

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

**Institution: Committees**

**Chairmen and Seniority**

Representative Dellums shares memories of his ascension to chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

*Interview recorded April 19, 2012*

You know, personally, in my wildest imagination, I did not think I was going to be chairman of the Armed Services Committee. First of all, you know by seniority, okay? If you come in at the same time, it's alphabetical. Les Aspin sat right in front of me, right? And then Sonny Montgomery was there. And Les Aspin was a young guy. And 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." And I said, "Man do you ever think about running for the Senate?" And at first he started to answer me seriously, and he looked and he said, 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." "No you're a great guy," but he said, "No, no, no, no, no." Well fast forward. President 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, you know literally I made the way for you to become the first black chairman of the House Armed Services Committee." So 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 you know he and I will just be right there together, and you know at best, I would be sitting next to him, but I had no idea that I would become the chair.