

Joe Donnelly Moderate on the Move

By Rebecca Patrick

“It has no relationship to party or political views; it’s a desire with everyone to try to work together and move our country forward.” That’s how Joe Donnelly describes his U.S. Senate experience since taking office in January after three terms in the House (representing Indiana’s 2nd District).

He’s been made to feel welcome by a former presidential nominee, Sen. John McCain (R-Arizona), and the body’s longest-serving member, Sen. Pat Leahy (D-Vermont). He’s formed alliances with other newcomers as well as Republicans Susan Collins of Maine and fellow Hoosier Dan Coats. Of the latter, Donnelly notes: “When we work on things, there has not been the first political discussion yet. It has just been, ‘How can we help our state?’

“... So much of the effort in the Senate is taken up with sitting down with individual senators and talking to them about your priorities and what’s important to you. You have face-to-face opportunity to try to promote the agenda of your state and our country.”

In mid-July, Donnelly talked with *BizVoice* about the specific public policies he’s advocating for, Obamacare twists and turns, plus connecting with Hoosiers.

***BizVoice*®: What’s high on your priority list to get accomplished this session?**

JD: “My key priority has always been to make sure that every Hoosier who wants a job has a job. In line with that, I’m a co-sponsor of the America Works Act, which tries to eliminate the skills gap and creates the opportunity for Hoosiers to have better skills and be in a position to go to their employers with a greater skill set that leads to greater employment. That’s critical to me.

“Another one is in regards to the Armed Services Committee where I serve; I am the sponsor of what’s called the Jacob Sexton End to Military Suicide Act. We’re trying to eliminate the scourge of suicide that we’re dealing with in the active duty of our military. Last year, we lost more men and women to suicide than we did to combat. Jacob is a young man from just east of Muncie, in Farmland. After serving six months in Afghanistan, he came home on leave and took his life. We have been working with his parents and with other families, not only in Indiana but around the country, to try to put together legislation so that we are there for our men and women when they need someone to talk to and when they need help.

U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly greets Hoosiers visiting the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. as part of the Honor Flight program that transports veterans to their national monuments. The former second district representative meets with Turkish commanders at a NATO Patriot Battery near the Syrian border.



“Additionally, I am working on the next step in improving the health care bill, which is to make full-time (employment status) be recognized as 40 hours instead of 30 hours (as outlined in the Affordable Care Act). I’m working in a bipartisan fashion with my colleague Susan Collins and we have sponsored a bill that full time is 40 hours – and we’re very hopeful of getting that passed.

“Finally, working to reduce the deficit, working to put our nation on a stable fiscal path is critical to me as well. Those are some of the things I’m working on; those are the ones on the front burner.”

BV: Were you surprised by the developments this summer regarding the Affordable Care Act? The President’s decision on the employer mandate delay (pushing it from January 2014 to January 2015), for example.

JD: “I was appreciative that the White House and the executive branch were listening. Susan Collins and I had sent a letter to President Obama requesting the delay because we thought it would be pretty difficult for our businesses to have everything in place by the time the law was supposed to be enforced. Traveling around Indiana, when I spoke to our businesses, they said, ‘Hey, we need more time to work on this.’ I tried to reflect that in the letter with Sen. Collins and was very excited to see the White House postpone the mandate for a year.”



Donnelly wants his constituents to stay connected; he says jobs top the list of concerns he hears.

BV: What do you see on the horizon for the Affordable Care Act in Congress – do you sense a movement to work together to improve it or the sides retreating to their corners?

JD: “I sure hope it’s working together because that’s how you can get things done. When we talk about trying to repeal the medical device tax (a provision of the Affordable Care Act), that again is an effort of both Republicans and Democrats. And we’ll continue to work on that.

“I don’t see how it’s a benefit to anybody to have a group that says, ‘We don’t want to work on that because then it might make the bill more effective.’ Then on the other side, ‘We don’t want to work on that because then people might think the bill’s not perfect.’ Well, it’s not perfect; we can improve it. It seems to me that my job is to try to improve things, try to make things better in this country rather than staking out an ideological position on the left or right and having people suffer because of it.”

BV: Do you think the President cherry-picking aspects of a certain law – in this case the Affordable Care Act – sets a dangerous precedent? That’s been a criticism.

JD: “Senator Collins and I were the two senators asking him to do this, so we were obviously in favor of that. If we can make the lives of our small business folks easier, the lives of our Indiana

business community easier, then this is not about cherry-picking. This is about me and a number of members of Congress, both Republican and Democrat, having asked the executive branch to do this. Businesses all over our state had asked the executive branch to do this. I don’t think it makes much sense to yell at them now for doing the thing we asked them to do. It would seem to be disingenuous to complain about having the opportunity to see a policy put in place that we had all asked for.”

BV: Is it becoming increasingly difficult to be a moderate in Congress? The media appears to be predominantly focused on left or right.

JD: “I think the media is wrong with that perspective. In Indiana, it’s about Hoosier common sense; they want to know how what you’re doing will create more jobs and create a better future for our country. Leave the screaming and yelling to other people and focus on moving our state forward. And that’s what I’ve tried to do.

“I think what you’ll find is that in the Senate we’ve created a larger group of moderates this term than before. The legislation being promoted in the Senate is primarily right down the middle, because it cannot pass otherwise – there are not enough votes

there. So what we’re seeing is an effort to use moderate policies to move our nation forward, create jobs and reduce our deficit.”

BV: What are you hearing the most concern about from your constituents?

JD: “Jobs. Every family wants to make sure Mom and Dad have a chance to have a good job. When they do, everything works better for that family and for our community. That’s why I’m co-sponsoring the America Works Act, working non-stop to bring more manufacturers to Indiana, more life sciences to Indiana, a variety of all different businesses to Indiana. I always say I represent the working families of Indiana, but they’re not working unless there are jobs and there are no jobs unless our employers are doing well.”

BV: What message do you have for Hoosiers?

JD: “I am the hired help. I work for all our businesses in Indiana and all the people in Indiana. This is not my office out here in Washington or Indiana; it’s your office. We’re doing whatever we can to grow Indiana, grow Indiana businesses and make the lives of our citizens better. That’s our agenda. And if you’re in D.C., please come by the office. We’d love to say hello. We’d also love to come to your office and have a chance to introduce ourselves and spend time with you.”

INFORMATION LINK

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