



Roosevelt Robinson—Deputy District Attorney

Photo by Richard J. Brown

Roosevelt Robinson — Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney

by Jerry Garner

Since 1978, Mr. Roosevelt Robinson has been employed as a Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney. As a prosecutor, he has handled all types of criminal cases including homicides, robberies, assaults, and other major felonies. As a Senior Deputy, he has worked in the Career Criminal Unit, prosecuting dangerous repeat felons. In 1984, he ran unsuccessfully for Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge.

Mr. Robinson earned his J.D. degree from Northwestern School of Law, Portland, Oregon, 1976, and a B.A. degree in Sociology, cum laude from the University of Portland in 1970.

After passing the bar, Mr. Robinson began to practice law in private practice, handling cases in worker's compensation, domestic relations, business, real estate, personal injury, civil rights, and criminal defense, in state and federal courts. He left private practice and joined the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office in 1978.

Mr. Robinson said although he enjoyed working in private practice as an attorney, being a prosecutor is more secure. "Each profession has its advantages. The advantage of being in private practice is that you have a greater variety of cases that come before you. In contrast, being Deputy District Attorney, you are basically dealing with criminal cases all the time. However, when you are in private practice, you must have a certain amount of capital to run a good law office. One must have an office staff to get all of your typing and research done, buy office supplies, pay your rent and malpractice insurance. Unless you have the money to meet these expenses, you must charge your clients more or you are constantly worried month to month about them. The latter makes it difficult to practice your craft."

Robinson said the job of Deputy District Attorney is very competitive. "For every one or two openings, there may be 30 applicants who apply. After applying for the job, potential employees must go through a rigorous screening process before they are hired. Each District Attorney's Office has its own criteria for the type of people they are seeking."

Robinson said those who are interested in becoming a District Attorney should take courses where they can use their minds in order to think about different situations. "They should use more than rote memory (remembering what someone else has written or reciting it to someone), but actually try to determine what the basic reasons or the philosophical reasons behind a certain concept. They should look at those types of courses and not shy away from them."

Furthermore, Robinson said, "they must be good readers, because in law school one must do a lot of reading of cases, plus they must possess a reading process to analyze those cases. Classes such as philosophy and logic are good classes to take," said Robinson. Robinson said one must also have excellent writing skills in order to express themselves clearly. He/she should pay particular attention to criminal law, constitutional law, criminal procedures, and trial practices."

Robinson said another way to enhance one's chances of getting employed as a Deputy District Attorney is by serving as a law clerk. "One of the easier ways to become a Deputy District Attorney is to become a law clerk for a particular District Attorney's Office while still in law school. This will kind of give you a foot in the door, and once you pass the bar, the odds of gaining employment with that office are greater."

Robinson said in order to prosecute cases successfully, the District Attorney's Office must work closely with the police. "The relationship is very important because when the police arrest an individual or gather evidence

against an individual, it must be done properly so the evidence or information will not be suppressed." He said evidence is suppressed when the police conduct an improper search or fail to read a suspect his/her Miranda warning. "It is crucial that the police and the District Attorney's Office work closely together, especially in the more complex cases such as homicide," said Robinson.

In homicide cases, the District Attorney's Office is generally involved right from the beginning. If the homicide occurs at night, the District Attorney is called at home and has the opportunity to visit the scene of the homicide. He or she starts with the case from the beginning, and gets the opportunity to view the autopsy and watch the medical examiner go through the process to determine the cause of death. If there is any need to carry out a search warrant, the District Attorney's Office either carries out such warrants or the Police Bureau does and the District Attorney's Office reviews them. Homicide cases are the only ones in which the District Attorney's Office investigates.

Robinson was asked how a prosecutor decides on bringing charges against an individual. He replied, "Basically, the police make the arrest and forward a copy of the arrest report to our office. We then review the report. If there is enough evidence, we issue an information, and within 30 days we must take the case before a grand jury. The District Attorney's Office has the final say whether a case will be issued or not."

One practice of the District Attorney's Office which has drawn criticism over the years is plea bargaining. Plea bargaining is when an accused person pleads guilty to the lesser charges. When a defendant agrees to plea bargaining, he or she bargains away their right to a trial in return for their guilty plea and a more lenient punishment, if they were then found guilty of the original charge. Critics of the practice of plea bargaining say it subverts the basic foundations of the system of criminal justice and operates on an implicit assumption of guilt.

Robinson said plea bargaining is a necessary part of the criminal justice system. "If we didn't get a lot of pleas, the criminal justice system would grind to a halt. Probably 85-90 percent of our cases end up in pleas. We only take about 10-15 percent of our cases to trial. It is impossible to try all the cases that come before us."

However, Robinson said that the District Attorney's Office uses strict guidelines in determining whether to plea bargain a case. "We have guidelines and policy mandates that each attorney in the office uses. That policy manual indicates cases that can and cannot be plea bargained. For instance, residential burglary, armed robbery, robbery committed in the second degree with a simulated weapon, cannot be plea bargained."

In spite of his busy schedule as Deputy District Attorney, Mr. Robinson still finds time to participate in community and governmental activities. He is a member of the Boy Scouts of America District Committee, member of the Oregon State Bar, Multnomah County Bar Association, Oregon District Attorneys Association, Alumnae of the National College of District Attorneys, Board Member of the Equal Justice Committee of the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission, founding member and vice-president of the Association of Oregon Black Lawyers, and co-founder and past-president of the Minority Law Students Association of Northwestern School of Law.

Mr. Robinson was asked if he plans to run for judge again in the future. He replied, "I do plan to run again at a future time; at the appropriate time for the right position."

Black Leadership Conference Accuses Goldschmidt of Snubbing

by Jerry Garner

The Black Leadership Conference is accusing Governor Neil Goldschmidt of ignoring them and of not honoring the promises he made to the organization during the campaign.

During a meeting held last Saturday at Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church, Ron Herndon, co-chair of the Black Leadership Conference, said the group is disappointed at the lack of respect shown by Governor Goldschmidt. "Goldschmidt made commitments to us in March. He promised to consult with us in regards to making appointments and decisions which would affect the Black community."

Herndon said the Black Leadership Conference has made several attempts to contact Goldschmidt, but their phone calls and letters to him have been ignored.

Goldschmidt responded to the group's criticism by denying making any campaign commitments to them. "I don't think they have been treated any differently from anybody else. If it isn't good enough, I apologize. It's no attempt on our part to hide."



Ron Herndon—"Let some racial problems break out; they won't have any trouble contacting folks in the Black community."

Photo by Richard J. Brown

He said he found out only Monday that the group was trying to contact him.

Herndon responded to Governor Goldschmidt's explanation by saying that he was playing games. "To assume, pretend, all of a sudden that we are suffering from amnesia, we didn't hear him say what he said to us when he spoke to us for two-and-a-half hours last March, defies imagination."

The Black Leadership Conference's dissatisfaction of Goldschmidt has been brewing for some time. The political organization sent a letter back in October informing him of their disappointment at his office for "the lack of respect and coordination during the campaign."

Herndon also charged Governor Goldschmidt of excluding critical issues facing the Black community in part of his "Oregon Comeback Plan". The Black Leadership Conference endorsed Goldschmidt during the primary and general election.

The Leadership Conference said they will focus on the following issues during the 1987 Legislature: health care, economic development, education, and corrections.

Martin Luther King III Speaks At Fundraiser Dinner for King Scholarship

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Fund of Oregon announces a scholarship fundraiser featuring special guest speaker,

Martin Luther King III

with special appearance by Beverly Anchors, former scholarship recipient and currently working as a news anchorperson for CNN Cable News network.

We invite you to this banquet fundraiser on Friday, January 23, 1987, at the Westin-Benson Hotel, S.W. Oak St. and Broadway, Portland, OR. Everyone is invited to no-host cocktails in the Crystal Room at 6:30 p.m. at which pledge cards will be available. Dinner will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the Mayfair Room. Martin Luther King III will speak following dinner.

Martin Luther King III will also appear on January 23 at Portland State University, 12-2 p.m., and will conduct a free public lecture at Lewis and Clark College beginning at 3:00 p.m.

To order banquet tickets and obtain more information, please call Mildred Jones, Executive Director, at Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Fund of Oregon, 229-4475.