

Editor,

My name is Jamie McWilliams. I wanted to take this opportunity to speak to your readers regarding District 12 Congressional Candidate, Dennis Ross.

I have known Dennis professionally since the mid 90s. When he was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2000, I was not surprised, and knew that he would be in Tallahassee working hard for his constituents. He evolved from being a strong businessman to a strong politician; one that would not be intimidated into voting for legislation, that he morally, ethically or financially didn't feel would benefit the citizens of Florida. From my own personal experience, Dennis Ross is one politician that brings a whole new spirit to the term "walking the walk."

On April 7, 2002, my 20-year old son, Justin McWilliams, was killed leaving a party in a pasture in Winter Garden, Fl. After running Justin over, the 18-year old driver left the scene. Charges were eventually filed against the driver for Leaving the Scene of a Fatal Accident, only to have those charges dismissed in March 2003 for what was termed a "loophole" in the Florida Statutes. Apparently, Chapter 316, State Uniform Traffic Rules, did not apply to private property! Our family was horrified that you could run someone over with your vehicle and escape any type of criminal accountability simply because it happened on private property.

Shortly after the charges were dismissed, I contacted the State Attorney's office to ask how we could prevent this type of injustice from happening to another family. They told me, quite matter-of-factly, to change the law. While I knew that any change in legislation would not affect the outcome of Justin's case, I also knew that as his mother, he would expect me to work hard to make sure this didn't happen to another family.

In June 2004, I met with Dennis, who was then State Representative for District 64, in Lakeland. We spoke at length about a change in legislation. However, he was also very honest with me. The journey would be emotionally challenging. My response? Tell me what I have to do.

Over the next 2-years, I appeared and spoke before more than a dozen Committees of Reference in the Florida House and Senate. Dennis and his staff were always readily available to talk to me about the progress of Justin's Bill. If he wasn't in, he would email me...or respond to those that I sent him.

On the final day of the 2005 Legislative Session, I realized that we would not get Justin's Bill passed the first year. We were unable to get to the final Committee of Reference in the Senate, which prevented a Floor vote. We simply ran out of time. I was heartbroken as I began the long drive back to Orlando. Then, my phone rang. I said, "Hello." Dennis Ross said, "Jamie, this is good legislation. We will get this done next year." There was such commitment in his voice.

I was back in Tallahassee in the spring of 2006. On the final day of the 2006 Legislative Session, our lawmakers unanimously approved the Bill named in memory of my son. I was in the Gallery when the final vote was taken. Dennis looked up at me from the floor and smiled. There are no words to describe how I felt at that minute. We did it! The genesis of the Justin McWilliams Act requires the driver of a vehicle involved in a crash occurring on public or private property, that results in injury or death, to immediately stop the vehicle and remain at the scene until emergency vehicles arrive. It further increases the penalty to a first degree felony for leaving the scene of an accident with death, up to 30-years in prison and a \$10,000. Fine.

Our family will be forever grateful to the 160-lawmakers and Governor Jeb Bush for their support of this legislation that is now in place to help that next family of a hit and run incident. However, it is Dennis Ross who took the time to meet with me and guide me through this journey. He is the one who drafted this legislation and sought and received bi-partisan support of this Bill. He is the one that said we would get it done, and we did. He was right. The journey was an incredibly emotional one; but one that I would take yet again.

While my story is incredibly personal, I wanted to share it with your readers. Dennis Ross is determined, realistic, approachable and incredibly loyal. And, most importantly, he is a man of his word. We could certainly use someone with his credentials in Washington. Dennis Ross is determined, realistic, approachable and incredibly loyal. And, most importantly, he is a man of his word. We could certainly use someone with his credentials in Washington.

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