



CONGRESSMAN

John J. Duncan, Jr.

Washington Report



Second District—Tennessee

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

✓ **The Economy**

CNBC had a headline on June 1 which said, “The US economy suddenly looks like it’s unstoppable.” The story reported the economic data that had come out that day said the economy “is heading into the second half of 2018 with strong momentum” and that payrolls “beat expectations” and both manufacturing and construction “showed accelerated growth.” I hope those who produced this optimistic report are right. However, I have read for years that there are economic cycles and that it is almost inevitable that we will have a downturn at some point. Actions by the Congress and the Administration to cut taxes and stop the explosion of federal regulations have given people and businesses reasons to be optimistic if these moves can be kept in effect. However, we should have been making sizable reductions in federal spending, too, and we have not been doing that. Thirty-three thousand people at Toys “R” Us have lost or are losing their jobs in large part because the Company took on too much debt (almost \$8 billion, according to the *Washington Post*). Countries all over the world have gotten in terrible trouble with too much debt, and U.S. debt, in my opinion, is far too high now and heading up faster than ever.

✓ **Tariffs**

The President ordered that a 25% tariff on steel and a 10% tariff on aluminum be imposed starting at midnight on May 31. His Administration has been trying in several ways to bring down our trade deficits which have been running around \$600 billion a year, with about \$375 billion of that amount being with China. I believe the President felt he had to do something to show other nations that he is serious about his efforts to make our trade more fair to American workers. With only a little over 4% of the world’s population, we buy almost 22% of the world’s goods. Every nation is chomping at the bit to get into our markets. We have tremendous leverage on trade that

we have not been using. We want and need to do business with other countries. But they need us more than we need them, and yet some countries—especially China—have not been treating us fairly. Negotiations are ongoing, and I hope these tariffs are short-term in duration. Some have said they will cause a trade war, but we really have been in a trade war for many years and have been losing. Some very big multi-national corporations will scream to high heaven, because they do not want us to be tougher on trade. But while there may be some short-term pain caused by these tariffs, the goal is long-term gain for the American people. At least it was encouraging that the stock market went up over 800 points combined in the first five trading days after the tariffs were imposed.

✓ **Negotiations**

I hope and believe that the President’s actions on tariffs were sort of a “shot across the bow” to show other countries that we will not simply sit back and be taken advantage of on trade. Tariffs helped the U.S. become a manufacturing giant and financed our government so we did not have an individual income tax until 1913. Now, we need to have negotiations with every country, so hopefully we can continue to import most things that we do now. Some people have overreacted, and some have fallen back to the standard over-simplification that the 1930 Smoot-Hawley tariffs caused the Great Depression. The Washington International Trade Association, which strongly favors free trade, published an article in 2014 showing that the Depression had several causes. The article pointed out that the stock market crashed eight months before Smoot-Hawley was even signed and that “the U.S. had also enormously raised tariffs in 1922 and that this did not cause a depression.” The report said some economists say the Depression was caused by great over-production in both industry and agriculture during the boom times of the ‘20s which led to greatly reduced prices. Other economists say that exports were only 7%

of our economy in 1929 and the decline in exports “may have been caused by the Depression itself and not solely by tariff retaliation.” Also, the article says Smoot-Hawley was applied to 890 products, far more than the tariffs we are talking about now and that other economists, such as Milton Friedman, say the Depression came about because the Federal Reserve contracted the money supply and people could not get loans.

✓ **Air Marshals**

Probably the most needless, useless job in the federal government, and certainly one of the easiest, is that of the federal air marshals. All they do is fly back and forth, back and forth on airplanes, usually in first class. Most members of Congress and hundreds of thousands of others do the same each week, or even more often. One Congressman years ago said we really did all we needed to do when we locked the cockpit doors. There have now been critical articles about air marshals in the *New York Times* and *USA Today* and critical reports on CNN and NPR as well as a critical report on CBS, on which I was interviewed. *Wired*, an online publication, a few months ago, said the Air Marshal program was the most “obvious” one that needed to be cut. I offered such an amendment several years ago before most of these critical reports. It received 134 votes, but it did not pass because many members are afraid to vote against anything supposedly for security no matter how wasteful. But at one point, more air marshals had been arrested (150 in a ten-year period) than there were arrests by air marshals, and they have never been able to prove they have stopped even one hijacking. I was able to convince the appropriators to stop giving this program big increases each year and instead to cut it back by about \$60 million for each of the last several years. This program has cost taxpayers about \$8 billion over the last 10 years, all money that should have been given to local law enforcement and/or applied to our federal debt.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE continued from page 1✓ **Two Amendments**

In May the Congress passed two amendments I introduced. One was in a transportation bill establishing a national standard for interstate truck drivers. It would do this by requiring companies that hire truckers or trucking companies to make sure that those companies had a good safety record, had insurance, and had complied with all the rules of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. This amendment was the work of long time staffer Don Walker assisted by staff member Zach Dooley. I have always worked to try to make our highways safer and, in fact, led the House effort several years ago to not allow triple trailer trucks in the thirty-four states where they were then and still are prohibited. The other was an amendment to the Defense bill, which is an effort to give Defense Department employees more and better incentive programs to reward ideas to save money in our military spending. This amendment was cosponsored by Rep. Walter Jones, a conservative from North Carolina, and Rep. Jared Polis, a liberal from Colorado. The amendment was the work of staffer Caroline DeBerry.

✓ **Loneliness Study**

A new study by one of our largest health services companies has found that loneliness—long thought to be a problem for seniors—is even more pronounced among those 18-22. This was a very large survey of over 20,000 people. It found that loneliness can even make you sick and said loneliness was more dangerous than obesity and as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. The report said meaningful social interaction was key to reducing isolation and what was needed were more face-to-face conversations. In the last newsletter, I wrote about an article in the *Atlantic Magazine* reporting the findings from a survey of one million teenagers. That study found that the more time young people spend on “social” media, the more subject they were to depression and even suicide and said parents should get their children to do “anything not involving a screen.” We have all—young and old—become too addicted to iPads, iPhones, television, etc., and we should make it a national goal to try to get people away from the screens and helping out or at least spending time with other live human beings. This is one way we could potentially and significantly reduce federal healthcare spending.

✓ **Anti-social Media**

Our so-called social media is, in my opinion, really anti-social. Our reliance on and/or addiction to computers and technology has provided tremendous economic benefits but at very great so-

cial cost. Technology has made our lives easier, helped us live longer, and enabled us to go further and faster than any time in history, but it has also made us more vulnerable to national or worldwide catastrophes. We all need to fight against the anti-social trends that our screen addictions are causing. Scott Richert, writing in *Chronicles Magazine*, summed it up best: “The art of conversation is dying; the technology behind the social media that draws us closer, in some sense, to people across the country or around the world is isolating us from our own neighbors.” He added that we “live in a time when we can think of so little to say to our neighbor when we see him across the driveway, yet so much to tell our several thousand ‘friends’ across the country and around the world who aren’t talking to their neighbors, either.”

✓ **War on Cash**

Many governments and multi-national banks and corporations want to see cash eliminated. Already many states, including Tennessee, require that some payments be made online. An article in the Finance and Development newsletter of the International Monetary Fund said, “the march toward a cashless society, it seems, is unstoppable.” Many years ago, a teacher in Madisonville asked when the U.S. would “move into the 21st Century” and go metric. I replied, hopefully never because there is nothing wrong with the U.S. being a little bit different, a little bit special, a little bit unique. That metric movement was stopped because the overwhelming majority just did not want it. Kevin Dowd, a professor of finance and economics, wrote in an article at the end of April that “the abolition of cash threatens to cause widespread economic damage...and to have a devastating impact on many of the most vulnerable in our society. It also threatens to destroy what is left of our privacy and our financial freedom....” After a column in the *Financial Times* in favor of going cashless, over three-fourths of the comments were opposed. One commented, “It’s almost fascist in its undertones. A totalitarian move to track and control all spending.” If people want to go totally cashless, they should be free to do so. But it should not be forced on those who still want some cash both for privacy and in case their account is hacked or there is a computer breakdown.

✓ **Too Many Generals**

The Senate Armed Services Committee decided we had too many Admirals and Generals and placed a requirement in the 2017 Defense Bill that the number be reduced by 25%. There were 886 on active duty at that time, plus 422 in the Reserves and National Guard. This was far more than any time in our history, with the

exception of World War II. According to the National Defense University, the “services as a whole had more three- and four-star generals for Vietnam than for a vastly larger force in World War II.” In spite of the Senate action, the numbers kept going up. So in the latest Defense Bill passed in May, there is a requirement to reduce the number to 852 by 2022. Captain Richard Pawloski, a retired Marine, wrote that “we are at least some three times overpopulated with admirals and generals.” I once read that we had about 7700 retired admirals and generals compared to a little over 600 retired members of Congress. Of course, admirals and generals retire at much younger ages and with much higher pensions than members of Congress.

✓ **Too Many Parks**

An article in the *Washington Post* on April 25 said there were now 421 county parks in Montgomery County, Md. This did not count the state parks in the County. There are now over 400 units operated by the National Park Service and over 6600 state parks. There seems to be no really accurate count as to the number of local parks in part because there are several different types, but it is fair to say there are several hundred thousand. Teachers, law enforcement officers, and other public employees wonder why it is difficult to get raises. One of the main reasons is that we keep taking more land out of private ownership. This decreases the tax revenue to local governments. What we need to do is take better care of the parks we have instead of adding more. Also, when we read about a Judge or legislative body “saving” some land from development, we need to realize that this is making it harder for public employees to get raises and much more expensive for young people trying to buy homes.

✓ **Over-Regulation**

When the federal government over-regulates any industry, it usually ends up in the hands of a few big giants. This is especially true in the pharmaceutical industry and is the main reason some medicines cost so much. Extremely big business loves extremely big government because it drives out so many small and medium-sized competitors. When the Dodd-Frank law was passed by Congress, I voted against it because I knew it would help the biggest banks and hurt the smallest ones. That is exactly what happened. Since Dodd-Frank passed in 2010, the Congressional Research Service says 486 banks or credit unions have failed and 3705 have merged. At a hearing of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, on which I serve, one witness said it is almost impossible for a

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE continued from page 2

bank with less than \$1 billion in assets to survive today. The *Wall Street Journal* reported in March that the three largest banks had increased deposits by 180% in the last ten years, now holding one-third of the nation's total deposits. This is why the Congress in May reformed some Dodd-Frank regulations to try to help save some of the smaller financial institutions.

✓ **President Eisenhower**

Probably the least-hated President since the '50s was President Eisenhower. I was just 13 during his last year in office and have learned most things about him from reading fairly recent books about his years in the White House. I believe President Trump would be wise to use President Eisenhower as a model for his own Administration. I wrote an article for a national magazine a few years ago pointing out that with the exception of a brief recession in 1958, Eisenhower gave us eight years of peace and prosperity. Inflation averaged just 1.8% during his years as President, and the budget was balanced six out of eight years. According to a column in the *Christian Science Monitor* by Rudy Penner, he issued 181 vetoes and averaged 64% approval rating during his years in the White House. No President has come close to those numbers since then. The Penner column also said Eisenhower believed "that large armies created a temptation to get into ground wars." There is an important lesson in the fact that a military hero was the most anti-war President we have had in the last 60 years. Only 19% of the present Congress has served in any branch of our military. I started out as enlisted and ended up as a JAG officer and have great respect for everyone who has served. But we have had far too many in the Congress and various administrations who have never served who have been far too eager to go to war and far too willing to let them drag out. They seemingly want to prove how tough they are or that they are modern-day Winston Churchills.

✓ **Presidential Hatred**

It is likely that almost all our Presidents have had numbers of people who have hated them, but it seems the hatred for our Presidents on both sides has grown in recent years. Millions seem to hate President Trump so much that they just cannot stand to admit that he and his Administration have done some good things since taking office. The President has said and done some things that I certainly wish he hadn't said or done, but he does not deserve some of the bitterness and hatred that has been directed toward him. In the limited interactions we had, Presidents Obama and Clinton and I were always

nice to each other, despite our differences in policy, and never hated each other. It was surprising when so many members refused to go to the Trump inaugural, not something I would have ever considered for Clinton or Obama's or any President's inaugural. Almost all members of Congress get along well with each other, and we can almost always express our differences in polite, civil, even friendly ways.

✓ **Two Quotes**

Two quotations that should be on the wall of every Congressional office are the following...

President Dwight D. Eisenhower:

"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."

President John F. Kennedy:

"We must face the fact that the United States is neither omnipotent nor omniscient...that we cannot impose our will upon the other 94 percent of mankind, that we cannot right every wrong or reverse every adversity, and that therefore there cannot be an American solution to every world problem."

✓ **Veterans Bill**

As a life member of one of the major Veterans Service Organizations, I said many years ago, in a speech to a veterans convention at the then Hyatt Regency in Knoxville, that we should give every eligible veteran a card and let them go to the Mayo Clinic or any medical facility or doctor they wanted. The man who then headed the V.A. hospital in Johnson City responded to the speech with an angry letter. No one likes competition, but it makes everyone better. Many years later, we were able to start the Choice Program on a trial basis, and in May we passed a \$46.5 billion bill to expand and reform this effort. In 30 years, Congress has unanimously passed probably 200 or more veterans bills. Rep. Phil Roe, my friend who represents Tennessee's First District, once said we now spend more on veterans than all the other nations in the world combined. And Rep. Tom Cole (OK) added that we spend four times more on veterans than Russia's entire military budget. Our office has always emphasized helping veterans all we can. The Congress has passed almost every conceivable program to help veterans in every way. But with our national debt of \$21 trillion, we need to stop creating new programs and start concentrating on getting more bang for the mega billions of bucks we are now spending. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2007 to 2011, said many times in speeches and Congressional testimony that this astounding fed-

eral debt was the "greatest threat to our national security."

✓ **Human Kindness**

What we need in this Country is more simple kindness one to another. It seems that we spend so much of our time now staring at screens and so little time doing kind things for others that our technology is dehumanizing us. Congressman Roe said on the Floor one night that he just could not believe some of the hateful things people say when they are online – things they would never say face-to-face. And it sometimes seems that many people want to be victims – angry or bitter because they feel the government is not doing enough for them. Actually life is unfair at times to everyone. Even people of very great wealth or ones who seem to have everything going for them often have had very great tragedies or very unfair, unkind things happen to them. If people knew the life story of everyone around them, they would be a lot less likely to criticize or say mean or even very cruel things. Anger about healthcare last year brought out such hateful people that some members of Congress had to have police escorts to get out of town halls or could not have rational, civil meetings because of all the shouters.

✓ **Afghanistan**

It is ridiculous that we still have American military troops running Afghanistan. In a speech on the Floor of the House a few months ago, I mentioned this quote from an article in the *New York Times International Edition*: "When the American author James A. Michener went to Afghanistan to research his work of historical fiction *Caravans*, it was 1955 and there were barely any roads in the country. Yet there were already Americans and Russians there jockeying for influence. Later, the book's Afghan protagonist would tell an American diplomat that one day both America and Russia would invade Afghanistan and that both would come to regret it." According to an article in the *Military Times* in September of 2016, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had cost us almost \$5 trillion and of course even more now. Most people believe things will go back pretty much like they were once we leave, if we ever do. Author James Howard Kunstler wrote a few days ago: "War for the USA these days is a weird, inconclusive enterprise. Our objectives are poorly discerned, hardly even articulated anymore, just a pattern of going through the motions as destructively as possible with no end in sight. How many Americans can state what our mission in Afghanistan is after 17 years of blundering around its bare mountains and valleys?"

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE continued from page 3✓ **Iran Agreement**

There were good arguments both for and against the Iran Nuclear Agreement. Polls at the time showed that a majority of American Jews were in favor of it. However, the Netanyahu Administration and the American Jewish lobbying group AIPAC were strongly opposed. Many conservative leaders such as Gen. Brent Scowcroft – a top advisor in several Republican administrations, columnist Pat Buchanan, and former Congressman Ron Paul were supporters, but most conservatives were opposed to the Agreement. While I have supported President Trump on many things, especially his domestic agenda, we should not have pulled out of this Agreement. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had certified 11 times that Iran was complying with the Agreement. Despite having mixed feelings, I voted against the Agreement for reasons outlined in detail in a column for the *News Sentinel*. However, I said in that column once we agreed, we needed to hope it would work, and it was working. Psalms 34:14 says, in part, “Seek peace and pursue it.” It seems that to pull out of this Agreement when Iran was complying plays into the hands of Iranian extremists who hate America.

✓ **\$670 A Day**

The *Washington Times* reported on May 30 that the federal government spent \$1.4 billion last year to take care of nearly 41,000 unaccompanied immigrant children. They stayed an average of seven weeks which came out to about \$670 a day for each child. One contractor bragged about providing “new sets of clothes for each migrant, gym equipment, and regular field trips to get away from the dorm – activities including movie nights, swimming and bowling” and even something called “multicultural crayons.” Another contractor described providing special foods, celebration of cultural holidays, cable television, basketball, Spanish language yoga, soccer tournaments, three meals a day plus two

snacks, and calls back home a couple of times a week. Federal contracts are usually the most profitable contracts in this Country, and many times are far too profitable. The most expensive way to do anything is for the federal government to do it, because there are just not the same pressures and incentives to hold costs down as there are when private companies provide goods and services to private individuals.

✓ **School Shootings**

I wish that no young person had to go to a school with more than 500 or 600 students. Several schools in our District have double or triple that number. Several years ago, *USA Today* reported that the largest school in New York City had 3500 students, and they broke it up into five separate schools and their drug and discipline problems went way down. The Parkland High School had 3000 students. At a smaller school, a young person has a much better chance to make a team, be a cheerleader, President of a club, serve on the student council, or simply be more than a number. It was fascinating to read an article in *The Federalist* by Stella Morabito, in which she pointed out that the U.S. had 248,000 schools in 1930 compared to 98,000 now, and our population has tripled since then. She wrote that very large schools tend “to breed resentment, status anxiety and social dysfunction. Combine that with the toxic effects of social media and family breakdown, and you’ve got a deadly brew.” Most of the school shooters seem to have been loners who spend far too much time on their computers or so-called “smart” phones, and who often come from dysfunctional, usually father-absent homes. Young people today are exposed to thousands of hours of violence on video games, movies, television, and even in their music.

✓ **Gun Ownership**

Some people blame school shootings and our high murder rate entirely on guns, almost ignoring the much more important social and personal problems that cause young people to misuse guns in the first place. Actually, while the number of guns keeps going up, the percentage of house-

holds with guns keeps going down. According to a CBS/*New York Times* report, the percentage of households with guns hit a high of 53% in January of 1994 but went down to just 36% in June of 2016. We should be teaching gun safety classes in the schools, and young people would be better off spending time outdoors hunting than laying around watching TV, playing video games, or bumming around malls. Unfortunately, the number of hunters keeps going down because wildlife officials keep making hunting more bureaucratic, with too many rules and regulations and too many date changes on different hunting seasons. Many places now have a serious problem with too many deer. A few years ago, the *Washington Post* reported that the number of deer in Fairfax County, Virginia, had gone way up to between 40,000 to 50,000, and they had 1301 deer-vehicle wrecks that year. They have had to hire professional shooters to come in to thin out the herd. The number of bears in the Smokies has gone way up, too, and now it is becoming more common to see bears outside the Park.

✓ **Heroes**

We cheapen the actions of real heroes when we apply the word to everyone who wears or has worn a uniform. Military service is one of the most honorable things an American citizen can do, and it was a privilege to have served in the Army. My office spends much time helping our military and veterans, and issues concerning military service is one of the major things that the Congress deals with. However, most soldiers will tell you that very few are true heroes. It is good to thank soldiers and sailors for their service, but it is also good to realize that everyone who works hard at an honest job – doctors, teachers, garbage collectors, ministers – serve this Country, too. I am thankful for business people who create our jobs and produce goods at fair prices. I am in the Knoxville Airport usually about twice a week and really appreciate the service of the Janitorial staff that give us, day in and day out, the cleanest airport in the U.S.

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