

Dennis Moore

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Dennis Moore

Thank you for agreeing to let us interview you today.

Absolutely.

When did you first go into public service?

A...I graduated from Law school over in Topeka, Washburn Law School, in 1970. I came up to...actually, I worked in the Attorney General's office in Topeka for about a year, year and a half almost two years right after Law school. I came up to Johnson County in 1973 and first ran for District Attorney in 1976. Barely...barely had the qualifications to do what you need to do to be at a Law school for five years and practicing law for five years in order to run for district attorney. *(He smiles)*

Where did you practice law for those five years?

Well part of it as I said was in Attorney General's office in Topeka. Then I was with a small law firm as an associate in small law office in Mission Kansas called Soden, Einsbrandt, and Eisenhower. And I used to a...have to go out to the courthouse in Olathe and you had to get out in the car and go way out to Olathe from Mission, I mean there was nothing between Mission and Olathe *(he laughs)* at that time and it really was going clear out to Olathe. And a...it was a...lot...it seemed a lot smaller, the courthouse, and didn't have all the buildings built around there and certainly what we called then later the "new jail". But Olathe was just kind of just a courthouse and the little building across the street where there's a café, a or a little tiny restaurant, some law offices, pretty small place at the time.

So you were elected in 1973 to District Attorney...

No, '76, 1976. I was 30 years old at the time.

What was the District Attorney's office like at the time?

Small, it was up on the 6th Floor of the courthouse in the Johnson County Courthouse my predecessor was a woman by the name, a...lady by the name of Margaret Jordan and she'd been there one term as a district attorney and I ran against her. I was this Democrat people said you are a nice young man but you're a Democrat you'll never get elected here in Johnson County and I said well I'll take a chance and see what happens. Surprised myself and a lot of people at being elected and frankly I got a lot of the bar association behind me, the attorneys in Johnson County and my predecessor had a policy she just did not prosecute, personally prosecute, criminal cases. She said I am an administrator and I said I would personally prosecute the cases and did after I was elected.

A speaking of the cases, was there a large caseload or relatively small?

It was a...well I had about 12 assistant D.A.'s, 13 I believe and it was a pretty good caseload we kept very busy. I can't tell you what the number was its' been since 1976, so I can't tell you what the number was but we had a good size caseload and kept busy.

What kind of cases were there?

Oh, all types, from bad checks to homicides, and I generally prosecuted the felonies, and including some homicides and some other violent crimes.

You talked a little about what Olathe, the downtown area looked like when you first were in Olathe as the District Attorney, what do you see much of the other parts of Olathe?

Sure, sure. I was there for 12 years as District Attorney. I was elected three times and served a total of 12 years and so I spent a lot of time out in Olathe. Before I got there I didn't spend...before I was elected District Attorney...the only time I would come to Olathe was really when I had to come to court and came to court frequently, but a...I wasn't there every day like I was when I was D.A. You got to pretty much get to know Olathe very well almost in a sense "live there" even though I didn't live or reside in Olathe I worked there every day.

In those 12 twelve years, what kind of changes did you see in Olathe in the town and around?

Huge growth and not just growth but what I call good growth. There is growth and then there is good growth. And what I saw in Olathe was it's just been a...a...just unbelievable the development there and I am talking about good development. I am talking about, huge new neighborhood in terms of really nice homes that are built in Olathe out west and all around Olathe actually. I'm talking about the city itself of Olathe developing, growing. A...good businesses and a...I've told the mayor, in fact out there, this is one of the most a...miraculous changes I have ever seen in a city...it really is. I'm just a...kind of still astonished by the growth in Olathe and the good...the good development out there.

A...where did you go a...what did you after a...you practiced law privately after you were District Attorney?

Yes, I did.

Where did you practice?

Well I got a couple of my...actually when I left the D.A.'s office in January of 1989, I was hired as a partner in a big downtown law firm called, Smith, Gill, Fischer and Buss at the time which later merged with another Brian Cave Law Firm. And I was one of 55 partners and a...really good people and really loved the people and a...the senior partner at Smith seemed like a second

father to me but after a couple of years I had kind of been used to D.A.'s office running things myself and all of a sudden I had 54 partners and I decided to *(he laughs)* to leave and start my own firm so I came back to Olathe. And we opened a law office, well we had a law office down in Overland Park but did a whole lot of practice out obviously at the courthouse we were out there just about every day then and I had a...Kevin Moriarty and Tom Erker were my partners in that law firm...the small law firm. Tom is still practicing law and he is still in Olathe. Kevin is a District Court Judge in Olathe now.

When you worked in Olathe what kind of law did you practice?

A...just a little bit of everything from domestic relations to criminal defense after the D.A.'s office to a...civil practice whatever kind of walked in the door.

You were in your 4th term representative of the 3rd district.

That's correct. Absolutely.

What made you decide to run the first time?

A...I had some folks call my office where I was practicing law at the time with Tom and Kevin and they said a...we'd like to talk to Dennis Moore about some people...some names of people who might potential run for Congress and my receptionist said do you want to them and I said why certainly. And they came down from Washington and made an appointment and came down. Walked into my office *(he laughs)* and we started talking and he started asking me some questions and I was answering their questions and they said do you have any names of people and I gave them two or three names and they said how about you? And I said I have already done my political thing and I don't need this and I am making more money than I would in Congress anyway practicing law and a....my *(he laughs)* my wife and I had a place at the time when I could afford down at the Lake of the Ozarks and we were down there one Sunday afternoon and we were sitting on our dock and having a cold one and talking a little bit and she Dennis if you don't do this you will wonder for the rest of your life what would have happened. *(He laughs)* And that was the wrong thing to say I guess because I got to thinking about that and I had some issues that I was concerned about that my predecessor had taken a position on that was different than what I believed was the way we should be proceeding as a country. And a...we...I talked with my wife some more and we made a decision to run for Congress so that was the first time and that was back in about 1997. I was elected in November of 1998.

What things have you worked to do not only as D.A. but as also as a representative work to do in Olathe and the surrounding cities in Johnson County?

I am not sure I can talk specifics to Olathe although Olathe was part of the county, obviously Johnson County seat. But when I district attorney one of the things I really worked quite bit on was a couple of things I worked on in addition to prosecution, one was domestic violence, which to me was a huge issue and there were a lot of cases that we prosecuted, I am saying myself and my assistants prosecuted and many times we would file domestic violence cases where there would be a domestic violence in the family and the police would be called and charges would be filed and then prior to the prosecution usually the woman would come in and asked for the charges to be dismissed. And I...to me...that was not a way to successfully handle domestic violence cases. Now wasn't trying to be punitive but I was just trying to protect people who were being abused time and time again. And a...I got involved with some organizations in Johnson County and Olathe that worked with domestic violence cases. In fact, later we formed a group called the Johnson County Association for Battered Persons. That's a long name and sounds kind of strange. But what it was...was an organization that helped domestic violence victims and later after that and it was a couple of years later we bought this organization what was a building down in Overland Park that is now called Safe Home, which was the first domestic violence shelter in Johnson County. Did a whole lot of work whole lot of work in domestic violence because I thought it was very, very important to people in this county. And during that same period of time, I also got very involved, in...working with child abuse cases and prosecuted people who had been charged with abuse of children or other people other kids. And did legislation...wrote some legislation that was enacted by the Kansas Legislature in the child abuse area and a...a...frankly one of the reasons I left the D.A.'s office ultimately after three terms I served I was elected to a four year terms, I served a total of 12 years. And a...I had a couple of homicide cases involving little kids and that really got to me after a while. And I just decided that somebody else maybe could do this for a while.

In your terms as a representative of the 3rd District what changes have you seen in Johnson County and Olathe? You talk a little about the growth are there any other major changes that you witnessed?

Certainly. A...Well, I talked about the growth and that was one of the huge I think changes, because I saw not only changes in the growth in the business community but also in the housing a...a...housing out along K-10, Cedar Creek, Falcon Ridge other really not exactly low income housing...beautiful, beautiful homes out there. And all around Olathe though. And it's just been, I think, one of the really success stories I guess in Johnson County and the whole Kansas City metropolitan region...is the housing development in Olathe, a...the government has grown in a good sense as well. I think we've had...I say "we" I feel like sometimes I am a part of

the Olathe community. Although I never really lived there, I worked there, but never really lived there. But a...I think they've got a tremendous government out there through the mayor and the council and a...the chamber is good. It's just a great place I think the people really new the secret of Johnson County and Olathe more and more would want to come here.

What would you envision for the future of Johnson County and Olathe and the areas around it?

Well probably more growth and again I hope it's more good growth and more good development. And I think...and a...I think they can do just about anything they want to do and they are going to be successful. There are some people in government and I am talking about the city government, the mayor and council and the staff out at...at...the city hall. And I just think they have the whole future ahead of them and they can do just about anything they want to.

Thank you for answering my questions. Do you mind if they ask you some questions now?

I don't mind at all. I didn't talk if I can just go back for one minute about some of the things I've done in Congress and these don't affect just Olathe specifically because I represent, Wyandotte, Johnson, and the eastern half of Lawrence. But a...I worked for an example, I did a bill to increase the IRA's limit and deduction from 2,000 to 5,000 dollars in order to encourage people to save privately for their retirement later on. I've done a couple of bills that affect what has happened in Iraq and I am talking specifically about our troops. I found out that they are coming back...they are being brought back by the Department of Defense from Iraq to our country, and they were...they were put down on the East coast in Baltimore and landed and they were told from here you have to pay for your own domestic travel home for the two weeks recuperation and rest with their families and they go back and finish their year in Iraq. And I thought what an insult to these folks that we say we appreciate. And I filled a bill which is now law to require the Department of Defense to pay their travel. Also filed a bill to increase the so called "death gratuity" which when I found out it was only \$12,000 that was paid to the family of somebody who died in Iraq or Afghanistan and now it's the bill I filed raised it to \$100,000. So those don't directly affect Olathe except to the extent that people live in Olathe and may be affected by those in the future.

Do you see an increase in the involvement with youth toward politics and just involvement in the community I know we have a lot of things but do you think it is a positive thing?

A...I neglected to mention something when I was talking earlier probably should hear a lot of my colleagues in Congress have heard about this book called, *What's the matter with Kansas?* And they kind of make a joke about it, and what I have told people is we have and I really believe this and I am talking about Olathe and Johnson County specifically. Real quality of life

here in terms of low property values, great, great, value for the property for which you pay for homes here in this area. I mean really just unbelievable. To buy some of the homes that you buy in Olathe on the east or west coast would cost maybe three times as much as what they are valued at here or maybe even more. A...the crime rates are low. We have really low crime rates here. And the education opportunities...schools in Olathe and Johnson County I think we have some of the finest schools districts in the whole United States. I really believe that. And a...I say to me quality of life is what it all about and if people in New York or California knew about what we have here a lot of them would want to come here. And now your question say again was about? About kids in school coming into government in the future or what?

Olathe has like Youth Congress, Youth Court and I have seen...I have been participating in and have seen you speak at them, what do you think of those and what do you think they are having a positive influence on kids?

I think they are great! I have spoken to at least two and I think three Olathe Youth Congresses and the kids are sharp they have good questions they seem like they are very interested in government and I hope they are and I hope their interest continues. And we need bright young people going into government in the future that's what's going to be the future of our country really. And certainly this area in the future of our country. It remains to be seen...sometimes I think some people become disenchanted with politics become disenchanted with elections maybe sit out voting I am hopeful that's not the case here. My information is at least that disproportionately large numbers of young people vote when they eligible to vote in this area a...compared to other places around the country and I hope that's the case. Because we are...and I tell folks you now if you don't vote you have no right to complain when things don't go the way you wanted them to go so...I really encourage young people and adults and sometimes adults are worse than young people when comes to not participating but I really think that's not the case here in Olathe and Johnson County generally I think people really take this seriously and want to be involved and want to have a say in their future.

You and I are about the same age you and I have seen the growth in Johnson County I just have some concerns about....if you could look into a crystal ball and ahead for Johnson County, what would you like to see happen in Johnson County you know you said growth but I mean how far...I mean do we need public transportation....what kinds of things for the future do you see?

That has been one of my I guess concerns and criticism sense of Johnson County general not just Olathe but the whole county and not just the county but the whole metropolitan region. I tell folks and believe this. We are...I have had a chance in this position before to travel around the country and we are one of the few one of the few I know of great metropolitan regions who really don't have in my estimation quality public transportation. You've been to Washing D.C.

maybe and ridden the Metro and its clean it's inexpensive and it is very safe. And I wish we had something like that for people here because for the two years I told you after I left the D.A.'s office I was a partner in the downtown law firm went down to my office in Kansas City at 1 Kansas City Place...anyway...a...I would get on a I-35 which I considered to be a parking lot every morning because you sit there more than you are driving seems like and the same coming home it was bumper to bumper traffic and it took you know 35-40 minutes sometimes to get downtown or back. A...if we had...I wish we had...I have been an advocate for light rail a...or computer rail...along I-35. Maybe start out in Olathe going down where people could drive up to a place for light rail or train stop and people could get on and read their newspaper while they go downtown they would save a lot of money in terms of not having two automobiles. And they could read their paper and kind of relax when they went downtown to work in the morning and same thing when they came home in the evening and we haven't had that. Now the truth is Johnson County has a lot of sprawl...mean its spread out over a large geography area and same in Olathe. But a...if people had the opportunity I think to get used to and get out of their car and get used to riding public transportation that is clean, efficient inexpensive and reliable I think they'd grab it. I really do. I'd like to see that happen.

And not to mention the fact that a back in the late 70s there was there was a guy on television one night and you guys are way too young to remember...you'll remember it. **(And he points to the interviewer)** a guy name Jimmy Carter and he was talking to the American people about the long lines at the gas pumps and it is déjà vu all over again now. We've had that same conversation just in the last several months here when the gas prices...a gallon of gas hit \$3.00 at the pumps and long lines again and a we should have...I tell folks we should have done 30 years ago what President Carter said we needed to do and that was to develop and conservation energy policy and I have faulted every Democratic and Republican president since then for not doing what he said we should do and we've got the same problem to deal with that brings public transportation up again if we had that this problem is not going to go away but it would slightly reduce the problem we have so we need to focus on quality public transportation.

Well thank you very much for taking time out of your schedule to talk to us.

Absolutely! Glad to do it!

It's been an honor to sit down with you.

Happy to be with you guys and hope I didn't take an hour and a half. **(He laughs)**