



A DAY IN D.C.

Bucshon Shares
His Perspective

By Tom Schuman

Committee work is a big focus for all in Congress.



Congressman Larry Bucshon, with staff members Jeff Lucas (center) and Nick McGee, on the move to his next appointment.

Indiana Congressman Larry Bucshon (R-8th District) has one primary objective he would like to see before he completes his service in Washington.

“My goal for when I’m no longer in Congress is that we’ve been able to get the health care system to a place where everybody can afford to get health insurance,” says the fourth-term representative and long-time heart surgeon. “That’s the goal. I may not accomplish the goal, but I think we’re going to make some headway.”

To get there requires many busy days (and quite a few evenings), including a Wednesday in July in which *BizVoice*[®] was granted unlimited access to Bucshon. After a series of meetings – with House colleagues as well as constituents, a floor speech, several votes and more – he offered the following in a brief discussion.

Preparation in general

“The day before, my staff sends me information on legislation that is coming on the floor. So does Cathy McMorris-Rodgers’ (R-Washington) shop (the House Republican Conference). Luke Messer (R-6th District, chair of the House Republican Policy Committee) sends out a digest. I read through that to see what’s coming up. Usually the evening before or the day before, I look at that stuff when it pops up on my phone. A lot of the legislation we’ve known about for a long time; it’s very unusual that it’s new.”

Preparation for this day

“On the subcommittee (Subcommittee on Health as part of the comprehensive Committee on Energy and Commerce), I pretty much understand all those issues already. So on those, I don’t need to do much background research at all. The issue today about off-label products: Physicians have used things off-label for decades because getting the indications updated usually lags behind the clinical experience. On



Bucshon and colleague Susan Brooks (R-5th District) both serve on the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Energy and Commerce.



Members of the Indiana Soybean Alliance meet with the congressman in Bucshon's Capitol Hill office.



A quick hallway conversation between Bucshon and legislative assistant Lucas.

most committee hearings, the day before staff sends a memo with synopsis of the testimony of witnesses.”

Policy familiarity

“Most things have been simmering on the Hill for quite a while. The National Defense Authorization Act we heard about today (in the Republican Study Committee [RSC], a caucus of House conservatives) – there have been committee hearings for months. My staff briefs me, the conference starts to brief, then we had (House Armed Services Committee) chairman (Mac) Thornberry at RSC. There are very few things where the night before where I go, ‘Oh, I don’t know anything about that.’ It just doesn’t happen.”

2017 compared to 2011 (his first year)

“Over time, you develop more of a depth of knowledge of the issues. Defense, I’m not a defense person, but over the last seven years I’ve learned a lot. But compared to a freshman, you have a baseline level of knowledge on most subjects – that’s a big advantage. Another thing that’s an advantage is that you know who all the players are – the committee chairmen, the history of what they’ve done in Congress.

“It’s just a better feel overall for the whole organization of Congress. Congress is no different than any other organization. Now they change over so you have to learn the new people every couple of years, but that’s not that difficult. You have a better feel for the

process overall. A better feel for why people are here and what they’re going to be asking for.”

Reaching across the aisle

“At committee level, you get to know people on the other side of the aisle. When I know what issues are important to certain people, I walk up to them on the floor, introduce myself and try to get to know them. Congressional trips are a very good way to get to know people. Even though we’re on an official trip, it’s a little more of a social setting. You get to know them more as people rather than just a member of Congress. I was part of a bipartisan working group for six years.

“Peter Welch (D-Vermont) and I are friends from that group. We can joke with each other about our policy differences. I give him a lot of trouble about GMOs (genetically modified organisms) because it’s a big deal for Vermont. You have be opposed to GMOs in Vermont or you get kicked out of office. He’ll say something to me about some conservative issue. Joe Kennedy III (D-Massachusetts) sits next to me on the Energy and Commerce full committee. He’s really big into substance abuse issues; he’s had famous family members struggle with that. I’m getting to know him as I sit next to him.”

First six months of this year

“I think the big issues people are focused on on TV – health care, taxes, infrastructure – we have not been able to get consensus on



A rare moment at his desk on this busy day.



Lunch is a side dish with the main serving a policy update from the Republican Study Committee.

those yet. There have been all kinds of other pieces of legislation. These are things that are actually very important for people. A lot that has happened has been administrative.

“The thing about Congress I have found to be true – the big issues that get a lot of press are important, but there are a lot of everyday things that Congress does that actually make a big difference to people.” He cites, among others, the five-year highway bill passed in 2016, Every Student Succeeds Act, reauthorization of Federal Aviation Administration and the Water Resources and Development Act.

Frustration

“I think you have to look at Congress with long-term goals (in mind). You have short-term goals, but a long-term vision of where you need to go. It can be frustrating. Health care is a big example for me. When I came to Congress, President Obama was in office, then he got

re-elected. There’s six years where we’re not going to be able to do anything on the Affordable Care Act. I mean nothing. But it’s

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like every job. There’s always frustrations, but you have to have short- and long-term goals.”

Staying energized

“What gets me fired up is seeing the effects of what we do. It really makes a difference. My other job, as a heart surgeon, we pretty much saw the difference that day. Somebody comes in with heart problems and you do bypass surgery or replace their valve and a couple of days later they’re walking in the hallways, It’s literally like a miracle.

“Here, I go back to Indiana and you see the way Medicare pays physicians. I hear from my doctor friends, everybody in the whole health care system, and I know we did that. The things our staff does every day, the constituent work. Individual people come up to me all the time to say, ‘Your office helped.’ I’ve been able to award a couple of people Purple Hearts that they deserved. The day-to-day stuff like that is what keeps me going.”

RESOURCE: Congressman Larry Bucshon at www.bucshon.house.gov