

Civil Rights

Hiding from “The FBI”

The Honorable William Jackson (Jack) Edwards U.S. Representative of Alabama

Illustration of the tense relationship between the federal government and local officials in Alabama in the 1960s.

Interview recorded August 23, 2012

And I just wanted to be different, and so I went back through my district right after the election, and just stopped in courthouses and on the street, and thanked people for their vote, talked to them about what I was going to try to do up there. And my friend Charlie Jackson, who traveled with me, was with me, and we pulled up to the courthouse in Wilcox County in Camden—this is the county that’s right below Selma—and we go in the sheriff’s office, and there’s eight or 10 guys milling around there in there. I said, “Sheriff?” And they said, “Oh, no, we haven’t seen him in three or four days.” I said, “Gee, when’s he going to be back.” “We’re not sure. Maybe another week or two.” I didn’t know what to say, but I realized after talking to these guys a few minutes, they didn’t have the foggiest notion I was their new Congressman. And so I got the conversation around to who I was and what I was doing there, and in a few minutes here comes the sheriff charging in his office. His name was Lummy Jenkins. Great name for a sheriff in a rural county. He’d been sheriff 33 years, never carried a gun. He came in, he told me how happy he was to see me, and we visited. About a year later I was up there making a speech, and Lummy was going to introduce me. So we’re waiting for my time to talk, and Lummy, while he was sitting there, he said, “Congressman, you remember that time you and Mr. Jackson were up here right after the election, and I wasn’t here, and all of a sudden I was here?” I said, “Yeah, Lummy. I remember that.” He said, “You know where I was?” I said, “No.” He said, “I was down in the restroom standing up on the toilet seat, stooping down so you couldn’t see my head or my feet.” I said, “Lummy, what in the hell were you doing that for?” He said, “Congressman, we looked out the window, and we saw you and Mr. Jackson getting out of the car in your coats and ties, and we thought y’all were the FBI.”