

Selma

Selma's Impact on the Alabama Delegation The Honorable William Jackson (Jack) Edwards U.S. Representative of Alabama

How Selma changed the political landscape of Alabama.

Interview recorded August 23, 2012

I think it really brought it squarely before us, because none of us were racists. We all grew up in the system that we were accustomed to. I mean, life was kind of simple. I guess there were issues out there that you kind of just didn't pay attention to because they weren't hitting you over the head, and once the Selma-Montgomery march occurred, then life for everybody changed. And if you weren't willing to see that change through, then you didn't have any business staying in office, in my judgment. And our delegation stayed in there, and honestly tried to make it work as well as we could. We fought back on some of those issues because we felt like they were going too far too fast, but it clearly changed my part of the country. And I have to say, in a positive way. We have black officials now on all of our boards, and elected offices, and judgeships, and things where a breakdown of the population ought to be. And in those days, you just didn't do it, because it just wasn't the thing you did. It's had such a positive impact that the kids growing up now—if they ever hear or read the kind of things you and I are talking about, they'll have to stop and say, "What is that you're talking about? What do you mean?" Because it's just—they're not confronted with it now. I'm not saying there are not still subtleties and people who will never give up the ghost and so forth, but the general population has long since moved forward, and is in a good frame of mind, in my judgment.