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Dean Logan's Blog

My Pilgrimage to the Heart of the Civil Rights Movement

Posted by David Logan on 03/11/2013 at 11:32 AM

At the invitation of my congressman, Rep. David Cicilline, I travelled to Alabama for the 13th Faith in Politics Congressional Pilgrimage, an amazing opportunity because so many pivotal events transpired there exactly 50 years ago. It was a dream come true for me, especially getting to spend time with one of my heroes, Rep. John Lewis, who as a Freedom Rider and organizer of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was arrested more than 40 times, beaten many times, and who has stood for everything good about America for his 73 years.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lewis_\(U.S._politician\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lewis_(U.S._politician))



With Rep. Lewis at the kick-off breakfast

After a charter flight from DC to Tuscaloosa, I spent 3 days in buses crisscrossing Alabama with 6 Senators, 27 Reps, and leaders from the Civil Rights Movement. This blog entry will focus on day 1, Tuscaloosa and Birmingham.

First stop: Foster Auditorium, where Gov. George Wallace "stood in the schoolhouse door" to block the integration of the University of Alabama (more than a decade after the US Supreme Court ordered desegregation of colleges and universities!). We heard from the sister of the young woman who eventually enrolled (after a face off between Wallace and Department of Justice officials) <http://www.npr.org/2003/06/11/1294680/wallace-in-the-schoolhouse-door> as well as from Wallace's daughter, who spoke movingly of how she has struggled with her father's infamous legacy.



The actual doors that Gov. Wallace stood in



Rev. Lewis addressing the group



Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul & Mary) leading us in “We Shall Overcome” (one of many songs sung that weekend)

On to Birmingham, once considered the most racist city in the south, where there were so many assaults it was nicknamed "Bombingham." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-MuWDsv5pg>

We gathered in the 16th Street Baptist, where a KKK bombing killed 4 little girls 50 years ago. Just across the street was the park where Sheriff Bull Connor unleashed dogs and firehoses in an effort to break up the peaceful demonstrations of the Children's Crusade
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPrHwmiUMH0>

We ended the day with a reception at the Civil Rights Museum, where I had a chance to see remnants from the Jim Crow era, including an actual KKK robe, and loved the chance for a conversation with Luci Baines Johnson, whose father Lyndon Baines Johnson, a white southerner, pushed for and won approval of the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965 (currently under assault in the Supreme Court) <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/06/a-big-new-power/>



“Separate but Equal”



KKK Robe



With Luci Baines Johnson