

**Dedication
Ceremony of the
John Joseph
Moakley United
States Courthouse**

**Boston,
Massachusetts
April 18, 2001**

Judge Douglas P. Woodlock

When President George W. Bush made the legislation naming this building the John Joseph Moakley United States Courthouse the occasion for his first Rose Garden signing ceremony, Congressman Moakley responded with a graceful speech observing that it was a great honor to have the building named after him. The congressman for once had it only half right. To be sure, it is an honor to have the building named after him; but it is equally an honor for this building to bear his name.

One way to understand why that is so is to quote from a letter that Justice Stephen G. Breyer — who very much regrets that he cannot be here today because the Supreme Court is in the middle of an argument week at an unnamed courthouse to our south — sent last Friday to Congressman Moakley. Justice Breyer writes of remembering

not just your dedication and effectiveness in seeing that the courthouse was built, but also your original vision. You wanted a courthouse that both would work for the judges and the judicial system and also would serve the community in which it was built. You wanted it to be a catalyst for the economic development of the area and you wanted it to belong, not just to the judges or to the lawyers, but to the entire Boston community.

I hope and believe the courthouse does carry out that vision, for it is both a symbol of justice and an important practical example of how our government can and should involve, belong to, and help the people whom it is meant to serve. That, it seems to me, is what you always have stood for throughout your life of public service.

Justice Breyer ended the letter by saying, “On behalf of the judges and our justice system, I thank you.”

This courthouse in this location carries out, as Justice Breyer writes, Congressman Moakley’s original vision. Even more fundamentally, this building aspires to the values of public service embodied in the congressman’s life.

When we began the design of this building, we tried to explain to the architect, Henry N. Cobb, why courts were distinctive governmental bodies. A court well run,

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we told him, attempts to provide a citizen with a high public official who is prepared to spend as much time as is necessary to resolve that citizen's dispute fairly. At its foundation, this represents government conducted on a person-to-person level. For people not directly engaged, these disputes may often seem to present trivial controversies. But I can assure you that there is nothing trivial about them for those who are involved; the judge who fails to recognize that is a judge who fails to do justice.

Person-to-person government is precisely what Joe Moakley has always been about. Congressman James P. McGovern — in fact everyone who ever served on Joe Moakley's staff — talks about his passion for case work. They frequently evoke the image of him “on the phone urging someone to get Mrs. O’Leary her Social Security check.” The ultimate measure of a democratic government's effectiveness — whether in the courts or through a legislator's attention to constituent service — is the willingness and ability to provide every person with a sympathetic hearing and a fair shake.

And from these seemingly trivial matters are constructed, brick by brick, larger lessons about our democratic life. They are the lessons that caused our architect to choose brick as the predominant material for this building. As a biographer of the founder of the congressman's political party wrote in explaining why Thomas Jefferson designed Monticello and the University of Virginia in brick, it is “the common building material from which a democratic quality emerges; it is capable of assuming noble proportions and intentions, yet it is plain and honest.”

The spirit of Joe Moakley is imbedded in the brick of this building, and with the naming that presence has become manifest. His name has been hand carved at the front door under the supervision of John Benson, the master craftsman who executed all the carvings for this structure.

There is a certain poetic justice in the fact that while John Benson was supervising the initial carvings for this building, he was also hand carving the quotations at the Franklin Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C., honoring the president Joe Moakley identifies as transforming the possibilities for his life and the lives of so many other working-class families.

But to understand how the brick of this building embodies Joe Moakley's spirit, you should also look closely at the plaque that was unveiled today to mark the naming of this building. That plaque is inset in the brick of the arch at the front door.

The craftsmanship of inseting the brick to match the original dedication plaque was donated by bricklayers from Local 3, who, on less than twenty-four hours' notice, arrived at 5 P.M. . . . so as not to disturb the work of the courts and worked until 3 A.M. . . . to carve it out. And when a certain judge expressed reservations about simply carving it out as opposed to resetting the brick, Robert Mottolo and Derek Ciulla appeared again on less than twenty-four hours' notice to rebrick the wall, working through the night without complaint because, as they told me, “We would do anything for Joe Moakley.”

Carved in that plaque, which fits so comfortably in its carefully crafted setting, is a quotation which captures plainly and honestly the noble proportions and intentions of Congressman Moakley's career. It comes from a speech that he gave at the University of Central America in El Salvador about the rule of law and democracy and justice, in which he held the highest officials of that ravished nation to institutional responsibility.

“There is no such thing as half justice,” he said. “You either have justice or you don't. You either have a democracy in which everyone — including the powerful — is subject to the rule of the law, or you don't.”

That quotation will enter into the conversation that John Benson has carved throughout this building. In particular, it reflects application of the principle stated by Justice Louis D. Brandeis in the hand-carved quotation encountered at the main staircase stairs on the other side of the entrance hall: “Justice Is But Truth in Action.”

I suspect that Justice Brandeis would understand that there was more to Congressman Moakley’s speech that day nearly a decade ago in El Salvador than what we had space to capture on the plaque. Confronting a recalcitrant military who attempted to cover up their murder of six Jesuit priests, a housekeeper, and her daughter, Joe Moakley went on to echo Justice Brandeis and tell them, “Truth is not the enemy . . . Without the truth . . . government cannot lay claim to truly democratic institutions.”

That approach is all that a courthouse can aspire to stand for. I can think of no higher honor for a courthouse than to be named after a man whose public service has embodied the search for equal justice under law for all, whether it is Mrs. O’Leary looking to receive her Social Security check on a timely basis or General René Emilio Ponce being held to responsibility for the misdeeds of the powerful institution he commanded. To be true to its name, such a courthouse must be — as Congressman Moakley has been throughout his life — committed to offering a sympathetic hearing, providing a fair shake, and speaking truth to power. It is the responsibility of those of us fortunate enough to work in this building to maintain that commitment. ❀

