

The Honorable William Lacy Clay Sr.
U.S. Representative of Missouri (1969–2001)

The Long Struggle for Representation: Oral Histories of African Americans in Congress

Labor Unions

Representative Clay Sr. describes his relationship with labor unions when he first came to Congress.
Interview recorded September 10, 2019

In my instance, 30 unions supported my opponent. I only had three unions, unions. So they thought I was going to be anti-union when I, when I got to Congress, but that wasn't so because that wasn't me. I was pro-workers. And George Meany made it clear the first week I was in Congress, he gave a celebration for me, and he had all the big shots in town. He had John McCormack, Tip O'Neill, all those Senators that they had supported at this reception, and he and I stood at the door, and he introduced me to all of them as "his man in the House of Representatives," even though 30 unions had opposed me. But his union hadn't. That was one of the three. The pump plumbers and pipe fitters endorsed me because I was working for the pipe fitters when I got elected. And, so we had a great relationship with labor.