really did; and they did a great job.

**MOAKLEY:** It reminds me of a cartoon I saw in one of the veteran's magazines, and it portrayed a veteran swathed in bandages, and his legs in one of those pulleys, and somebody is visiting and he says, well, am I still a hero or just another drain on the tax payers. And I think that too many people are so willing to forget the sacrifices the veterans made in the wars when the wars ceased to be active. And I think that it's men like yourself and the committees on the Veterans Service that has to keep reminding the administration that these people have paid a great debt, and they shouldn't be cut off the rolls as soon as the war is over.

**DORN:** Congressman Moakley, we didn't start veterans preference, George Washington started it. He felt that a man who wore, a woman that wore the uniform of their country was a special individual. They served during a special time, a time of emergency, and therefore were entitled to veterans preference and special treatment. And this is what we are trying to carry out today. We feel that these men that served in Vietnam and in Korea and in World War II, all over the



world, they performed a special mission and are entitled to special consideration by this Congress. And I really want to thank you and others here, my colleagues, who have made the best veterans program on the face of this Earth possible. The hospital program is the finest in the world.

**MOAKLEY:** Congressman Dorn, I know one of the bills that you've been particularly concerned about is the increase in the monthly rate of Veterans Disability and Death Pensions, and dependent and indemnity compensation. Do you expect to be reporting out this bill very shortly?

**DORN:** I hope so because of the cost of living. You know, this is one-- Veterans in this category that disability and those on compensation because of their disability, quite often present to the committee the fairest program of anybody. I mean, they really don't ride the committee like some people do, and so I commend them for this. But nevertheless, they are sitting by and seeing this cost of living just going up almost daily. And they do need a cost of living increase in their compensation and I might say pensions, too. You know a lot of our veterans, this is one of the great issues before the Congress and right at the moment is the pension program. Since Social Security was increased twenty percent last year, and another five percent or 6% next year, some of the veterans on pensions, elderly veterans in particular, have been taken off completely. And so, you helped me pass a bill in the house, which, and again it passed 385 to zero, which would increase across the board these elder veterans and their widows, the pension by ten percent to offset the loss which they sustain when Social Security increased twenty percent.

This is nothing but fair because a lot of people are beneath the poverty level now. And hopefully the President will sign that bill. It has passed the House and the Senate, we're working on it in conference, and when it goes to the White House, I believe the President will sign it.

**MOAKLEY:** I would like to see the bill go into effect that has been filed. I filed one, I'm sure you have--



**DORN:** Yes, you did. You introduced--

**MOAKLEY:** That would not reduce the veterans pension and that Social Security is increased. And I think this is very important because when I go around to the post office and district offices, the World War I veteran comes up to me and says, Gee Joe, Social Security was increased, but they decreased my veterans pension, so what good does it do me?

**DORN:** You take it out of one pocket and put it in another. And maybe you'll lose a little bit. And most of the veterans of World War I on pensions did lose because of the Social Security increase of a few dollars a month, and with the cost of living going up on the other hand, it's most unfair. You did introduce a bill, and that bill has been considered. And I believe we are going to work out in January some formula, some triggering device where when Social Security goes up, the Veterans pension will not be cut.

**MOAKLEY:** I think that probably is one of the best things we could do for World War I veterans because with the cost of living, people living on fixed incomes, rents are going up, food is going up--

**DORN:** Everyday--

**MOAKLEY:** And then their pension is stable. And the fact that it's not being stable, it's being reduced when Social Security becomes increased. So we're asking these people who have made sacrifices years ago, now to cutback and pull in their belts a little bit, and I don't think this is right. I think we should be telling them to live in dignity and not have to worry about the price of clothes.

**DORN:** You know during the depression years, a lot of men who served during World War I had to get on the streets and serve pencils and serve apples, and it's a national disgrace when a



man who fought during a national emergency time of war has to go out on the streets and almost literally beg for a living.

**MOAKLEY:** I agree. Congressman Dorn, I know actually I could go all day talking about bills that you're interested in, and bills that you've sponsored, and bills that you fought for, but one comes to my mind whenever I talk with you, and that's the bill that you sponsored, which would remove all time limits for the use of the GI Bill<sup>3</sup> for educational purpose by our nation's veterans. And I was just wondering what the current status is of this legislation.

**DORN:** The Veterans Committee of the House is meeting today and perhaps tomorrow, trying to work out legislation, a bill which I hope will come to the floor, that would increase benefits to those eligible for GI education benefits, and some other adjustments in that bill, maybe extend the time, and Korean Veterans and others can apply for GI benefit. Let me say this, Joe, in connection with our GI Education Program. You know when that program first started, and I was here after World War II in '47, some people then said, oh this is going to lead to federal control of education, it's socialism and all this kind of really bunk. We spent nineteen billion dollars to educate 10 and half million American men and women. It cost nineteen billion dollars already, these 10 and half million American men and women have paid into the treasury 150 billion dollars more than they would have paid had they not been educated and received the higher income. So this is the best business. And ninety percent of them are homeowners. Senator Edward Brooke in Massachusetts will tell you right now that were it not for the GI Bill, he couldn't have been a lawyer, and he probably would not be in the United State Senate today, and he was a great Attorney General.

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<sup>3</sup> The GI Bill of Rights, officially called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, provided, among other benefits, government compensation for the educational costs of returning World War II veterans.



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**MOAKLEY:** I could tell you the same thing. If it wasn't for the GI Bill, I couldn't have gone onto college and gone onto law school. And I'm very happy to note that the government is really the beneficiary of these benevolent actions rather than just giving this money away.

**DORN:** Exactly, and Joe, the same thing will happen today. Every dollar you spend on a Vietnam veteran man or woman who served over there for education is coming back probably tenfold. It's good government business. It's good for our veterans, and it's good for the country.

**MOAKLEY:** Good. Well, I'm very happy to have as my guest today, Congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn, as I said at the beginning. The name of the William Jennings Bryan Dorn and Veteran Services are synonymous in the House of Representatives. And I think that just by listening to him today you really know that that's his number one priority, and I commend him for it. It has been a pleasure having you on the show, and I look forward to not only working with you on the floor on some of the legislation that you have introduced and will be coming up shortly, but I would like to have you again on this program so we can have another report to the veterans just telling exactly what the status is of the current legislation.

**DORN:** Thank you Joe, I would love to. And I again want to say how grateful I am to you for your support of every piece of veterans' legislation that I have brought to the floor of Congress, and the bills that you have introduced in my committee. They are very helpful to us, and I thank you.

**MOAKLEY:** Thank you very much.

**ANNOUNCER:** Thank you Congressman Joe Moakley and Congressman Dorn. Be sure and tune in next week to WCOP at the same time for our Congressman Joe Moakley.

END OF INTERVIEW