

The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums
U.S. Representative of California (1971–1998)

Events: Civil Rights

Sharing a Chair on the First Day

Representative Dellums recalls the unusual circumstances he and Congresswoman Pat Schroeder of Colorado faced on their first day on the House Armed Services Committee.

Interview recorded April 19, 2012

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, at the committee tables, and nobody wanted, they didn't want another seat there. Okay, there was just one seat. And 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—you know 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. So the next time the two seats were there, we made our point, and we moved on.