

Civil Rights

A Letter to Republicans The Honorable Paul Findley U.S. Representative of Illinois

Representative Paul Findley of Illinois recounts a letter he wrote to fellow Republicans during the debate on the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Interview recorded January 12, 2015

By my second term, in defeating Peter Mack, Springfield became a part of my district and that carried the Lincoln message forcefully to my, to my desk and to my, my thoughts. I decided that definitely, I would vote for the civil rights bill, despite the decision by my Leader, Gerald Ford. But I decided to take it a step further and, and I drafted a letter to all of the Republican Members of the House, and mentioned that I represented the, the hometown of Abraham Lincoln and for a lot of reasons, I just could not bear the thought of voting against the first civil rights bill to come before the Congress in its history. So, I circulated that without telling Ford in advance, which was a mistake on my part. As a courtesy, I should have told him ahead of time, so he would know what to expect. And whether my vote influenced others, I do not know, but a number of Republicans did vote for the civil rights bill, and it was the proudest vote I cast during my 22 years in the House; one that I have cherished and reflected on with great pride ever since.