The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums

U.S. Representative of California (1971–1998)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

April 19, 2012
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Office of the Historian
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"When I went on Armed Services Committee as the first black person, that was important to knock that barrier down so that race is not a factor. It's like when Martin Luther King stood up and opposed the Vietnam War, where people said, 'Wait a minute. You're a civil rights leader. Why are you raising your voice about national security matters? That's not your business.' Well, my going on the Armed Services Committee, in one sense, said, 'Yes, it was our business, and we're here.' That was an important part of it. But my going there also was a larger human question, which was the role of non-intervention, the role of peace, the role of arms control, the role of appropriate priorities in our society."

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Abstract

First elected to Congress in 1970, Ronald V. Dellums embodied the activist spirit of his northern California district during his 14 terms in the House. In his first interview, Dellums explains why an antiwar Representative would seek a spot on the Armed Services Committee and how he and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) devised a successful plan to overcome the objections of the influential Chairman F. Edward Hébert. As the first African American to serve on Armed Services, Dellums talks about the historic milestone and how he worked to earn the respect and support of his colleagues. He continued to break barriers in the House serving as the first African-American chairman of Armed Services during the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). Dellums speaks about his rise to committee chair, his leadership style, and the portrait commissioned commemorating his historic chairmanship. Dellums also provides details on how he selected an artist, the reactions to the portrait, and the personal significance of having his likeness painted and hung in the halls of the House.

Throughout his career Dellums played a leading role in the anti-apartheid movement in Congress. In his second interview he describes his early involvement in the push for U.S. economic sanctions against South Africa, including getting arrested during a peaceful protest at the South African Embassy in Washington, DC. Dellums worked closely with the CBC to apply legislative pressure on the South African government to end apartheid. He offers a unique, behind-the-scenes look at how he skillfully shepherded a sanctions bill through the House that few thought had a chance to pass. The California Congressman also recalls the first time he met Nelson Mandela and how he had the privilege of escorting the anti-apartheid activist and first president of the new democratic government of South Africa onto the House Floor for a Joint Session of Congress.

Biography

DELLUMS, Ronald V., a Representative from California; born in Oakland, Alameda County, Calif., November 24, 1935; attended the Oakland public schools; A.A., Oakland City College, 1958; B.A., San Francisco State College, 1960; M.S.W., University of California, 1962; served two years in United States Marine Corps, active duty, 1954–1956; psychiatric social worker, California Department of Mental Hygiene, 1962–1964; program director, Bayview Community Center, 1964–1965; associate director, then director, Hunters Point Youth Opportunity Center, 1965–1966; planning consultant, Bay Area Social Planning Council, 1966–1967; director, Concentrated Employment Program, San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council, 1967–1968; senior consultant, Social Dynamics, Inc. (manpower specialization programs), 1968–1970; part-time lecturer, San Francisco State College, University of California, and Berkeley Graduate School of Social Welfare; member, Berkeley City Council, 1967–1970; delegate to Democratic National Convention, 1972; elected as a Democrat to the Ninety-second and to the thirteen succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1971–February 6, 1998); chairman, Committee on District of Columbia (Ninety-sixth through One Hundred Second Congresses), Committee on Armed Services (One Hundred Third Congress); served from January 3, 1971, until his resignation on February 6, 1998; Mayor of Oakland, Calif., 2007–2011; died on July 30, 2018, in Washington, D.C.

Read full biography

Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes or redactions to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, http://bioguide.congress.gov and the "People Search" section of the History, Art & Archives website, http://history.house.gov.

For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at history@mail.house.gov.

Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:

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Interviewer Biography

Kathleen Johnson is the Manager of Oral History for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University, where she also played basketball for four years, and holds two master's degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create the House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: *Women in Congress: 1917–2006* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006) and *Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008). Before joining the Office of the Historian, she worked as a high school history teacher and social studies curriculum consultant.

Farar Elliott has been the Curator of the U.S. House of Representatives, within the Office of the Clerk, since 2002. She created the institution's first curatorial program and is responsible for the House Collection's 13,000 pieces of fine art, historical artifacts, photographs, and decorative art, under the direction of the House Fine Arts Board. Farar received her A.B. in History of Art from Bryn Mawr College and an M.A.T. from The George Washington University. Before coming to the House of Representatives, she worked in museums ranging in scope from Asian art to Southern history to historic New England sites.

—THE HONORABLE RONALD V. DELLUMS—

INTERVIEW ONE

JOHNSON: We're here today with former Representative Ron [Ronald V.] Dellums of California. The date is April 19, 2012, and my name is Kathleen Johnson with the House Historian's Office. I'm here with Farar Elliott, the House Curator. Today we're going to be interviewing Mr. Dellums about his time on the Armed Services Committee and also about his portrait when he was chairman of Armed Services.

Today we're going to start off with some questions from Farar [about Mr. Dellums' Armed Services Committee chairman portrait].

ELLIOTT: Mr. Dellums, could you describe the painting a little bit for us? What it looked like and how it came to be?

DELLUMS: Well, let me back up to how it started. A group of people got together, and they raised a fairly significant amount of money, maybe $35,000 or something like this. They went on a search for someone to paint the portrait. The search committee was made up of residents from the Bay Area and professionals, people like the cartoonist [Morrie] Turner and a few other people. Everyone had to submit a concept and something that they had done in the past. And very interesting, [Andre] White [the portrait artist] was either number one or number two on everybody's list because—for example, in the federal building, they displayed all of the competitors' original work and their concept, which maybe [was] an 8-by-10, and people actually came in and voted. It was Oakland–Berkeley, where else? Activism is in our genes. People fully participated in that process, and they chose him [White] to do this thing.

To my amazement, he actually came back here, interviewed me. He came to the House Armed Services Committee. He went into the gallery, watched me work on the floor of the Congress. He really wanted to know who I was and see me in my environment.

He then also contracted a photographer, and the photographer had to take pictures. I remember one day the photographer said, "There are two artists here. We're competing, right?" And he said, "No I want—" He had the photographer take different angle shots of my hand, so if you look on the portrait, every vein is my vein. It's not a generic hand. It's all right there. For example, they had a photographer [take photos of] the painting as it evolved, and there was one shot of the artist looking through a magnifying glass into a picture of my hand, and he was painting from that. It was that level of intricacy that was amazing.

I hadn't seen it, but then finally, when it comes to the unveiling, a lot of people came, and I was a bit self-conscious, but I knew what I had worn, so I put the very same clothes on, and I peeped and I saw, so I struck the very same pose. The people went, "It looks like Ron's going to walk off this painting," because, you know, it was so lifelike.

Here's an amazing thing. A person with this level of talent worked full time in a senior citizen home. You would think that he would be able to earn a living full-time painting with such incredible capacity. I think his life may have changed a bit once people realized what incredible capacity he had. This African-American artist actually studied the masters, and he mixed the paints the way old masters mixed the paint. He did it. He went back eons of time and mixed the paints the same way. He did everything the very same way. People told me it was very rich.

Then later, the organizing committee wanted to know whether they got the money for it all. One of the people that take a look at art—and I don't know if they came from New York, or where, but anyway—they said that [the] canvas wasn't even totally dry yet. It takes time for it to. They estimated it at that point at $125,000. He had just painted it. They thought it was an amazing piece, and they sensed his commitment to detail and artistry.

There's a joke—if you notice, it comes out of a light background, and most portraits come out of a darker background. Being the peacenik from Berkeley—and arms control—they said, "Ron, you're standing in front of a nuclear blast." I said, "Only you guys could put that on me," you know. But I was very proud of the work. It was an amazing—and sometimes people look, and I have to tell them that the picture that they're looking at is actually a picture of a portrait. They think it's a photograph, with such detail.

ELLIOTT: I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about people's reactions to the portrait because even today, when people walk into the hearing room when we're showing them different portraits, that's the one that stands out.

DELLUMS: Yes, well, and people have said that to me. I have no idea. It's not about me. It's the artistry of the person that did it, but people said they thought it was the most striking portrait that they had seen, and maybe it's coming out of a light background or whatever, [or] it's his commitment to detail. My colleagues [said], "It's looked like you're getting ready to walk off of it." So people have responded to it. Really, some people breathe, you know, "Oh my God, what an incredible portrait, and what an amazing talent." I get that.

ELLIOTT: What was the idea for the light background and the window behind there? Was that your idea or—

DELLUMS: No, I had nothing to do with—I think, at one point, he was saying that he wanted it to be inspirational, and that here's this guy who's guided by an inner light and an external moral compass. I think that was part of what he was trying to do. Taking the strength and the energy of the path and looking forward. I think that's kind of what he was saying when he talked with me about it.

ELLIOTT: What did it feel like to have your portrait painted?

DELLUMS: A bit self-conscious. Yes, absolutely. But to be perfectly honest with you, being an African-American guy who was born here, to suddenly realize that for way beyond my time on this planet, that young people will come in there [the Armed Services Committee room] and say, one day, "an African-American guy led this journey." That's humbling, very much so.

ELLIOTT: I was wondering, kind of following up on that, looking back now, this many years later, what is it like to see your portrait up on the Armed Services hearing room wall?

DELLUMS: I take a great deal of pride in it. I remember when I got ready to leave—there was a lot of pain on my part because it was a big decision to decide to leave because this was a very significant part of my life. My colleagues said, "Why are you leaving?" I said, "There are two of us in this room, and you guys can't handle one, so one of us has got to go. The portrait's going to be here for a while, but I'm going to be looking over you." They all laughed.

It's a great deal of pride, and when family and friends come back, they want me to take them in to see it, and they're overwhelmed with the impressive nature of the room. Here's my brother, here's my nephew, here's my cousin, here's my friend who's there. For many of my family and friends, it's a major

point of departure. There's nothing that happened to them in life that corresponded to that moment.

My son says, "Pop, for a guy who was born in the hood, it's been a fantastic ride." Yes, and as I said, it's very, very humbling, and almost [an] out of body experience, really, because it's hard for me to see myself that way. So to some extent, it is an out of body experience. It's kind of like I'm looking at a third person, somebody else.

JOHNSON: I wanted to provide a little background on your time, your tenure, on Armed Services. The first question I have for you is why did you, as a well-known peace advocate, choose to get a seat on Armed Services?

DELLUMS: Good question. My first two years didn't have much—when you're a freshman, you don't have much authority. Carl [Bert] Albert saw me walking down the hall one day, and he said, "You were on the Berkeley city council." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Okay, I'm putting you on the District of Columbia Committee." Okay, so fine. Then the next thing I knew, I was also on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

My second term comes. Now I've got some seniority, and now I can make a choice. I'm a trained social worker. I have a master's degree in clinical social work. I wanted to be the black Sigmund Freud. I ended up 35 years in elective office. I wanted to be a social worker, and I worked in manpower during the '60s, the Great Society. What was the manpower program is now workforce programs, but back in those days, that's what they called it. I worked in a number of experimental demonstration programs. People thought it was a logical thing for me to go on Education and Labor Committee because I could make a contribution to the poverty program, to the various workforce programs that were evolving in the '60s.

But then I said, but I come from the Bay Area, and an important part of the reason that people sent me here was also to challenge the insanity of war and to raise my voice in the name of peace. I had been inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King [Jr.] and to raise my voice for arms control and to challenge people to understand the dangers of nuclear weaponry and the expansion of that. I said, "That's where I need to go." We made that decision. So I told them, "I want to be on the Armed Services Committee."

I get this call from my representative on the Committee on Committees that said, "Ron, they're just not going to let you on the Armed Services Committee. F. [Felix] Edward Hébert of Louisiana called everybody last night personally and said do not give me, the Berkeley radical, and the Denver radical, Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder [a seat]. I just can't get you on. What's your second choice?" "I have no second choice. I'm going to fight this."

I hung up the phone, and I ran, and I found Phil [Phillip] Burton, who knew this institution like the back of his hand. Phil Burton's from San Francisco. I said, "Phil, you know this institution like the back of your hand. I'm an outside guy. I want to be on Armed Services Committee. They said the chair didn't want me on the Armed Services Committee. I don't think that's fair. Tell me how to fight." So Phil Burton thought for a moment. He said, "Who's the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus [CBC]?" Lou [Louis] Stokes. Nice guy. Perfect gentleman. Great guy. "We'd get him, but he's too nice. Go find Bill [William Lacy] Clay [Sr.], and tell Bill Clay, both of them, demand an immediate meeting with Carl Albert. You go with them. They need to insist upon Ron Dellums being on the committee."

Incidentally, I had gotten the caucus [CBC] members to agree to support my candidacy on the Armed Services Committee, and most people thought,

"Why does a black guy want to be on Armed Services Committee?" But Oakland–Berkeley was a different place, and I felt that I had that responsibility since that was an important part of my campaign.

I found Lou Stokes and Bill Clay having lunch, and I said, "Put the call in. We need to do it." So Lou reluctantly said, "Okay." Because everybody sort of thought, "Yes Ron, we'll support you." But in their wildest imagination, nobody in the Congressional Black Caucus really thought that they were going to appoint Ron Dellums to the Armed Services Committee, coming from Oakland–Berkeley. He said, "Well, we have an immediate meeting."

Walked in the meeting, Carl Albert says, "We got all of the members of the CBC on various committees, but we couldn't do anything for Ron." That's when we started to talk, and I would nudge Lou Stokes. "Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of principle." Nudge Bill Clay, "And if you don't put the brother on the committee, we're going to denounce this as a racist institution. We're going to call a press conference." So you got the nice guy going, "This is a matter of principle. Ron Dellums knows these issues." Bill Clay saying, "It's about fairness and justice," right? So at a certain point, Carl Albert got up, and he said, "I'm going to see if I can get this name reconsidered." At that moment, I knew I had won.

We walk out, and I said, "It's over." Lou Stokes said, "You really think so?" I said, "The fact that the Speaker said they were going to reconsider it, it's done." Okay? Hour and a half later, I get this phone call. I'm the first African American appointed to the House Armed Services Committee. Incredible thing.

First day we organized. Pat Schroeder, who had just won as a freshman, was on Armed Services. The two of us are at the bottom of the rung, but there

was only one chair available at the committee tables. They didn't want another seat there. Okay, there was just one seat. I looked at Pat Schroeder, and I introduced myself, and I said, "Ms. Schroeder, my name is Ron Dellums. I'm from California." She said, "I know." "And I'm honored to be here with you. My grandmother taught me not to let people make fun of you cheaply. If it's okay with you, it's cool with me, why don't you and I sit in this seat side by side, together, as if it's the most normal thing in the world?" And she said, "Cool."

So Ron Dellums and Pat Schroeder sat on this one seat for the entire organizational meeting, and we never acted as if—even though we wanted to scream, we said, "No." We just let our silence and our behavior handle it. And they didn't know what to do because we didn't scream. The next time, the two seats were there. We made our point, and we moved on.

JOHNSON: I wanted to ask you a question going back just a little bit. This is the early years of the Congressional Black Caucus, and I know that one of the strategies was to try to get black Members on as many of the standing committees as possible, to spread around. Was there anyone else that the caucus had in mind to serve on the Armed Services Committee before you said that that's where you wanted to go?

DELLUMS: It's interesting you asked that question. The Speaker suggested Barbara [Charline] Jordan, but I had anticipated Barbara Jordan coming from Texas. When she won, I called Barbara Jordan, congratulated her, look forward to working with her. I said, "I'm going to make an effort to serve on the House Armed Services Committee, but I have a feeling that you, coming from Texas, with all the military bases out of there, would be an acceptable option—alternative to the Berkeley guy." Okay? And she said, "I want to be on the Judiciary Committee." She said, "I think you ought to be on the

Armed Services Committee. That's a role that you need to play." I said, "Why don't you write a letter immediately, let them know?"

Back to this meeting with Carl Albert, when he said, "Well, you know, we can put Barbara Jordan on." I said, "Well, didn't you get a letter from Barbara Jordan?" He went, "Yes." I said, "Didn't she say she wanted to be on the Judiciary Committee?" "Yes." "So she's out." Now, again, back confronting with me.

We took the option off the table, because she had said she was with me, and she thought that I should be there. She wanted to be someplace else. And an interesting thing. That decision pushed her into history with her amazing speech during the Watergate era—the Constitution state. She went where she needed to be historically, and I think I went where I needed to be.

JOHNSON: You briefly mentioned Chairman Hébert, and I was wondering if you could—after that first meeting—if you could talk about your recollections of him as a chairman. And then just to follow up with that, the Watergate Babies in the House, and then the fact that after his two terms as chairman of Armed Services, how he was ousted by the Democratic Caucus, and what a close vote that was. So a two part question: your recollections of him and then his demise on the Armed Services Committee.

DELLUMS: F. Edward Hébert of Louisiana—he was a conservative Democrat. He saw young people like myself and Pat Schroeder in very different terms because we were coming with a different narrative, with a different set of politics. We were articulating different policies and principles, but I decided—actually Pat and I talked about this, but—Bella [Savitzky] Abzug and I talked about it as well because Bella came from New York. She was also the ultimate progressive, and she said, "Ron, we need to learn how to make friends with

these folks, to disarm them with friendship. You can't win fighting against [them]." She was absolutely right.

I remember, I was offered a speech in his [Hébert's] district in Louisiana at some university. I called him up, and I said, "Mr. Chairman, I've been asked to give a speech in your district. I'm on my way there. Do you want me to attack you or praise you—whatever will be beneficial to you?" He fell out laughing, and from that point forward, we had a good relationship. There was nothing negative, and he never went out of his way to be disrespectful or harmful. I was part of the process. Then when they awakened one morning and realized that it wasn't my way or the highway.

If I might depart for a moment to come back to that, I remember when I first came back here. One night I went up on the steps of the Capitol—when you could freely move around then—and I'm sitting there by myself, and I'm going, "It's a long way from 1014 Wood Street, a kid with holes in his pants." I said, "I'm a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Why am I here?" I literally had this conversation. "Is it to change the venue of my activism, because I was a pretty damn good activist in Oakland–Berkeley. I could carry a good sign. I could man the bear cage with the best of them. I could've stayed home and been in closer proximity to my family and friends. So why'd they send me all the way to Washington? Was it to keep carrying the sign? Or was it to put the sign down, walk inside the building, take my seat at the table, and say, "I'm here to join you in governing and in representing the half million people that sent me here to represent them." So I decided to opt for the latter.

Going back to the chairman of Armed Services and my other colleagues, when they realized that what I was really trying to say to them was that if there were 217 other people who came from Berkeley, it would be my way or

the highway. If there were 51 people in the Senate who came from Berkeley, it'd be our way—but that wasn't the case. So Mr. Hébert, I've got to figure how to sit down with you. I've got to figure out how to sit down with you, Sonny [Gillespie V.] Montgomery from Mississippi, and other people from other parts of the country, and we've got to figure out how to govern this country. I've got to figure out how to stand for what I believe in and come every day and fight for what I believe in. But in some kind of way, at the end of the day, we've got to end up doing what ultimately is in the best interest of the country. I'm happy that I had that conversation with myself because it allowed me to frame how I was here to function.

I decided that they thought I was going to be the loudmouth guy from Berkeley. They had no idea that I would actually become a student of "Pentagonese," and that surprised them. I think at the end of the day was the basis upon which they appointed me subcommittee chair and ultimately elected me chair of the committee. They sensed that, while I was committed to the principles and the values that I came here with, I did want to become as thoughtful and as articulate and as smart as I could be on the full range of issues dealt with before that committee.

JOHNSON: That just made me think of a quote I just wanted to read to you and get your opinion on. Representative Tom [Thomas Joseph] Downey of New York, in 1991, he talked about your tenure on Armed Services, and this was his quote when talking about you. He said, "When he first sat on Armed Services, people were openly rude to him. They would talk over him and ignore him. They thought he had only one dimension. Today," this is in 1991, "the committee falls silent when he talks. His beliefs have not changed, but today he knows his stuff, which makes him formidable." Do you think this was an accurate depiction of your tenure on Armed Services?

DELLUMS: Like I said, that's an out of body experience. I'm honored that Tom, who was a good friend, would say something like that, but I worked hard to try to get to that point, and you know, it was just very straight-forward. I felt that if I was going to go on Armed Services Committee, get in the trenches and learn, and become as smart as I possibly can—frankly, if I could be smarter than anybody else—but go at it with great diligence because my view was that irrespective of where I stood on the political spectrum—that I had to have a set of policies that would allow me to talk about the role of the military and foreign policy as coherently as anybody else.

If it were different—it's like, for example, I remember I offered an alternative military budget, and one of my Republican colleagues, he was really trying to be positive in his own kind of humorous way, so he said, "Would the gentleman from California yield?" I yielded to him, and he said, "I see here that the gentleman actually has an Army and a Navy and a Marine Corps." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "And you don't have a zero for the military budget? You actually have a number?" I said, "Yes, sir." "You have all of these things." I said, "Yes." He said, "So we're going to have to take this budget seriously." Well, that was the point.

I went at that in a very, very serious way. I'm honored that he [Downey] would say that because they did get up one morning and did realize that I wasn't one-dimensional. I'd stay up all night—like sometimes they have these wonderful debates with Les [Leslie] Aspin and others about different [policies]—I'd stay up all night, like getting ready for the big fight, right?

I enjoyed it at one level, but I took it with tremendous seriousness because I thought if there was anybody on that committee or in the House of Representatives who took the floor on these issues, who had to be credible and who had to be substantive, I was that guy. It was important for me to do

all the work necessary to be credible, and so when I came at them, they would take me seriously.

JOHNSON: I wanted to go back to the Watergate Baby question.

DELLUMS: Oh, I'm sorry.

JOHNSON: No, that's fine. I guess, first, if you could describe the atmosphere, the environment in the House when the Watergate Babies came to town and then also specifically about the caucus vote that was so close in Chairman Hébert's—which led to his ousting. It was only a couple of votes that he lost by, so anything that you remember about that event.

DELLUMS: Well, when the guys came in—George Miller and Tom Downey—it was a wonderful time because they said, "Ron, how did you survive before we got here?" I said, "Trust me, we were hanging on by our fingernails." Suddenly, here are the ranks—these young guys with hope and idealism and enthusiasm and courage. Suddenly, it didn't feel quite as lonely because now ranks were growing, and here are these wonderful guys who literally became lifetime friends as well. That was a great time in my life because here comes this whole new cadre of bright, capable people.

Watergate time period was significant, and I tell people we actually went in rooms and sat down for hours and listened to all these tapes. "Really? Really?" "Yes." We realized that we went through this incredible period of history. But then each Congress, you got to reorganize, and my colleagues decided it was time to move the Armed Services Committee to another place. And with some drama, we won. And Eddie Hébert, who was considered one of the old guys from the old guard, was removed, and that just opened up a whole other door. Might I just make one other quick thing?

JOHNSON: Sure.

DELLUMS: It hit me. When I got appointed to the Armed Services Committee, the Congressional Black Caucus said, "If we can put Ron on the Armed Services Committee, we could put anybody anywhere." They gained strength. Initially, they didn't think it could be done, but when it was done, it reinforced the Congressional Black Caucus' sense of its own strength and its own capabilities because we thought that was impossible. If we could do that, we could do anything. They became much more confident in being able to say, "Representative So-and-so we want on this committee or Representative So-and-so we want on this committee." Our objective was to spread out and put ourselves on all of the various committees so that when we spoke with each other, that we could talk about the full range of legislative activity here and that we had a voice in.

JOHNSON: One question I wanted to ask you before we moved on was when you decided that you wanted to serve on Armed Services, was this something that you had to explain to your constituents? Was there backlash? Did they think that maybe you were going against some of your promises by serving on that committee?

DELLUMS: No, they knew exactly. They knew exactly why the peacenik [was] on Armed Services Committee. So, no, they understood. There was no negative feedback from that because they understood that part of what I wanted to do, and my reason for going on the Armed Services Committee was to say here are alternative ideas, here are alternative policies. During that period, there was a great deal of conversation about—we [are] back to the same square one. Too many of our dollars were going into the military budget, going into military intervention. We needed to redirect a number of our resources into important domestic issues. It was like today, right?

People understood that part of my responsibility was to be willing to raise the question of inappropriate intervention. Where we thought that the problems didn't lend themselves to a military solution, Ron had a voice on Armed Services. Where we needed to challenge the priorities, Ron had a voice on the committee. Where we needed to raise the question of the danger of nuclear weapons and arms control, Ron had a credible platform from which to speak, the Armed Services Committee. I wouldn't be an outsider raising these issues. I would be inside. So I don't recall any negativism in that.

JOHNSON: You were the first African American to serve on Armed Services, and you also were the first African-American chairperson. What did these milestones mean to you personally, and then what did you also think they meant to the larger African-American community?

DELLUMS: Well, in the first instance, I went to my colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus to support my candidacy going on because I thought that was a powerful declaration. "We want to serve on all the various committees." But my going on the Armed Services Committee really transcended race. It was about overarching human questions. Again, I was the first African American ever elected to Congress from a majority-white constituency. My district was 71 percent white. Granted, these were very progressive people, but I won in such a district, all right?

To answer your question, let me step back for a moment. I remember the day that I announced after people convinced me that this is something that they wanted me to do. The first question was, "This is a white district. What makes you think, as a young black man, you could win in a white district, against a white incumbent?"

My response was, "Your question assumes a monolith known as the white community. It's a monolith that I reject because I don't think that it exists. When I look out there, I don't see the white community. I look out there, and I see white folks who opposed the Vietnam War and who raised their voices in the name of peace, and if I raised my voice in the name of peace, they will vote. When I look at the white community, I see white senior citizens, I see white labor union people, I see white students, I see white consumers. I see all of this. If I speak articulately to these different issues—because people don't get up in the morning one-dimensional. They get up, very complex people—and if I speak to the complexity of their interests, and I do so in a way that's superior to the incumbent, then I will beat that person. I believe that at the end of the day, when the smoke clears, that that's going to happen, and then I'm going to beat this guy, at least at the level of 55 percent." And that's what happened—crossed my fingers. {laughter}

JOHNSON: It was a good prediction.

DELLUMS: Yes, so that was the whole point. When I went on Armed Services Committee as the first black person, that was important to knock that barrier down so that race is not a factor. It's like when Martin Luther King stood up and opposed the Vietnam War, where people said, "Wait a minute. You're a civil rights leader. Why are you raising your voice about national security matters? That's not your business." Well, my going on the Armed Services Committee, in one sense, said, "Yes, it was our business, and we're here." Okay? That was an important part of it. But my going there also was a larger human question, which was the role of non-intervention, the role of peace, the role of arms control, the role of appropriate priorities in our society. It was both, okay?

Then ultimately, to become the chair of the Armed Services Committee, as an African-American guy—see, I think it might even be more significant that they elected me not so much as the African-American guy but as the progressive guy. Because when my colleagues, after they announced a vote, and I had like 90-something—I think there were maybe three or four votes or so against me—and they said, "Ron, I voted for you, not because we agree, because most of the time we don't agree, but I respect your work ethic. I respect your values. But more important, you got there the hard way. You stood on your principles. So, out of respect, I voted for you."

Sonny Montgomery called me one day and said, "Ron, I'm going to support you as chair," and he was senior to me. Wow, Sonny Montgomery going to support me as chairman? If the southern Democrats, led by Sonny Montgomery on Armed Services Committee, were going to get up and say, "I step aside because I think Ron Dellums would do a better job," that was an amazing thing. Here's this guy from Mississippi. Think about what Martin Luther King would've thought about that move. He would have said, "Woah," okay? That was a powerful thing. At the level of race, it was an amazing moment, but it was also an amazing moment in terms of the politics of it.

I also think that for me, it was a personal triumph because I walked in here, I was the commie-pinko-black dude from Berkeley. That was it. "Radical black man from Berkeley wins election," right? To get up one morning, chairman of Armed Services Committee—amazing transformation.

If I might just pursue that further—I'm going to become at first subcommittee chairman. I remember Sonny Montgomery came in, and he sat next to me, and he said, "Ron, what committee are you thinking about?" Well subcommittees, many Members wanted Subcommittee on Military

Construction [Mil Con] because one thing that we learned was that what translates into power here is your ability to say yes or no with real money. So here's the budget for all of the military construction everywhere, billions of dollars.

Sonny looked at me, and he said, "Now Ron, you know they're not going to give you Mil Con. Now you come a long way, but you ain't come that far," okay? He said, "You know, because these are the family jewels, and they're not going to give you that." He said, "With that said, what committee are you thinking?" I had thought about it, because I said, "Okay, how do I get by these guys in a way that doesn't create a problem?" So I said, "Sonny, I'm an old social worker, give me Personnel Committee." He said, "Well we're thinking about Personnel." But it was interesting.

I ended up coming back actually—so I had Personnel and then later actually got the Mil Con subcommittee, and it was incredible, right? I'm thinking how do I bring together my colleagues on this subcommittee? We don't agree on policy. We have different views about the weapons systems. We have different views about the use of military forces. So it hit me. The one place where we have to be in agreement is on personnel. We may argue over whether you should deploy, but once they deploy, it's the quality of their lives, and it's their welfare. We may disagree on the deployment of a weapon system, but if you deploy it, and there [is] personnel…So everybody came together with me on a bipartisan basis because they could work with me around personnel matters.

If you look at the record, we got more family housing because I'm running up and down stairs and looking at child care centers and talking with—but it unified the committee. They got used to working with me because there was a place of least resistance. That was the place where Republicans and

Democrats could work together, and that was on the quality of life for personnel. That's when we began to trust each other because we could work very diligently in those areas. When we fanned out into areas of disagreement, we could have disagreement without falling apart with each other, and it was a wonderful experience actually.

JOHNSON: At this point in your career and on your tenure on Armed Services, did you have a goal of becoming chairman? Were you trying to lay the groundwork for that?

DELLUMS: Personally, in my wildest imagination, I did not think I was going to be chairman of the Armed Services Committee. First of all, by seniority, okay? If you come in at the same time, it's alphabetical. Les Aspin sat right in front of me, right? Then Sonny Montgomery was there. Les Aspin was a young guy. I remember one day, Les and I finally made it to the top row. We had come all—and we're sitting there, I said, "Les, remember when we were way down the—" I said, "Man, straight shot to the chair." I said, "Man, do you ever think about running for the Senate?" At first he started to answer me seriously, and then he looked over at the chair, and he said, "No way, no how, man, I'm going to let you,"—and so we started laughing. I said, "Man, I'll come support you. I'll camp out, walk the length and breadth of your state with you, you know that. You're a great guy," but he said, "No, no, no, no, no."

Well fast forward. President [William J. (Bill)] Clinton takes credit for that because he said, "Remember, they talk about African Americans that I appointed to the Cabinet, but had I not appointed Les Aspin [as Secretary of Defense]—literally, I made the way for you to become the first black chairman of the House Armed Services Committee." He used to take credit for that.

But I had never really thought about it because I thought Les was going to be there forever, and he and I will just be right there together, and at best, I would be sitting next to him, but I had no idea that I would become the chair. Then when the President appoints Les Aspin secretary, then it's Sonny Montgomery and myself. Well, Sonny was chair of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, but Veterans' Affairs versus Armed Services. Come on. I know he's going to exercise his prerogative.

But then I get this call. I was in Oakland, home on a weekend visit with my constituency, and I get this call from Sonny saying, "Ron, I'm going to support your candidacy." It was all over at that point. But it was up until then I really wasn't sure that I was going to be chairman. But back further, I had no knowledge, no thought, that I would ever be chair. I chaired virtually every other subcommittee by the time I got there. I had served as chair of the various subcommittees. I was well-versed in what was going on, but I never thought I'd be chair.

JOHNSON: Do you remember your first day, the first meeting when you were a chairperson, or your first few weeks, even, in what was going through your mind?

DELLUMS: Well, interesting thing, if you go back, I became a full committee chairman with what I think is the least seniority of any person that ever became full committee chairman, at least at that time, when I became chair of the District of Columbia Committee [in 1979], and I had only been here three terms. Charles [Coles] Diggs [Jr.] had been the chair, and then he left. Here I am, this junior member, but by virtue of seniority, I became the chair. So I actually had experience chairing a full committee. But interestingly, nobody ever called me "Mr. Chairman" when I chaired the DC committee. It was

only when I chaired the Subcommittee on Mil Con, "Mr. Chairman," then I realized it had to be something different.

I had some experience at being a full committee chairman, and I clearly had experience as being a subcommittee chairman on Armed Services. But there was some self-consciousness—but real excitement though. Couldn't wait to get to work every day. I mean, it was once in a lifetime. Sometimes I couldn't sleep at night getting ready to—I'm going to have the Secretary of Defense, and the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and so you're on. You've got to be there, you've got to handle this committee, you got to keep focused and keep it moving and stay substantive and be engaging, be able to ask intelligent questions, the whole thing. So that nervous energy but a welcomed challenge, actually. I mean, to be perfectly honest with you, I loved every minute of it. Loved it.

JOHNSON: What was your philosophy as a chairman? How did you go about running the committee?

DELLUMS: That goes back to the first day that I chaired, okay? I remember the night before I was to be elected, and I knew that I was going to win, and Sonny Montgomery—I called Marilyn Elrod, who was the second person that I employed here in Washington, DC, as a freshman. She became a case worker, and I told her, and she moved up with me. And eventually as subcommittee chair, I brought her on the staff, and I called her that night, and I said, "Tomorrow, I'm breaking through a glass ceiling, and you're going to break through that glass ceiling with me. I'm appointing you the first woman staff director of the House Armed Services Committee." To my knowledge, it'd never been done before, on the House or the Senate side, never been done since. So I became the first African-American chairman, progressive guy, and I appointed a woman as staff director.

Two meetings that are very important. One meeting, I asked Marilyn Elrod to call all of the staff people together. I want to meet with them. I walked in the Armed Services Committee on this day, and you can cut the anxiety with a knife. I'm the chair. You have capacity to fire everyone on the spot.

I walked in, and I said, "I want to allay everyone's anxiety. All of you in this room who want to continue to work, you will have that opportunity to continue to work. I'm not comfortable with the idea that, alone, I have the capacity to terminate people's employment. So for those of you who want to work, you have a job here. Whether you stay here or not is a matter of performance, and that will be determined by our new staff director, Marilyn Elrod." Women cried. Wow. Because in their wildest imaginations, they never anticipated that they would see someone appoint a woman staff director. I said, "So whether you stay here, that's going to be with you." I was to later learn that someone told me that within minutes of that meeting, someone called the Pentagon and said, "In case you didn't know it, this guy just unified his entire staff." Okay? "They're all with him."

Then I asked Marilyn Elrod to call a meeting to get in touch with the Ranking Republican [Floyd Davidson Spence]. I said, "Invite all of my Republican colleagues on the Armed Services Committee because I want to meet with them, 2:00," or whatever time. I walked in this room. I'm the only Democrat, brand new chair, and every single Republican on the committee was in the room.

I said, "Let me tell you why I called this meeting. Being in the majority is an aberration. I've been a minority all my life. Being the chair of such an awesome committee with such extraordinary responsibility is a new experience. I came here to say to you—that while I'd been a minority at many different levels—you have been a political minority for 40-some years.

If I rose to become the chair of the Armed Services Committee, and I used this platform to thwart your capacity to function here, would make a mockery of my life and make me a walking hypocrite. I am a minority. I came here to say to you that there will be no secret meetings that you would not be able to attend. You will be treated with dignity and respect. I had to scream to be heard. You will not have to do that. And all of you will have your full opportunity to engage and fully participate in this process. So I came here to guarantee that to you."

The room got super quiet, and I said, "But here's my caveat. I don't want to awaken in the morning and pick up the *Washington Post*, and you're communicating with me through the *Washington Post*. I'm here. I came here voluntarily, and whenever you need to meet with me or choose to meet with me, I'm at your disposal. Just let the Ranking Member know, and we can meet. There's no problem here. Okay?" I said, "And if you shake my hand and say deal, and you break that deal, that's the last time you shake my hand. We understand each other?" They said, "Okay, this guy's for real."

Fast forward one day, Tom [Thomas Stephen] Foley runs into me, he says, "Ron, you're not going to believe this." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "The Republicans stormed into my office, raising holy hell, and they're angry about how the Democrats are treating the Republicans, and guess what? They said the way you treat the Republicans on the Armed Services Committee is the epitome of how they think we ought,"—it was kind of humorous that they were surprised by that.

But the point being was that I was not there to be phony. My motto was this is a democracy. Who am I to—I'm not a dictator. This is a group process. I didn't like it when I had to scream to be heard. I didn't like it when there were attempts to harm me in the process. I cannot become a leader and

project any of those practices. I'm not here to be vindictive. I'm not here to be contradictory. I'm not here to be hypocritical, and I'm not here to be dictatorial.

What I said to them in that room was "Look, we can have our differences. That's politics. That's why we were elected, okay? We can fight it out, but once we reach a consensus, then my responsibility is to present that consensus to the best of my ability, to our broader constituency, which is the full House of Representatives, and I will honor that responsibility." I said, "So we could disagree politically. I'm going to fight my fights, and if I win I win. If I lose, I lose, and we move on."

I said, "Now, but there's one place where we all have to agree." I forgot to tell you, that's what I said. Puzzlement on their faces. "One place where we have to be in absolute agreement." "What is that Ron?" "On the integrity of the process. If we don't agree on the rules, and we don't agree on the integrity of the process, everything is downhill from there. We can fight on issues, but we have to agree on the integrity of the process. My job as chair is to maintain the integrity of the process, to make sure that you participate, that you're treated with dignity and courtesy. I know that some of you guys are going to have to take some things back to your district. That's the oil that greases this incredible machine. If you work it out with Floyd Spence, who is the Ranking Member here, he and I are going to be in absolute communication. If you work it out with him, fine with me. We'll work together." When they sensed that that was how I operated, everybody could exhale.

Now an example of whether that could work was—I remember we were in a conference [committee] with the Senate. Sam [Samuel Augustus] Nunn was chair. We got down to about $13, $15 billion—no small money—and maybe a dozen issues that we could not resolve at the panel level. We could

not resolve at the full level. They said, "Kick it to the big four, the two respective chairs and the two respective Ranking Members, and the panel gave us the authority to resolve these issues. Sam Nunn and I agreed that we were going to meet over on the Senate side in one of those little cubbies that the Senate has, and the four of us were going to resolve the issues.

I told Marilyn Elrod, "Get in touch with Floyd Spence, and tell him that we're meeting such and such a time tonight to resolve these matters." Message back from Floyd Spence. "Tell the chairman that he's totally briefed all of us to the max. We know exactly where all the issues are. He briefed us on where he thinks we ultimately can work it out. Tell the chairman he doesn't need me there, that if he and Sam Nunn can work it out, we can live with that. Tell him that he has the trust of the Republicans. I don't need to be there."

Sam Nunn and I ended up the only two people in this room, one night, resolving $13 to $15 billion dollars. We go, "Well what do you need to take back?" Suddenly, Sam Nunn goes, "Well I'll be. It's done." We did it. No staff people in the room. I'm thinking, there's no way anybody in Berkeley would ever believe that Ron Dellums and San Nunn could sit in the middle of the night, a dozen issues, $13 to $15 billion on the table, and resolve the matters without a fight. We got it done. No staff people in the room. We just got it done. And the Republicans said, "Trust you." That was major. Major.

JOHNSON: I just had one final question for you, because you've been so patient answering all of our questions today. What do you think will be your most lasting legacy as—either just your tenure on Armed Services or specifically as chairman of Armed Services Committee?

DELLUMS: You know, the interesting thing is, I personally think that the legacy for me will more than likely not have to do with Armed Services. It'll be the sanctions against South Africa. I think that'll be the big piece. And interesting, even though the Dellums bill never became law, people wrote and said, "Even though it never became law, it hung over South Africa like the Sword of Damocles." It was the pressure that freed [Nelson] Mandela. It was the pressure of that bill that caused the negotiation of a new South Africa. It was that bill that ultimately created the environment that allowed Nelson Mandela to be elected to be president. I'm very proud of that moment, and I only played one role in that. At some point, we can talk about that.

On Armed Services, I think if there's anything that I could look back—I'd like to think that people will say that, "The guy had integrity." How many people could present a bill and then say, "Now in my role as chair, I've carried out my responsibility to present the consensus of our committee. Now let me take that hat off and put on the hat of the Representative of Oakland and Berkeley and tell you where I disagree." My colleagues could actually say, "You know, I could deal with that," and they could respect that because they always knew where I was.

I was always willing to fight the fight, win or win, lose or lose. But I never, ever used the committee for personal reasons. I never [said] "Well, we're not going to hear this." Who am I to say what we're not going to—not a dictatorship. Some Members get really caught up in being chair, and they sort of think they're like gods, but I never played that role. I never felt that I had the power as one person to thwart the process. If I wanted to take the process in a different direction, then we all met, and we talk about it, and

they either said, "Okay, let's go down that road," or they said, "No, we don't go down that road."

Finally, my philosophy also was the only way you have any possible chance of getting Members to come to the same conclusion, they to share the same information. I told the committee that. I said, "So I'm going to take us on the journey to explore information." Now, for example, when Aspin was chair, he had a policy committee over here. I made the entire full committee the policy committee. Everybody came along. We all shared the same information.

At the end of the day, I think in the last meeting or so, if you go back and look at the record, Republicans and Democrats actually said that. "You took us on an intellectual challenge, on a substantive challenge." I'm out there talking about the use of force in a post-Cold War era. I mean, who's holdings hearings on stuff like that? My thought was let me take all the Members, give them an opportunity to all be members of the policy committee, and let's all hear the same thing so that that wasn't a committee that the chairman could use for my purposes but a committee that would allow everyone to be educated in the same way. I think that was different.

So maybe a legacy is that I tried to come at it differently. I tried to come at it with integrity. And that I humbly understood my role but also understood what powers I did have to influence, but I tried to use them in the context of a democratic process, and an open, transparent approach to everything.

JOHNSON: Was that philosophy that you just mentioned, was that something that you think evolved over time that you learned, or you thought was the best way to get things done in the House, or was this something that you sat down and

talked to other Members and came up with this idea? Where did that originate from?

DELLUMS: Which part?

JOHNSON: Your idea of not having the policy committee, of letting all the Members be an active and equal part of the process.

DELLUMS: Well, you know, I'd like to think that that comes out of just growing up in a family that cared about things like that and hearing people like Martin Luther King articulate. I felt that was part of who I needed to be, which was to respect people and to see them as equals and to engage them.

Also, I think part of it was my social work training, okay? There's a fundamental principle in social work—now that I'm thinking about your question even more deeply—that I really think helped me politically. Start where people are, not where they ought to be—fundamental principle in the social work process, in the therapeutic process. You start where people are. If you're going to start where people are, not where they ought to be, how do you start? You start listening, hearing. You come non-judgmentally. For me to approach my colleagues with that value in mind, "Wait a minute, let me start where they are, not where they ought to be, because if I start where they ought to be, then it's a partisan battle." If I say, "Okay, this is where they are, how do I work with them in a way that takes them from here to here?" But if I start fighting from here, don't make any sense. I think at one point that was an advantage because I was trained a different way. Most of the Members of Congress trained as lawyers or business people. I'm a social worker, and so when I tell people, they go, "Wow, that's amazing. I never thought [to] start where people are, not where they ought to be."

I taught my staff that. Start where people are not where they ought to be. And don't judge. Come into this fight non-judgmentally. I didn't have to come into the fight adversarial. You come in listening. You come in educative. You have to hear people. You have to listen carefully and be part of the educative process. That's a very, very different approach, and I think that stood me well.

I think it's a combination of my social work training, social work values, what I was hearing out there. And the fact that I knew if I walked in here when Spiro [Theodore] Agnew in 1970 said, "This is the most dangerous person to be elected to Congress since Vito [Anthony] Marcantonio—if there was somebody that needed to come here and to learn…" So I came to learn. I sat on the floor. Every day, I listened. I watched how the rules—I observed the people that were heard. What are their characteristics? Why are they respected? Why are they heard? How do people operate here who are successful people? How do you do this in a way that lets the substantive fight be the substantive fight? The issues that we deal with in the Congress, I used to say, they dwarf us as individuals. If we're going to put personal animosities into that, coming to the work place—almost impossible. The issues we confront are so incredible—that in and of itself is stressful. We don't need to come at each other like this.

That's how I tried to do it. It wasn't perfect. There were a few times when I flew off. "Mr. Chairman, we never saw you angry. Oh my God! But you're a man of peace." I said, "Well, I told you that I'm a man of peace. I didn't say that I was always a peaceful man. Under some circumstances, you can piss me off." They said, "Okay, we understand that." But I tried. I hope I'm not rambling.

JOHNSON: No, not at all. Was there anything else that you wanted to add to our session today?

DELLUMS: No. At some point, I would like to—we can talk about some other things. We can talk about the South Africa piece.

JOHNSON: Definitely.

DELLUMS: A few other things. No, but this has been fun. I had to think about it for a while, but I hope I got out what I needed to get out to you.

JOHNSON: This has been great. Thank you.

DELLUMS: I had a great time here. It was one of the highest points of my life. I was honored to be here.

—THE HONORABLE RONALD V. DELLUMS—

INTERVIEW TWO

JOHNSON: This is Kathleen Johnson with the Office of the House Historian. The date is June 19, 2012, and today, I'm with former Representative Ron Dellums of California. We're in the House Recording Studio.

Today, if it's okay with you, I'd like to talk about civil rights and starting off about how you first became involved in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

DELLUMS: Yes. Well, it was very interesting. I remember one day, the Congressional Black Caucus was meeting. The word comes into the meeting that a group of quote "militant Polaroid workers" were in Washington, DC, on Capitol Hill, and wanting very much to have an immediate meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus. The caucus had an agenda, and I was considered the young radical guy, so they said, "Send Ron to meet with the Polaroid workers." Being a freshman, fine. They said, "Ron, why don't you go meet with the Polaroid workers. Then come back and report to us." On the way out the door, John Conyers [Jr.] of Detroit gets up and says, "I will accompany Ron." So he and I go to this meeting with the Polaroid workers.

If you recall, the identity passes that the black South Africans had to have—those pictures were taken by Polaroid. Polaroid was saying, "Look, in one sense, we're working for a company that is participating, at some level, in this process. We want to challenge that." Out of that conversation, I agreed to work with them to fashion the first sanctions bill against South Africa. We did that. When we first entered—I don't recall all the features of it—but this was our first, sort of, rudimentary effort at trying to fashion a sanctions bill against South Africa.

John Conyers was my only cosponsor then. This was late '71, early '72, when there was no real organized, strong, movement here. I mean, there were people protesting, but didn't have the kind of movement that ultimately evolved. That's how I got started in the process. As time went on, and as the movement developed, disinvestment became the cry of the movement. As time went on, our sanctions bill morphed into disinvestment.

JOHNSON: What were you hoping to accomplish at this point? Because this was 1972, and you said that there really wasn't a full-fledged movement. So what did you think would happen?

DELLUMS: Well, two things. One, it was my early view, and I think the view of many people, that if we introduced the bill, it would provide a rallying point. It would be an educative tool to say, "This is what is happening to our people in South Africa," and that a movement could emerge around the specifics of a particular piece of legislation. It was a rallying tool, and it was an educative tool—an opportunity to bring national attention to the travesty of apartheid in South Africa.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that you worked with John Conyers. As time went on, were there other members of the CBC in particular that you worked with on this?

DELLUMS: Yes. At some point, everyone in the Congressional Black Caucus was totally committed and supportive of the process. Charles Diggs, who was the first chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, was "Mr. Africa" for all of us. He was the senior Member on the Foreign Affairs Committee. He was the expert on these matters. He was involved as well.

Over time, Bill [William Herbert] Gray [III] took a very significant and exceptional role in the whole thing and, in many ways, helped to fashion the Foreign Affairs Committee sanctions bill that ultimately came out of the

committee. There were a number of members of the Congressional Black Caucus who were all involved in this process. Over time, Maxine Waters, who started off in the California state legislature, was a significant person in bringing similar legislation and attention at the state level in California and then came back here, was a significant part of the effort as well. There were a number of people.

JOHNSON: When did the anti-apartheid movement become a significant issue for the Black Caucus?

DELLUMS: I think in the '80s, when things started to really, really come together. Labor was significantly involved, you had the faith community was involved. Students were holding protests in different places around the country. Into the '80s it began to become a very large, large gathering. I remember it was a huge gathering in New York, different places around the country. I would say in the '80s, when it really became very, very significant.

Walter [Edward] Fauntroy, who played a very exceptional role in this whole thing, was part of a group of people that became activists around the embassy and began to demonstrate in front of the embassy, and some of them got arrested. I remember, one day, the phone rings at my home, and my son said, "Hey Pop, Congressman Fauntroy is on the phone." I picked up the phone, and I said, "Walter, where do you want me to be, and what time do you want me to be there to get arrested?" He started laughing. He said, "How did you know?" I said, "I've been watching the news. For you to call me, I know that you're asking me to come and be there." I think it was the next day when we came, and we got arrested.

I remember I spent the night in jail. The next day, I saw these gray whiskers coming out. {laughter} By the time I got before the magistrate, or the judge,

it was late afternoon, around 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening. They let us free, and I go home, and I [said], "I'm not going to shave this beard until [Nelson] Mandela is free." That was the beginning of this beard.

But the thing is, once Mandela was freed, and it was the new South Africa, someone said, "Ron, you ought to call a press conference in South Africa and shave." {laughter} I said no because, by that time, it had become part of who I am and the person that I saw every morning in the mirror. I didn't cut it off. But that was the genesis of how that began.

JOHNSON: So this was in 1984, when you were arrested. Did you have any second thoughts when you were in jail about what you were doing?

DELLUMS: No, not at all. I was honored. It was my first time spending a night in jail. And I was reflecting on that. I said, "Here's Nelson Mandela, who has spent years in prison. I'm just here for a few hours." This was a very small price to pay to help raise the issue and to be part of what we all hoped would strike an evolving effort. Because the more people that would come, the more people that got arrested, the more attention, the more pressure that, ultimately, the Congress would have to ultimately act, because the movement was getting larger, okay?

The reason why I introduced the disinvestment bill was because I'm a very firm believer that there are only two factors over which any of us have control. Everything else, you don't really have control. But there are two things over which you do have control: your fidelity, your faithfulness to what you believe in, and your willingness to show up every day for the fight.

With those as the guiding principles, I kept introducing the disinvestment bill even though people said, "There's no way this is going to happen. This is

outside the realm of reality. It's way too radical. It's just not going to happen."

The movement does strike a chord. It does reach critical mass to the point where Congress says, "We have to do something." The Foreign Affairs Committee works on a piece of sanction legislation in, I believe, 1986. Being faithful and showing up, I go to the Rules Committee with the disinvestment bill. They give us one hour of debate—half hour for, half hour against. I said, "Okay, it's important for us to show up and be there. Put that alternative on the table, okay?"

Now, sidebar. Some of my southern colleagues said, "Ron, are you going to introduce one of those Berkeley amendments?" I said, "Why do you ask?" They said, "Well, give us a chance to vote against your bill, so we could vote for the committee bill. Because when we go home, people are going to say, 'How could you vote for this liberal bill?' Then we could say, 'No, if you want to see something real liberal, you should have seen the thing we voted against when that guy Dellums introduced the bill.'" I recognized that I had a role to play much earlier, but in this context, it was a role—redefined the debate.

People often think that the center of American politics is a real place, that it's a static place, that some way you could discover the center of American politics. My view is that there's no such place, that the center is contingent upon who shows up for the fight. If we show up with disinvestment, the committee bill is not the ultra-left wing bill, it's in the middle because the people who were opposed to any sanctions were on the right. Here we are, ostensibly, on the left. The committee bill becomes the center. In one sense, who shows up can, in my opinion, define the debate.

So they agreed to allow the Dellums amendment to come in the nature of a substitute. There's 11 hours of debate on the main bill. At the end of one hour, the chairman of the committee says, "All time is expired on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California. All in favor, signify by saying 'aye.'" Well, there were a handful of Democrats on the floor, more Democrats than Republicans.

[Mark Deli] Siljander of Michigan was the Republican guy who handled the half hour against the Dellums amendment. My colleague said, "Ron, we're going to give you at least a voice-vote victory," so everybody screams. There were maybe 10 people or more. "Aye!" Few people on the floor on the Republican side, "All opposed." "No." "In the opinion of the chair, the ayes have it." Well, no problem because the chair knew that Siljander would get up and say, "On this I note the absence of a quorum and make a point of order and call for the yeas and nays." Ah, so I figure, "If we can break 150, it would at least be a moral victory. We would bring pressure on the process."

But a drama starts to unfold because nobody got up to seek a record vote. The chairman is apoplectic, he goes, "I said," like, wake up somebody, "The ayes have it." Still nothing. Silence. "The ayes have it, the ayes have it," and the motion carries. Totally crazy, based on people's perception. There's no way that the Dellums amendment was going to pass and, suddenly, there I am. They said, "Ron, you won." I almost fainted, right? Because it was in the nature of a substitute, they have to go immediately to final passage. People came in and said, "What's going on? There's a final—what happened to the 11 hours?" They said, "You won't believe this. The Dellums amendment passed in the nature of a substitute on a voice vote." People were absolutely—"What is this?"

Now you've got a serious problem. If you call for a recorded vote, and you vote against the Dellums bill, that would be interpreted as being supportive of apartheid going forward because this is now the only vehicle for people to express themselves. The Members got together very quickly and decided, "Let's voice-vote this thing." They voice-voted final passage of the amendment in the nature of a substitute. That's how it actually happened.

Siljander walks into the well, and he says, "Ron, I made you a hero for a moment." He said, "I like you, I respect you, you didn't lie, you didn't say that you guaranteed that disinvestment was going to work. You said you thought this was the only option. I respect that. But look, man, this is way too radical. My party controls the Senate. It's going to die. It's never going to happen. But I made you a hero for a moment."

He shook my hand, he started to walk way, and I said, "Siljander, hold on for just a moment. Let me give you another thought. Tomorrow morning, front page of every major newspaper in the country is going to say, 'House passes bill to bring sanctions against South Africa.' Every television station, tonight and tomorrow morning, lead story, 'Congress passes bill.' There's a movement out there. Movements are strengthened by victories. People in the movement will be buoyed by, and strengthened by, this effort. While you think this is going to die, I would suggest to you that what you have inadvertently done has brought much more pressure on the Republican-controlled Senate. They're going to do more than they would have done had this bill not passed. So maybe I'll have the last laugh, my friend." He looked at me, like, "Oh my God."

Well, that's what happened. The Senate passed a bill. President [Ronald W.] Reagan had said on a number of occasions, "I will veto any sanctions bill that comes to my desk." So now I have the absolute right to go to conference

[committee] with the Senate to work out the difference between disinvestment and the bill that was fashioned, that came out of the majority Republican-controlled Senate. There was a big meeting that was called. Senator [Richard Green] Lugar, Senator [Edward Moore (Ted)] Kennedy, people in the movement from TransAfrica and other places, rooms full of people.

The theme of it was, "Ron, if you demand to go to conference, and you change any portion of this bill, the likelihood of the Republican-controlled Senate overriding President Reagan's veto becomes slim and none." In fact, Senator Lugar used the term, he said, "Ron, I don't want to be ham-fisted, but if you demand to go to conference, and we change this bill, I can't guarantee override. But the bill we passed, I can guarantee."

Now the progressive wing of the party doesn't often win. Here was this great moment for us, but in that moment I said, "This is not about me. This has nothing to do with Ron Dellums. This has everything to do with the future of South Africa." So I stood up, and I said, "It's very clear to me that the consensus in this room is that if we don't override the veto, we will send the wrong message to South Africa. That part of a loaf is better than no loaf at all. If I step aside and acquiesce to the Senate bill coming to the floor of the House, so that becomes the vehicle, you can guarantee override, and that will be the message that would be sent to South Africa. We will have taken a giant step down this road to ultimately end apartheid in South Africa. I will acquiesce." And I acquiesced.

Now there are a number of people who think, because they don't know the history, that President Reagan vetoed the Dellums bill. No. He vetoed the bill reported out of the committee led by Senator Lugar. I stepped aside to allow it to happen, and it passed. That was the 1986 sanction bill. It was, in

my humble opinion, not as strong as it could have been, clearly. Again, being faithful, showing up every day for the fight, I said, "We have to keep pressure on the process." I kept introducing the disinvestment bill to keep bringing pressure on that process so that South Africa would know that the 1986 sanction bill was only one statement but that there were forces in this country that were trying to continue to bring even greater pressure. My effort and our effort was not to bring South Africa to its knees but to bring South Africa to its senses.

A couple of years later, the Dellums bill goes to a multiplicity of committees. The press said there's eight, or whatever, different places where this bill will die. Fascinating thing happened. The doggone thing went out to a number of committees, and as it started to come back—because it had different aspects to it—the doggone thing started to get stronger. One of my conservative colleagues from Florida said, "Ron, you really want this disinvestment bill to have strength and have global reach?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I've got an idea." He actually strengthened the bill.

When the thing finally came back two years later, it wasn't the Dellums bill in the nature of a substitute, so sort of [on] the outside. It was the vehicle. The disinvestment bill actually—reported by all of these different committees, ultimately, committees of jurisdiction—came back together. Foreign Affairs Committee brings the bill to the floor. It *is* the disinvestment bill. On a record vote, the thing passed. It got this incredible number of votes.

Now I don't know, I can't vouchsafe this, but during the time that I was chair of the House Armed Services Committee, a German journalist who indicated that he was doing a book, or had done a lot of research, came to our office. I was actually in the Armed Services Committee Room on a

hearing. He met with my staff. He said his research—again, I can't vouchsafe this—he said his research indicated that F. W. de Klerk got in touch with Margaret Thatcher and said, "What do you think I ought to do?"[1] To which her response, according to this guy, was "The Dellums bill passed the House—disinvestment. The Democrats now controlled the Senate. It's probably going to pass the Senate. It's going to become the law of the land." "So what should I do?" To which she responded, "Free Mandela now, and begin to negotiate the future of a new South Africa because if you wait until the disinvestment bill is passed, you will have no leverage." He [the journalist] said, "Tell Mr. Dellums that while his bill never actually became law, it hung over South Africa like the sword of Damocles."

I was honored to play a very small role. I think all of us—Bill Gray played a very important role. He pushed the sanction bill—he and a number of my other colleagues—through the Foreign Affairs Committee. Senator Lugar stepped up as the Republican chair and offered a piece of legislation. He said, "If this bill stays the way it is, we will guarantee an override." He kept his word. They overrode the veto. A number of people played a very significant and important role. I think it was in the aggregate that all of this happened.

Again, we were only part of it. We were the legislative people and the activists in the United States, but there were thousands and millions of people in South Africa and other places around the world that played a very important part. When you step back and look at it from that larger dimension—played a very small role. But I was honored to have played that role.

JOHNSON: I wanted to go back and ask you a few things about 1986, when the surprise vote that you described a few minutes ago. You were quoted as saying afterwards, "This is the highest point in my political life, the most significant and personally rewarding. It has been a long journey to this moment."

DELLUMS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember saying that? Does that still hold true for you?

DELLUMS: Yes. Because even though it was dramatic, it was a fluke in one sense, it was Siljander making the very personal and individual decision not to rise and ask—this was 15 years of our lives. We had been pushing this since late '71, early '72, into 1986.

I remember that night. I got home, it was late. I had literally put on my running shoes, and I went out of the house and I started to run. I ran and ran and ran until I couldn't run anymore. I just sat down on the curb, and I just cried. That was an incredible moment. To be a person that grew up in the hood, modest family but caring people, to have found myself in a place where I could be part of history, to help change the world in some way, was an overwhelming feeling. I don't know if there are many things that could overshadow that in my life. That was just extraordinary.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Bill Gray a couple of times, and I just wanted to follow up on that. Since he also had a bill, an anti-apartheid bill with sanctions, and then you had yours that was more the disinvestment—

DELLUMS: The disinvestment, economic, yes.

JOHNSON: Exactly. Did you two work together at all? Was there any kind of strategy, that if he had this more conservative, you had a little bit more radical, that somehow this would get the end that you both wanted?

DELLUMS: Well, it was interesting because we were both, actually, doing our thing. As I said, my view was, help define the debate. Because earlier on, my conservative colleagues would frequently ask me, "Are you going to introduce the Dellums

amendment?" I remember Phil Burton said to me, "Ron, you have a role to play." I said, "Yes. Redefine the debate." So I kept trying to do that.

It was important to show up. I understood that the disinvestment bill was the cry of the movement. It was the cry of many South Africans who came here and said, "We want disinvestment," alright? That was the cry of the activists. That was the cry of the movement. That was the cry of the demonstrators and the protesters.

But I also understood that there was a legislative process that was more pragmatic, that it's the give and take. Because you got Representatives from all over the country, and you got to come together and figure out what, ultimately, is in the best interest of the country and what is the best statement that we could make. That doesn't necessarily end up being the cry of the activists. The cry of the movement is to bring pressure. The legislative process becomes a practical application of that. Okay, how do we ultimately come together from all over the country, and from different parties, and fashion a piece of legislation? That may sound strange in today's context, but in that context, that was what we did.

So, Bill Gray was part of the legislative process of trying to determine what that vehicle would be in very practical terms. I saw my role as being faithful to the movement because, back then, we didn't have a Progressive Caucus. It was only a few people. We had to play our role, play our hand. I showed up every day for the fight from that perspective and argued from that perspective, understanding that, in some way, that did two things. One, it gave the movement and people the sense that their ideas were still being put on the floor of Congress. Remember, I came from Oakland and Berkeley against the backdrop of the '60s. That was sort of a sense that we had.

The second part was to bring pressure on the political and legislative process in the Congress itself to get the appropriate committees to bring the best that they could bring to the floor of Congress, ultimately for a vote. That was our effort. People kept saying, "Politics is the art of the possible." My point was that what's possible is what you dare to dream is possible.

JOHNSON: I was asking about you and Representative Gray, and so you're talking about individual Representatives and the role that the played.

DELLUMS: Yes. He and I, we had different roles to play. I know it must have been difficult that day when all of this incredible work went into this piece of legislation that was going to be debated for 11 hours, and in this one hour—dramatic fluke as it were—all that work went out the window. I remember the next day, in the *Washington Post*, one of our colleagues said, "Gray went to the House, and the House went to Dellums." So I had to go to Bill, "*Mea culpa*, *mea culpa*." {laughter} "Let's stay friends." You know what I mean? I could understand the incredible tension when you put significant time of your life into a piece of legislation. And he was absolutely committed. It was not, he was more-or-less committed and I was more-or-less committed. We were both committed. We were just doing different things. We had different roles to play that ultimately, I think—each of us playing out our role—it ended up working out.

JOHNSON: What about the CBC? What role did they play in the mid-1980s? Did they back both pieces of legislation?

DELLUMS: Yes. Absolutely. And because many of the caucus members who related to the activism that was going on in the move—they endorsed both efforts. Most members of the CBC endorsed both efforts. They were there saying ultimately, "It's the strongest we can do," but they were also supporting. So

many Members of Congress cosponsored a number of different approaches. And ours was just one.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Nelson Mandela, and I know you had the opportunity to meet him after he was freed. Can you describe what that was like?

DELLUMS: Well, man, that's fantastic. I was invited on the delegation whose mission was to go to South Africa and come back with recommendations as to whether or not we ought to lift sanctions against South Africa. Bill Gray was chosen to lead the delegation.

And sidebar, I remember, even after the Dellums bill had passed, Speaker Tip [Thomas Philip] O'Neill [Jr.] sent Bill Gray to do the network television interviews on the bill, and I remember I went to the Speaker, and I said, "Progressives don't win very often, but we won. Why didn't you send us to explain?" So it was kind of—even inside the House, even among the leadership, the disinvestment bill was sort of too far out kind of thing. So, anyway, that was that.

We stopped in Lusaka, Zambia, where Nelson Mandela—because he had been freed, and when he left Robben Island, he went to Lusaka, Zambia, to meet with the ANC [African National Congress]. So part of the itinerary of our trip was to stop, okay? I remember I had been in the Congress, obviously, for a long time. But I just never had gotten a chance to go to Africa. You know, your constituents—the whole thing.

So suddenly, I find myself on the continent of Africa, in Lusaka, Zambia. We get there at night, at this modest hotel. I awakened in the morning and wiped the frost off the window, and I look out in—for the first time in my life—the vastness of Africa. I stopped for a moment, and I thought, "My God. Out of

my entire family tree, I'm the first member of my family to go 360." Tears came to my eyes, and I thought, "Wow, how incredible."

Then I thought, "In a few minutes, I'm going to meet Nelson Mandela." So I kept ready. I'd never met Nelson Mandela. Obviously, he was in prison, [I was] going all over the country, "Free my people! Free Mandela!" Okay? "Free South Africa!" Suddenly, I'm in this line, and there I am. Bill Gray says, "Mr. Mandela, I would like you to meet Congressman Ron Dellums from California."

This is my impression of Nelson Mandela. Remember, he wanted to be a heavyweight prizefighter, so he has big hands. He reached out and—because he did this Hollywood double take. I mean, it was classic double take, and then he—I remember his hands. He said, "Ronald Dellums, we have heard much of you. You gave us hope. You kept us alive." We just hugged each other, and tears came. Man, how this man even know me? Had no idea. He was this incredible giant that was in my mind—suddenly he's saying, "You gave us hope, you kept us alive." Wasn't why I did what I did. I did what I did because I thought it was the right thing to do. We were out there to try to help change the world, and bringing the end to apartheid was an important part of it. And here's this man saying, "You kept us alive." So. "We knew of you." That was so humbling and touching.

I remember, I got home, and my kids come, "You met Nelson Mandela? Wow, Pop! What was it like?" I said, "I think I have met the most serene person and the strongest human being that I've ever encountered in my entire life." He was like a saint. He was this incredible man. He was the only guy that called me "Ronald." Everybody else called me "Ron," right?

So remember that at a certain point, all these different cities started to

compete for Mandela's presence. To my absolute shock and amazement, Nelson Mandela goes—and here's L.A. and San Francisco and others competing for this man—Nelson Mandela says, "I'm going to Oakland to thank Ron Dellums' constituency." Wow. What an honor. Where the Oakland A's play, the [Oakland-Alameda County] Coliseum—packed to the rafters, seats on the infield, outfield, you couldn't get in the place. I mean, man, 50,000 people, and it was packed.

I walk out on the stage with Mandela to all this cheering and everything. He said the second thing to me that I will never forget. He looked out into the vastness of this audience, and people often think Oakland, the Bay Area, like "Chocolate City." But what people don't know is that Oakland—or most, many people don't know—is that Oakland is the second most diverse city in America. This is a very diverse region, with African American, Latino, Asian, people from every continent. Many languages are spoken in the Bay Area—anyway. Mandela walks out, and he sees every color, every hue, every culture here. The whole thing. He turns to me, and he said, "Now I better understand you. I now better understand your politics. You represent the human family. You represent the future of South Africa." He said it all, because he saw these people coming together like this. He said, "That's South Africa."

So he gave me two gifts that I will never, ever, ever forget. They were magnificent moments and very humbling moments. But again, as I said, when you put it all together, I played a very tiny role. But I think it's in the aggregate of all of us playing our role, is what ultimately brings change. It's not one of us that does it. It's in the aggregate. I just happened to be in the right place and wanted to be a spokesperson for a perspective that, ultimately, did bring enough pressure from the United States to help, ultimately, bring

South Africa to its senses. Mandela was free. They did negotiate a new future. There is a new South Africa.

JOHNSON: And Nelson Mandela also came to speak before Congress in a Joint Session. Do you remember that at all?

DELLUMS: Yes. The Speaker gave me the privilege of being one of his escorts to the floor of Congress. To escort the president of South Africa to the floor of Congress, coming from where we had come, to ultimately see this and be able to walk onto the floor of Congress, to escort him, was an amazing thing.

I remembered, during that period, when he came that time. He told a story that I thought was incredibly fascinating. He said, "Remember, when I was imprisoned on Robben Island, the races in South Africa, white and black, could not really get together. They could not really see each other, feel each other, and experience each other's humanity because it was such distance." He said, "But in the isolating institution of prison, they came together."

He said, to his shock and amazement, an incredible debate occurred behind prison walls. One perspective was when these blacks come to Robben Island, oppress them, brutalize them, harm them, push them, break them, so that if they ever get out of here, they'll never want to come back, never want to come challenging apartheid.

But he said there was another debate that emerged among other white jailers. Their perspective was, "Well, maybe someday these folks who are the majority of South Africa will become the leaders of South Africa. And maybe we will reap what we sow. So instead of harming them, we should treat them with dignity and respect, so that when they emerge as leaders, they will treat us with dignity and respect." He said it was an incredible debate. And in the isolation of prison, he said, he began to see the humanity of his jailers.

This was an amazing thing. I mean, it was almost counterintuitive. When I went to Pretoria to witness Nelson Mandela's swearing in as president, what was so impressive to me was that standing right behind him were his jailers, at his invitation. Here's a person who could have come out of prison with tremendous anger and bitterness and resentment but who came out and said, "No, let us come together to forge a new South Africa." Here's this incredible guy.

Quick thing on this because there's no way you could elicit this question because you didn't know, but I'm sitting next to Maxine Waters at the event. Mandela was getting sworn in. She said, "Ron, you're crying." I don't always cry, and she said, "Why are you crying?" I said, "I'm remembering a conversation with my mother. I was 10 years old. I'm in the kitchen. My mom says, 'Ronnie, do you know my greatest dream in life is?' And I said, 'Tell me, mom.' And she said, 'Someday, I would like to be in a country where the highest that I looked, to the highest office in the land, to the president, that that person that I'm looking at, looking back at me, looks like me.' She said, 'Do you understand what I'm saying to you?'" And in my own, sort of, juvenile, primitive kind of way, I understood what my mom was saying.

Suddenly, there I am in Pretoria, realizing my mom's dream because I'm looking to the highest office in the land, and the person looking back at me looked like me. I said, "Wow. But I had to come halfway around the world to see this. Maybe someday I can see this in my own country." My mother came within three months of seeing President [Barack] Obama elected President of the United States. I remember the night that he won, I told that story to an audience. I was mayor of Oakland at the time. I said, "But you, in

this audience, are realizing my mom's dream here." It's amazing, absolutely stunning. So I've seen it 360—honored to be here.

JOHNSON: Do you have a little more time? We can ask a few more questions?

DELLUMS: Yes, I think so.

JOHNSON: Okay. I wanted to switch gears a little bit and talk about civil rights. Many minority Members have discussed the idea of surrogate representation. And when you came to Congress in 1971, there were not a large number of black Members. Did you feel any sort of pressure that you were representing African Americans not just in your own district but nationwide?

DELLUMS: Yes. I thought we had an obligation because I think I came from a time when people—we didn't come to be politicians. We really were an extension of a movement. We really were the voice of a movement. Remember, many of us came here against the backdrop of a very tumultuous era of the '60s and all the movements that occurred in the '60s. I happened to come from a place where every movement of the '60s emerged in close proximity and in great simultaneity.

Some places, it was primarily the civil rights movement. But in Oakland, Berkeley, Bay Area—every movement. The civil rights movement, the nationalist movement, the [Black] Panther movement, the feminist movement, the gay liberation movement, the environmental movement, the peace movement, all of it. We came along at a time and in a place where we had to hear each other's analysis and feel each other's pain and rage. Blacks heard whites, and whites heard Latinos, and Latinos heard Asians, the men heard women, the gays heard straights, and straights heard—right across the board. I maintained that a very interesting group of people emerged out of the Bay Area based on that particular experience.

So remember when I won, it was "black radical from California wins election." I came committed to express the concerns of all these folks. I remember, I'm in a congressional district—if you don't mind me—I'm in a congressional district, 1970. Seventy-one percent white. Twenty-nine percent non-white, 18 percent African American, 11 percent Latino, Asian. [Jeffery Cohelan was a] 12-year incumbent, Democratic Party, Fulbright Fellow, labor union—on paper, very strong.

Here's this young black guy that's going to run against a guy in a 71 percent white district. "What makes you think you can win? You're a black guy in a white district." I said, "Your question assumes that there's a monolith known as the white community. I reject that. When I look out there, I don't see a monolith, the white community. I see peace activists, I see labor union people, I see students, I see senior citizens, I see consumers—all of this. If I speak to these concerns, and I will try desperately to do so, at the end of the day, when the dust settles, the majority of people here, based on these ideas, will put that coalition together, and we'll win the election."

When I went out to talk to people, I said, "Look." And I never ran from who I am. I went out there, and I said, "Look, I'm a young black man in a society challenging racism. I will take that responsibility very seriously. If I'm elected to the Congress, I will go there and stand up to fight against the oppression of racism." I go to the Latino and Asian communities, and other people of color, and I said, "I am a member of part of this community that has been victimized as a result of skin color and culture, background. I will stand up for you as well because we share that in common." To the women, "You don't have to be black to be treated as a victim, as an oppressed person. You're an oppressed group of people. I am learning. I will take these learnings to Washington and challenge all forms of oppression." Okay?

Then I would go to the broader white community, and say, "Look, at the end of the day, we're human beings, whatever our color. So preserving the environment, dealing with educational issues, dealing with broader economic issues, dealing with consumer questions—these are human issues. We're all, at the end of the day, human beings. I will go there and stand up for the human family and the quality of life for the human family. I also believe that peace is a superior idea, so I will go fight in the name of peace. I will go and raise my voice for that."

It's a long way of saying to you that I took on that broader responsibility because when I won, I became the first African American in American history to win in a predominately white district. I tell young people that, in 1970, a predominately white district sent a tall, skinny, black guy to Washington to be their congressional Representative. Thirty eight years later, America sends a tall, skinny, black guy from Chicago to be the President of the United States. Moral of the story, the Bay Area was 38 years ahead of its time.

It got beyond all that in that moment. It dealt with intellect, it dealt with political acumen, it dealt with stance on issues, it dealt with values and principles and people. If they had placed a totally racial dimension in that election, I never would have gotten a chance to represent them. They moved beyond that. They said, "No, there are other factors that we need to bring in to play." In that, with peace and other issues being issues, it gave us a chance. I came here totally committed to the idea that I had a responsibility to the movement that I came to represent. I had a serious responsibility to the coalition that put me in office.

I remember, {laughter} some people said, "Well, should this guy be in the Black Caucus because he's representing 71 percent white district?" And people said, "Are you nuts? You know, come on, man." We got past that very

quickly. I became a member of the CBC. I saw my role as embracing the totality of the coalition.

JOHNSON: Who asked that? Was that colleagues on the CBC?

DELLUMS: Yes. {laughter} It was kind of funny. And then some people outside. They said, "Well, you know, how this guy be a legitimate…" I remember students actually asked me that question one day. Someone went, "Are you nuts? You know, what's that all about? We have to be way more sophisticated and intelligent than that," because that's a very limiting and confining set of parameters. At the end of the day, we're human beings and have the right to fully participate in the totality of the process. I will not allow anyone to deny me the ability to be in a total part of it. Race should not be a limiting factor. It's one of the elements that define who you are, but—

I remember my mother saying to me once, "Being black and being of African descent are two of the very important adjectives that describe you. But you are a thousand adjectives. And there are 998 other adjectives that describe you, and when you put them all together, they describe the complexity of a human being." I said, "Nobody gets up one in the morning one-dimensional. People get up who they are. And that's a thousand adjectives."

JOHNSON: I know we don't have much time left, but before you leave, I wanted to ask you, did you ever participate in the annual congressional delegations to Selma that Representative John [R.] Lewis led? Either as a Member or after you left the House?

DELLUMS: I never got a chance to go. Never got a chance to go.

NOTES

[1] F. W. de Klerk was the education minister of South Africa from 1984 to 1989 and the State President of South Africa from 1989 to 1994. Margaret Thatcher served as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990.