

HAVE YOU MET ...

By Cortney O'Brien

Rep. Dennis Ross (R-FL)

Whether he's serving on Capitol Hill or sightseeing across the country, this Florida congressman knows that an opportunity is a terrible thing to waste.

Rep. Dennis Ross (R-FL), who represents the suburbs west of Tampa as well as Lakeland, has logged about 100,000 miles across the country in his family's motorhomes. He, his wife, and their two sons have traveled to memorable places such as the battlefields of Gettysburg, the Grand Canyon, and the green meadows of Yellowstone National Park.

"It's a very nomadic life," he told *Townhall*. "But, it was more about the journey than it was the destination."

These enjoyable but long road trips were kind of like Ross' journey to Congress. To get there, it required patience, endurance, and a full tank of energy. Fortunately, Ross' past proved he had already earned these qualifications.

"I've always had a desire—I put myself through law school, I started my own business. I failed along the way, but this is the way we were raised. There are consequences to your actions, and if you work hard, you receive the benefits of your labors."

He achieved all of this, he says, without relying on the government.

"What influenced me most was that we can come from modest means, and achieved incredible things, and a lot of that had to do with inspiration, self-confidence. Little of it had to do with government providing it."

Ross put these notions to the test when he first opened his law firm in



1989. Although he was working as an in-house lawyer for Walt Disney World, his entrepreneurial drive overcame his current job security. To kick start his business, he sought financial help from banks, but to no avail. Finally, his next-door neighbor loaned him \$10,000—and he didn't let it go to waste.

"Within six months, I had paid back my neighbor and had never looked back. I built a law firm with seven lawyers and 24 employees at one time."

The congressman says all Americans should have access to these kinds of experiences.

"Those were opportunities that everyone should have if they desire it. I lost my first run for political office too. Failures are part of the process. It's what you learn from them that makes all the difference."

Because he is the product of hard work, Ross tries to espouse these same ideals to his constituents.

"So my passion now in politics is to ignite the pilot light of a desire to succeed. The way you do that is, no matter where you come from, no matter who you are, no matter what your religious, or ethnic, or gender background, believe you can accomplish. And I think that's been the success story most Americans want to see, instead of being told, 'Don't worry about it, government's going to take care of you.'"

One way he combats this lean-on-government ideology is by voting for pro-business, pro-growth legislation. Ross

has pushed bills such as the Innovation Act and Natural Gas Pipeline Permitting and Reform Act in the 113th Congress. His efforts earned him the Spirit of Free Enterprise Award this August from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Now, back to those trips across America.

"I'm a suppressed truck driver," Ross insisted.

While success is important, having seen so much of America has allowed Ross to appreciate life beyond Washington. One particular trip his family took to the Grand Canyon opened his eyes to what was really significant.

"We're out there one time in 2001 and we're sitting around the campfire, and there's an older gentleman and his wife that were next to us. They came over for the campfire and we were talking and my wife was saying how badly she wanted to go up to Pike's Peak and how badly my kids wanted to see Yellowstone and the older gentleman looked at me and said, 'Why don't you take them?' and I said, 'Well, I have to get back.' And he said, 'What do you have to get back for? You're halfway there.' And I said, 'You know, you're right.'"

After that conversation with the wise stranger, Ross canceled his work schedule for the next two weeks and they drove to those locations his family had long wished to see.

"It was one of those things where we realized the importance of what we were doing was very significant because we knew when we got back home we wouldn't have these opportunities."

Opportunity—it's a word that comes up often in Ross' vocabulary. Whether he's serving or sightseeing, Ross knows how important it is to seize them. •

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