



Oral History Interview of James Kelly (OH-018)

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Oral History Interview of James M. Kelly

Interview Date: October 8, 2003

Interviewed by: Robert Allison, Suffolk University History Professor and Joseph McEttrick, Suffolk University Law School Professor

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Interview Summary

James M. Kelly, member of the Boston City Council representing District Two since 1983, discusses his relationship with Congressman John Joseph Moakley. Mr. Kelly describes Congressman Moakley's work to improve housing and the South Boston waterfront; Congressman Moakley's hopes for the ninth districts future; his thoughts on Congressman Moakley's constituent service; the Saint Patrick's Day breakfast in South Boston; his memories regarding the Boston school desegregation in the 1970s; and Congressman Moakley's legacy in Boston.

Subject Headings

Boston (Mass.)

Bulger, William, 1934-

Busing for school integration

Hicks, Louise Day, 1916-2003

Kelly, James M., 1940-2007

Moakley, John Joseph, 1927-2001

New England Patriots (Football team)

Public housing



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South Boston (Boston, Mass.)

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This interview took place on October 8, 2003, in the Curley Conference Room
at Boston City Hall.

Interview Transcript

PROFESSOR ROBERT ALLISON: We are here with Councilor Jim Kelly from South Boston, who is speaking to us on October 8, 2003, at City Hall. Thank you for joining us, Councilor Kelly.

COUNCILOR JAMES KELLY: Thank you, Bob.

ALLISON: We're really interested—and we're doing this for Joe Moakley's legacy, so we'd like just to talk as informally as possible with you about your relationship with Joe Moakley. If you could tell us when you first met him, how you became involved in politics, his relationship with you.

KELLY: Yeah, I don't know when I first met Joe Moakley. We used to hang out at Kelly's Landing [Restaurant], a crowd of us. And it's amazing when I think of it now, not only during the summer when it's beautiful—because the old Kelly's Landing, well, it used to be right on the water's edge down at City Point.¹ But we used to hang out down there in the wintertime, too. Yeah, even in blizzards, we'd be down, just standing under the light pole.

And just a couple blocks away was where Joe Moakley lived. And I guess, growing up, at the age of nine, ten, twelve years of age you get accustomed to hearing names. And one of the names that I've heard, going back fifty some-odd years now, is Joe Moakley, as someone that I grew up with. And in addition to that, a good friend of mine that has since passed away lived in Joe Moakley's first floor and his name was Paul Deneke. And the Deneke family, up until Mrs. Deneke was put into a retirement home, they lived in the first floor of Joe's house. And then Joe converted what was a two-family into a single family dwelling where he lived for many years. And that's where Joe lived when he passed away, obviously.

¹ City Point is a peninsular area of South Boston that extends into Boston Harbor.

But Joe and I always talked about how we had similar backgrounds. We both, at one time in our lives, lived in public housing. Both have attended South Boston High School. Both of us attended the cooperative course, the sheet metal course. And I went on to become a sheet metal worker, and an active member of Sheet Metal Workers Local 17. And I'm still a member of Local 17 now. But Joe had sheet metal in high school, and did some sheet metal work for a period of his life.

Joe Moakley used to live at 5A Bateman Place, was the name of it. Some years ago, they changed from Bateman Place to Bantry Way. And I have, since the late 1950s, lived at 5A Bantry Way, the exact same house where Joe Moakley lived. Joe and his family lived on the second floor back in the—I guess it was from 1938 to 1948 for a ten year period. And the Kelly family moved into the first floor at that address in '58, and I'm still there now.

And Joe was a councilor, city councilor, and I'm a city councilor. So there were many things that—experiences—and I think molding our thoughts as to being concerned for neighborhood people, and that was Joe's strength. Being involved with the union, being supportive of unions. And being involved in government was much of—I framed my life on several people. Certainly Joe Moakley was one, Louise Day Hicks² was another, Bill Bulger³ was another.

And it was probably the greatest era in the history of South Boston, relative to elected officials working together for the common cause, and the common cause being the residents of South Boston. But beyond that, the people that we represent in our respective positions.

The last time I—or not the last time I saw Joe, but one of the things I do remember clearly—and it's one of the real good nights that's tucked away in my memory forever—and that is Pat Walsh

² Louise Day Hicks (1916-2003), a Democrat, served on the Boston School Committee from 1962 to 1967 (serving as chair from 1963 to 1965), ran unsuccessfully for the mayoralty of Boston in 1967 and in 1971, and served on the Boston City Council before being elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1970. She represented Massachusetts' Ninth Congressional District for one term. It was in the 1970 election that Moakley lost his first bid for Congress. Moakley defeated Hicks in the 1972 congressional election when he ran as an Independent so he wouldn't have to run against Hicks in the democratic primary.

³ William M. Bulger (1934-), a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1962 to 1970, in the Massachusetts State Senate from 1970 to 1978 and as State Senate President from 1978 to 1996.

from the Laborers' Union, Local 223. Pat and I were having dinner down at [Anthony's] Pier 4 [Restaurant] one Friday night. And who comes walking in but Joe Moakley, and Joe was by himself. And Joe came over and the three of us had dinner together.

And to hear Joe Moakley and Pat Walsh, a couple of guys who have been around the block, talk about the years that they've known each other and what they've done, and a lot of inside personal stories about how things got done for the labor movement with the help of—certainly Pat Walsh was a labor leader, highly respected, and Joe Moakley who was absolutely a mover and a shaker, and more often than not in a quiet manner, but yet also always a forceful manner, and had the ability to get things done. And I think that's probably what distinguished Joe from a lot of other people, that he had the ability to get things done in one way or the other. Really a beloved figure in the history of South Boston.

The last time I was with Joe was—I think Joe was taken into the hospital on a Sunday night, as I recall, or over the weekend anyways. And I saw Joe on the Friday before he went in the hospital. Fred Clark,⁴ who I have a lot of affection for, Fred knew that Joe's days were coming to an end. He knew that he'd be going in the hospital, so Fred called me one day and he says, "Do you have twenty minutes for Joe? Joe would like to talk to you." So I guess Joe sensed that the end was near. And I went down to his office, down at the federal courthouse, and in that twenty minutes we talked about so many different things as to Joe's hopes for the future. Not for himself, obviously, because he wouldn't be here, but his hopes for his district. He loved every part of his district that he represented, but always a particular place in his heart for the neighborhood of South Boston. Talked about some of the public figures that were around in his day. I know who Joe liked, who Joe disliked, who Joe tolerated. It was a very intimate, personal conversation that obviously has to remain—I would not want to violate Joe's trust, even now, but it would have to—

Joe knew who the frauds were, Joe knew who had sincerity. And I know that he had a lot of affection for Bill Bulger, a lot of affection for and a love for Louise Day Hicks, despite the fact that they had their differences at one point. And it was one of those conversations that you cherish forever—and well, those are just some of the memories that I have of Joe Moakley.

⁴ Fred Clark was a member of Congressman Moakley's district staff from 1982 to 2001.

Joe's funeral—I've never seen such an outpouring of grief, all sincere, by so many people across the spectrum. If a funeral can be beautiful, then Joe Moakley had a beautiful send-off. I remember not only the church at Saint Bridget's, which is the parish church for Joe and I, and for Louise Day Hicks, and for Bill Bulger, and for Mike Flaherty, Senior,⁵ and Junior.⁶

ALLISON: And for me.

KELLY: And for you, Bob, that's the most important. (laughter) But Joe was buried from Saint Brigid's, and it was a beautiful eulogy by Bill Bulger. It was—probably the most memorable part of that is as we were going to the gravesite, the thousands of people that were lined up along [William J.] Day Boulevard [in South Boston], holding signs or just with their hand over their heart, and it was very moving. And it was nice to see—I would say, 80 percent of the thousands of people that were members of organized labor, that didn't forget that Joe was “their guy,” and the signs that they had. It was just nice.

It was something that I think all of us, whether we're in private life or private citizens, would love to have something like that about us. But those kind of days are reserved for the Joe Moakley's of this world. And to their credit, people never forgot Joe, as he never forgot them, never. Never a day went by when Joe Moakley didn't do a number of good things for a number of people.

ALLISON: We won't ask you who he liked and didn't like, but could you tell us a little bit about what his hopes were for the district and for his neighborhood?

KELLY: Probably stability. The neighborhood that Joe Moakley grew up in was a lot of families caring about not just their immediate family, but caring about other people. And I think that's the strength of a neighborhood. Certainly that's the strength of the neighborhood of South Boston where people care about one another. And as openers, as Joe was and as much as Joe

⁵ Michael F. Flaherty, Sr., is an associate justice for the Boston Municipal Court and a former state representative.

⁶ Michael F. Flaherty, Jr., has been a member of the Boston City Council since 2000.

welcomed positive change, Joe also wanted to make sure—like the rest of us do—that there’ll always be neighborhoods like South Boston where people know one another, where there’s a relatively low crime rate.

Joe had concerns about the escalating drug culture in our country. Certainly in South Boston we’ve got a drug problem that has to be addressed, obviously, better than it is being addressed. I’m not sure any of us have the immediate answer, but we’ve got to find the answer because drugs, particularly heroin, is a major problem. And I think Joe was someone who saw that something’s not right. Although Joe spent, obviously, much of his time down in Washington, he always kept his ear tuned to what’s happening in the neighborhood. And we talked about the drug problem and our frustration with trying to deal with it, because the drug problem in South Boston is really something that is alien to South Boston.

We have always had some wise guys in the town. We’ve always had bookmakers and things of that nature, but for years we were fortunate that we didn’t have a drug problem. And now, for a number of reasons, drugs are fairly common. So those are just some of the things that Joe was concerned with.

To sum it up, I think Joe was concerned about what’s going to happen to South Boston in the next generation, the next fifty years. And it was his dream that it remain the way it was when he was not only growing up in South Boston, but the way he represented the town for so many years. And it was really a thing of beauty. Joe recognized that, and Joe wanted that to be preserved.

PROFESSOR JOSEPH McETTRICK: Councilor, can you tell us something about, now looking back, the things that you would point to as some of Joe Moakley’s principal accomplishments or impact on the neighborhood, either in terms of development or social programs? What really stands out in your mind?

KELLY: Well, Joe was a big supporter—I’m sure financially as well as vocally—of some of the social programs in the neighborhood; the South Boston Neighborhood House, the Labouré

Center. The many good deeds done by the Marion Manor, which is a nursing home, but they certainly pay attention to the needs of the South Boston residents as they go up in years. So Joe was a big supporter of those.

Joe was also an advocate for people who lived in public housing. He was constantly finding ways, when he was at the Massachusetts Senate, of getting state funding for public housing. And certainly in Washington, he was a champion to get rehab money to periodically put in new bathrooms, put in new kitchens, and just the general maintenance of public housing. I think Joe—because he lived in public housing and he saw that public housing used to work. I'm sure arguments could be made as to whether condensing so many people in a compacted area and people not really having any breathing space—

Times have changed over the years, but for many years, public housing first built—I think it was 1948 that the Old Harbor Project, which is now the Mary Ellen McCormick, the first public housing development in the country, I understand. And Joe having lived there, he saw that public housing can work if people have safety, that there's a respect for one another. And there's handbag snatching and drug dealing going on up on the third floor, when you're trying to live with your family on the first floor. Things of that nature was Joe's concern.

So Joe was concerned about the future of public housing as well. He knows, like most of us knew, that there were some people in this country that are up against it financially. They don't have the kind of income that they need to survive without some kind of government assistance. And Joe saw the necessity of subsidized housing, but he also was concerned about the saturation of subsidized housing, of condensing so many people all in one confined area. So those were some of the concerns that Joe and I had talked about, either—it wasn't our last days that we spoke about—our last visit that we spoke about those issues, but over the years, when we would have lunch or when we would have a meeting in his office.

And in the latter several years of Joe's life, I as much as anyone probably had the opportunity to meet with Joe on occasions involving [former] Senator Lynch,⁷ who is Joe's successor, and Representative Jack Hart. The four of us worked together on a lot of issues over the last several years of Joe's life, particularly on the development of the South Boston waterfront. Joe wanted to see the area developed; he didn't want to see it overdeveloped. And that's pretty much the position that Senator Lynch and Representative Hart⁸ and I took, as well.

And Joe allowed Lynch, Hart and Kelly to work on those issues, but he always gave us total 100 percent backing. And as probably a clear example of that: After giving the idea of a football stadium a lot of thought and meeting with Bob [Kraft]⁹ and his son Jonathan, the Kraft family, the owners, we had talked to the residents of our neighborhood, particularly the neighborhood leaders, the heads of the civic association. And after giving it a lot of thought, we arrived at—that a football stadium at that location in South Boston just wouldn't work for the neighborhood, certainly, but it wouldn't work for the Red Sox.

Despite the fact that there was assurances from Governor Weld,¹⁰ at the time, and from the Kraft family that they could put in roadways to make it happen, those of us who'd been around for a long time, we know that South Boston is sort of a peninsula. It's connected mainly by bridges, and there's just a limited number of vehicles you can get by way of bridges, and there were just too many people coming into one area at the same time. And it wouldn't work for the fans, and ultimately wouldn't work for the owners of the Patriots. It certainly wouldn't work for the neighborhood. So with Joe Moakley's assistance, we were able to convince the Kraft family to back off.

I remember I was down on the South Shore Plaza [in Braintree, Massachusetts] with my grandkids on a Friday afternoon, and I got a call from Joe Moakley. And he says, "I got Bob Kraft here," he says, "and Bob wants to talk to you, to tell you that he's backing off on the

⁷ Stephen F. Lynch (1955-), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts' Ninth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since Congressman Moakley's death in 2001. He served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1995-1996, then in the Massachusetts Senate from 1996-2001.

⁸ Jack Hart, a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1997 to 2002, and has served in the Massachusetts Senate since 2002.

⁹ Robert Kraft is the owner of the New England Patriots.

¹⁰ William Weld (1945-), a Republican, served as governor of Massachusetts from 1991 to 1997.

stadium.” And Bob Kraft got on the phone and he said, “I surrender!” He says, “You guys are just too much for me to deal with,” he says, “so I just want you to know that after listening to the neighborhood and having a conversation with Joe Moakley, the idea of a football stadium at that location in South Boston is dead.” So that was obviously good news.

(interruption)

KELLY: Where were we?

ALLISON: Well, you were talking about the idea for the stadium, Joe Moakley’s ideas about the waterfront and your ideas about the waterfront.

KELLY: Oh yeah, Joe wanted to see the waterfront developed, and Joe certainly—his thoughts were reflected in what Senator Lynch, now Congressman Lynch, and Representative Hart, now Senator Hart, and myself, the public position that we had taken, that development is good; overdevelopment is bad, not just for the neighborhood but for the people—the office people that would be in there.

But then on the issue of the stadium—and that probably as much as anything was one of the more important things that we, as a neighborhood—certainly, with the input of Congressman Joe Moakley—did, and that was to get Bob Kraft to reconsider his plans for building the stadium in South Boston. And that was done with the neighborhood having rallies and meetings, and being covered by the press. But I always got the feeling that these rallies and these meetings and these protests against what Bob Kraft wanted to do, they’ll go a certain distance for a certain period of time.

But eventually, because Bob Kraft had the support of Governor Bill Weld, and support from all of the sports talk show people, and then the public was gathering, Yeah, we have to have a new stadium for the Patriots and it should be here in the city of Boston, and South Boston is the logical place. The area is unattractive, and the stadium is good. Of course, and then you got the

neighborhood people saying, Hey, look at the traffic, it would be overwhelming. There's just no way you can build that stadium at that location without it coming through the neighborhood.

Because there are two ways of it coming through: one would be through downtown Boston, and the traffic is not going to be coming through downtown Boston; the other way is through the heart of South Boston. That's where the only available routes are. And talk of building roads at some point in the future to make it work was just impractical and just wasn't going to happen.

So we knew that South Boston was going to receive the brunt of the traffic, the neighborhood, many parts of it. The road going out to Castle Island would be where they have the tailgate parties, and they'd probably leave their cars there to walk down, a twenty or fifteen minute walk down to the stadium on a mild fall day, and that's exactly what would happen.

So we were very concerned. And then one day I was down at the South Shore Plaza with my grandkids. And I got a call on my cell phone, and it's Joe Moakley. And Joe says, "I have Bob Kraft here, and Bob Kraft just assured me within a matter of a few minutes that he was going to abandon his plans for the football stadium, and he wanted you to know that firsthand." He said, "I'm going to put Bob Kraft on the phone." So Bob Kraft gets on the phone, and he—"I surrender!" He said, "You guys"—and when he talked about "you guys," he's talking about the men and women of South Boston, talking about the elected officials.

But what persuaded Bob Kraft to abandon his plans was Congressman Joe Moakley. Joe said, "It's not going to happen." And Bob Kraft, knowing Joe Moakley, knows that when Joe says it's not going to happen, then it's not going to happen. And I think that, more than anything else, was what made Bob Kraft to decide to abandon his plans.

ALLISON: It occurs to me—now you mentioned this whole football stadium debate, and Joe Moakley ran against Louise Day Hicks a couple of times. And yet, he remained very friendly with Bob Kraft and very close with Louise Day Hicks. He had a knack for confronting without being abrasive or confrontational. Can you talk a little bit about this?

KELLY: Well, Joe’s personality—Joe was a very sincere guy, and Joe didn’t make decisions lightly. And when he felt deeply about something, you’d know that this is from the heart. This is something that Joe had given some thought to. It wasn’t off the top of his head, it’s not something that he would—a position he would take and then have to reconsider, although he had the confidence and the strength to do that if he had to. But I think, talking with Joe, Joe had a passion in his eyes, particularly on those issues that he felt passionate about.

I’m not sure if everyone agreed with him jumping to that issue of El Salvador.¹¹ And to a lot of people that was a far-off country, and I’m not sure if people understood that, but Joe Moakley understood it. And that was very, very important to Joe. And there were a number of other issues, probably, over the years that Joe felt very passionate about. Running against Louise Day Hicks, I’m sure he gave that a lot of thought. And although Joe and Louise had their differences at that time, which is clearly understandable, time has a way of healing wounds, and that clearly was—

In fact, one of the last times I saw Louise was at Joe Moakley’s funeral. And the tears in her eyes, they were real. So she and Joe had a special bond. That’s something that sticks in my memory, too. And she came over to me as the mass had ended, and we had a brief conversation, and it was nice. And it was nice that people who had once had their differences over the years, had had numerous conversations, private conversations by themselves, and all was well with the world. And that’s the way it ought to be.

(interruption)

¹¹ Starting in 1983, Congressman Moakley introduced legislation to protect Salvadorans in the U.S. using the “Extended Voluntary Departure” provision that allowed a temporary stay of deportation and work authorization. Moakley was finally able to pass legislation that granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Salvadorans in the Immigration Act of 1990 (PL. 101-649). Also, in December of 1989, Speaker of the House Thomas S. Foley appointed Moakley as chairman of a committee to investigate violence in El Salvador, specifically the November 16, 1989, murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter at the University of Central America in San Salvador.

McETTRICK: You had started to speak of people talking with each other, now many years later after all the difficulty with busing in the seventies.¹² Could you give us your thoughts from the perspective of 2003, about what happened and its impact, and where you think we stand now on those subjects? You know, just the perspective of time on it.

KELLY: Probably the biggest issue to ever hit this city was the issue of forced busing of children. It got a number of people, including myself, involved. And eventually, I guess, busing was somewhat of a political issue as much as it was a neighborhood issue and a family issue. That your child, who was born and raised in the neighborhood, could no longer attend the school closest to their house because of their skin color. That had to be something that every parent can relate to. I mean, what kind of insane decision was this that prohibits our children from going to a local school, because of race? Isn't that somewhat racist?

That was the position that many of us took back in 1974. That's the position that I continue to take. I think that busing, not only was it a big issue, a lot of controversy—a lot of bad things happened; a lot of bad things happened across the city, not only—South Boston got the brunt of whatever violence there was because the cameras were stationed there for a few years. And we had national and we had international press cordoned off at a location outside of South Boston High School.

So whatever is said by anyone in the neighborhood is recorded, and that's the perception of the neighborhood. Whatever ugly incident happens, it's right on camera. So South Boston received the lion's share of the negative media attention, despite the fact that many similar incidents were happening in other parts of the city, but it went unreported.

Joe's position during those early years of busing was criticized by some in the neighborhood who thought that Joe ought to be more vocal, ought to be more active. In fact, Joe and I often

¹² In his June 21, 1974, opinion filed in the case of *Tallulah Morgan et al. v. James Hennigan et al.* (379 F. Supp. 410), Judge W. Arthur Garrity ruled that the Boston School Committee had “intentionally brought about and maintained racial segregation” in the Boston Public Schools. When the school committee did not submit a workable desegregation plan as the opinion had required, the court established a plan that called for some students to be bused from their own neighborhoods to attend schools in other neighborhoods, with the goal of creating racial balance in the Boston Public Schools. (See <http://www.lib.umb.edu/archives/garrity2.html> for more information)

had conversations, not only in later years but during those times. I used to talk to Joe—in fact I went down to Washington to talk to Joe at that time. And Joe convinced me that what he was doing in his way, while all the multitudes would like to see Joe lead an anti-busing march and speak passionately at an anti-busing rally.

Joe says, “You know, I’m a congressman,” he says, “and I can do more for the cause if I speak privately over a breakfast meeting or a dinner meeting with Tip O’Neill.¹³ Or the president of the United States. Or if I speak on the floor of Congress.” And I read the *Congressional Record* over again, and some of the best arguments I’ve heard in favor of neighborhood schools, and against Judge Garrity’s court order, was the statements made by Joe Moakley.

Now people at home were reading the headlines as to what some of the rest of us were doing, myself included. I was very vocal, probably perceived to be very militant in my positions. And I probably was. I have no regrets on that; I said what I think had to be said. And I think some people compared that fiery talk by what they wanted Joe Moakley to do.

END OF PART 1

KELLY: So I guess, to sum it up, Joe had a role to play and a position to fill, and I thought Joe did a great job. There are some who disagree. But those were tough times for everyone. They were tough times for the neighborhood of South Boston, and across the city, and beyond. And they were tough times for Joe Moakley, too. Politics, the Hicks people, and I was one of the Hicks kind of people, but I was also a dear friend.

Well, not at that time was I a dear friend; I was someone that was just starting to get to know Joe. Well, I’ve known him since I was a kid, and I knew of Joe more than knowing Joe, but Joe recognized that I was someone who had a forum for public statements. I was seen to be one of

¹³ Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill (1912-1994), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts’ Eleventh and, after redistricting, Eighth Congressional Districts in the United States House of Representatives from 1953 to 1987. He served as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1977 to 1987. He also served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1936 to 1952.

the spokesmen or one of the leaders of the anti-busing movement, I guess, as I'm labeled to this day.

But to sum it up, Joe felt as strongly as me or anyone else that the forced busing of children out of their neighborhood was wrong. He believed in neighborhood schools. He made that argument to the people in Washington, to his colleagues in Congress. But Joe also wanted to do it in his way, and in hindsight, that's okay with me. And even at the time I understood it, although I can also understand how some others wanted Joe to be a little bit more vocal.

But to this day, I think everyone can agree that forced busing has been a disaster financially, educationally, and it certainly hasn't been anything for integrating the schools, the Boston Public Schools. Probably with the exception of the exam schools, better than 90 percent are non-white. And until forced busing ends, that's the way it's going to continue until each year or each several years, it will become increasingly more non-white. And nothing good has been achieved by busing.

McETTRICK: Well you've struggled with this for thirty years in your private and public life. What advice would you give to people who follow you in the city council, or follow Joe Moakley in the Congress? What should government be doing with race relations? Has government caused as much trouble as it has created good?

KELLY: Well, I think that as long as you have policies that are going to separate people because of race, there's going to be problems. If you're going to award someone a job or a promotion because of their skin color, you're simultaneously denying someone else a job, a promotion, because of his or her skin color. And that is going to create ill feelings.

I guess if the government had the courage—and if they don't have the courage to do that, neither do the courts have the courage to treat people not as classes based on race, in this case, but as individuals. If an individual is denied a job or a promotion because of his or her race, then the courts should take speedy action to make that person whole. But if someone is denied a job or

promotion, you don't give preferences to that particular group or that skin color at the disadvantage of the others.

And that's what's been happening since the DeFunis case¹⁴ back in the early 1970s, that people were allowed to go to medical school or law school, or given promotions or gain jobs in the police and fire department, because of their skin color. Where people who are just as needy, have studied just as hard, but have achieved more on test scores, for example, are being denied job opportunities, being denied promotions.

And it happens every single day, and there are very few people that are willing to say this is wrong. We've got to treat people like people. And we should not deny people jobs, promotions, the right to go to schools in their own neighborhood where they're born and raised, simply because they're black or they're white, or they're Asian or Hispanic.

But we have a mindset in this country where everyone is afraid to talk about those issues. And I see no need to be optimistic in the future. The Supreme Court obviously plays a major role and they will, on occasion, touch on certain cases where they would make a decision that I would be in agreement with, but their decision, unlike—what has always happened is there's been a precedent in the courts, and the appellate court and the lower court judges would respect that the high court has spoken. Well no, they just take the exact same set of circumstances the lower courts would, and rule completely different—what the higher court has already ruled on.

And the person who has been aggrieved sometimes doesn't have the money or the fortitude to go any higher in the judicial process, and they get beaten back. And we go on and on. And therefore, there's a lot of resentment by a lot of people. And they used to say that people of South Boston raise their kids to be haters, and to think negative things about blacks and other minorities. That's nonsense; no one was more strongly opposed to busing, at least vocalizing it, than I was. And my parents always taught me to be respectful of people of all colors, and I have always been and continue to this day.

¹⁴ Councilor Kelly is referring to DeFunis v Odegaard, 416 U.S. 312.

It's just I strongly disagree with those who want to keep the buses rolling, or those who say that a kid who grew up in the projects in South Boston and who does very well on the police test—scores one-hundred, for example—should not be given a job. But someone who may be the son of a very prominent businessman in the black community and who scores seventy on the test, that they get the job. And why does the person who is a minority, who scored a seventy, get the job over someone who was born without, really, or born into financial hardship? Why should they not get the job?

Find out that it boils down to the person who got the job; they got it because of the color of their skin. It causes resentment by that individual, by that individual's friends. And I just see a lot of—I think it could be better if the process was made more fair by the elected officials and the judiciary, but again, I just don't see that happening. I just see that discrimination, against white males in particular, is going to go on for a long time to come. And I think that's sad.

ALLISON: I'm wondering, Councilor, if you could talk a little bit about one trait you and Joe Moakley have in common, is real attention to constituents and constituent services. And one reason that he had such loyalty in the district was because he was looking out—you have the same.

KELLY: Yeah, and again, as a congressman, Joe represented not only the people of South Boston, but the people within his district. And the same with me; I represent the people of a very diverse district I represent, and that's South Boston, the South End, Bay Village, Chinatown. And I get as much satisfaction helping someone from Chinatown, or someone from the South End or Bay Village, or Dorchester—I have a couple of precincts over by Saint Margaret's Church that I represent—I get as much satisfaction out of that. And I try to be as responsive to their calls as I do with the guy who lives next door to me.

And I think I got a lot of that from Joe Moakley. Joe always was, I don't know, a people's kind of elected official, that he really cared about people and he took personal satisfaction in being helpful. And he didn't need to have headlines over it, but that's the way Joe was. And I think to a great degree, I try to emulate Joe in that regard.

Louise Day Hicks, when she was a member of the city council, I spent a lot of time with Louise. I used to drive Louise around to a number of events. Louise felt safer with me, I think, plus we had a good personal relationship. And I can remember being in Louise's office and there would probably be as many minorities coming in, wanting to meet with Louise, as there were residents of the neighborhood.

And you know, this is something you never see in the press. They considered Louise to be "the number one bigot" in the city. But there are a lot of people, elderly, some not so elderly, black people that used to come in and kiss Louise and consider Louise a friend, and someone that they were very comfortable with asking, Can Louise be helpful in getting a family member, an elderly aunt, into elderly housing, or a family member who is down on their luck into public housing, or a job for someone? And I was always amazed that probably half the people that asked Louise for favors were black people. And that was another side of Louise.

Joe, of course—Joe Moakley wrote the book on that. And I think that Joe was an example not only for me, but probably for a number of other people, that you do your job. You're elected by people, which has got to be the highest compliment that an individual can get, that people took the time out of their day to go to the polls and cast a vote for you. That's a great ego booster, that people vote for you and have confidence in you, and trust in you. And it's not just the people of one particular area, it's the people of the district; and you do your job.

And if you didn't do well in some areas in past years, then yeah, you'd probably even work harder because you want to do better the next election. So part of it is ego-boosting, but also in your heart you have a responsibility to those people that are in your district. And Joe Moakley did it better than all of us, I think. But it was done very well by the Hickses, and obviously the Bulgers, and hopefully by people like Jim Kelly, as well.

McETTRICK: Well, South Boston is legendary for expressing itself politically, and two events that come to mind would be the Saint Patrick's Day Parade and the breakfast. Could you tell us

a little bit about the history of those occasions, and how Joe Moakley was involved in it, and how you yourself have been involved in it over the years?

KELLY: Yeah, well the emcee of the breakfast goes to the state senator of the district. And right now it's Jack Hart, who does a great job. Before him it was Steve Lynch, and for many years it was Bill Bulger, who really put the event on the map. It was Bulger who, because of his natural wit, put himself through Boston College by doing some emcee work at a place over on Blue Hill Avenue, I think it was, that he was sort of the comic and emcee. That's how he put himself through BC. And before Bulger it was Joe Moakley, for the period when he was a senator, and before that, for a number of years it was Johnny Powers.¹⁵

But it was Bulger who, when the media saw that this is something out of the ordinary—this is not only a breakfast and barbs go back and forth, this was somewhat of a genius at work here, and he happens to be the senator from South Boston. And he's getting everyone, from not only local politicians across the state, but he'd get national figures dropping by. And so Bulger—I guess it sort of went hand-in-hand, Bulger being the emcee, plus—it might have been Cablevision that initially started off, and it just sort of grew from there. And now it is as big as any event in the country.

I think that the Saint Patrick's Day Breakfast in South Boston is something that's really big, where a couple years ago, President Bush called Senator Jack Hart. Where you see presidential candidates, where you see a mainstay as Ted Kennedy,¹⁶ and Bill Weld when he was governor. It was probably be the best era for comedy. You had Bill Bulger, genius. You had Bill Weld, who was just a great fall guy for Bulger. Then you had Charlie Flaherty, who was the former Speaker of the House. Those three guys together just could put on a show. I mean, you'd just sit back and watch them, and it's just funny. It's amazing how—and I think when you're politically attuned it's even funnier. But for the average viewer, it's really great and it continues to be great under Jack Hart. That is something that—

¹⁵ John E. Powers (1910-1998), a Democrat, represented South Boston in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1939 to 1946 and in the Massachusetts State Senate from 1947 to 1964. He served as Senate President from 1959 to 1964.

¹⁶ Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy (1932-), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts in the United States Senate since 1961.

(interruption)

KELLY: But even to this day, Jack Hart just does a super job. Bill Bulger, eight or ten years ago, asked me, when we were having breakfast, he said, “Would you ever be interested in running for the Senate?” And I said, “No,” I said, “I really enjoy being a city councilor, particularly a district city councilor where I can focus on South Boston, the South End, Chinatown, Bay Village, Dorchester.” That to me is something I truly enjoy, and I think I was sort of born to do, something like that.

I don't want to go into state politics, but also in the back of my mind, where if I was the senator, I'd have to be the emcee (laughter) of that event, and that's something that I— I just couldn't do it. But thank god there are people like Hart and Lynch that followed Bulger. But how do you follow a Bill Bulger? Steve Lynch certainly did a commendable job and Jack Hart did. But all of us would admit that.

McETRICK: Well, we know you must be really pressed for time, but we did want to ask you a little bit about what you saw Joe Moakley's legacy to be, and how he really can speak to future politicians and future citizens about government and public service.

KELLY: I think the hallmark of Joe Moakley is sincerity and passion. He had something in him, that everything that Joe did—whether it be El Salvador or whether it be with the labor movement, whether it be in his own way, fighting like a champion against the busing of children out of their neighborhood schools—everything that Joe Moakley believed in came from within him. And again, the hallmark was passion and sincerity.

And I think what Joe did throughout his career—certainly as he became a statesman in maybe the last ten years, and even more particularly in the last several years of his life—anyone who observed Joe saw that this is a passionate man who was very, very sincere. Joe had a great sense of humor, but for the most part Joe was a sincere guy that—he was a friend to so many, he was as helpful as he could be, and he was fair to everybody. No matter where they lived, no matter

what their race or religion or sexual preference, Joe was the ultimate fair kind of guy who was passionate and sincere.

But I think just by watching Joe and understanding what makes Joe tick, politicians like myself and those that follow in years to come will say, you know, Take a page out of Joe Moakley's book. And they'll do all right.

That's what I did, and sometimes I sort of strayed off on occasion. Joe would always cringe on some of the things that I would say. (laughter) He'd say, "I know what you mean, but can you say it a different way?" And I said, "I will try." And I did try, but I think I come up short, and we'd have the same conversation at a later date.

But a wonderful human being, really a beautiful guy and a tough guy, too, was Joe Moakley. And I am honored that I had the opportunity to know Joe as well as I did, particularly in the later years of his life and in the maturity of my own political life. And Joe had a tremendous influence on me. I know that Joe probably on occasion still wrings his hands. But I've tried over the years to express the way I feel, but maybe in a different way than I did when I was the young militant back in the early years of busing in the mid-1970s.

And again, although I was that way, I have no regrets because I think there was some things that had to be said, and there were very few people around that had the opportunity for a TV or a radio interview. I probably had more of an opportunity to do that than others. And I just—if I offended anyone, some of the things they did offended me and a lot of other people who just simply wanted the right to send our kids to schools closest to their homes.

McETRICK: Thank you, Councilor.

ALLISON: Thank you very much, it's been terrific.

KELLY: Thank you, I appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW