

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

Events: Civil Rights

The Dellums Amendment: Part One

Representative Dellums provides background on the passage of his amendment calling for U.S. economic sanctions against South Africa.

Interview recorded June 19, 2012

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. So at the end of the 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. And Siljander of Michigan was the Republican guy who handled the half hour against the Dellums Amendment. So my colleague said, "Ron, we're going to give you at least a voice-vote victory, so everybody screams." And there was, you know, 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," you know, "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. So the chairman is apoplectic, he goes, "I said," (like, wake up somebody), "The ayes have it." You know, 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. So they said, "Ron, you won." I almost fainted, right.