

Dennis Faulkenberg

TAKING ON THE UPHILL BATTLES



By Charlee Beasor

Dennis Faulkenberg likes a challenge.

Take, for example, when a nursery expert in southern Indiana told Faulkenberg that no one north of Bloomington could grow a certain type of exotic tree. He replied, “Watch me.”

(Faulkenberg’s crape myrtle tree – which typically grows in the south – is now six years old. He’s also grown banana and magnolia trees in his backyard in Indianapolis.)

Taking on tough challenges doesn’t stop with gardening. Faulkenberg has spent much of his professional career – first with the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) and later his consulting firm APPIAN – lobbying on behalf of Indiana road and highway funding.

With Indiana’s historical status as a donor state (sending more money through taxes into the federal Highway Trust Fund than it gets back) and no substantial gas tax increases in many years, Faulkenberg has fought an uphill battle in getting Indiana’s transportation infrastructure its fair share of funding.

One of his proudest career achievements is his impact on the 1998 TEA-21 federal highway bill, which increased Indiana’s return from 78 cents on the dollar to 92 cents. It meant \$262 million in funding per year for the state. At the time, Faulkenberg served as deputy commissioner and chief financial officer for INDOT.

“That’s what my life was for many years. I spent basically Monday through Friday in Washington, D.C., would come home on the weekends, get clean clothes and see the kids. That was five days a week out of town for most of the last year of that bill,” he recalls.

“It was a huge accomplishment. Everyone said we’d never get it,

that the ‘big’ states controlled the committees of influence in Congress. And just by sheer determination, we got a formula that meant millions to the state of Indiana with no tax increase.”

House Enrolled Act 1002, which was signed by Gov. Eric Holcomb this year, is another crowning achievement for Faulkenberg and the road funding warriors in Indiana. The bill will provide \$1.2 billion per year when it is fully phased in and makes Indiana one of the few states with a long-term infrastructure funding plan.

Try, try again

Faulkenberg knows firsthand that HEA 1002 was a long time coming. “I’m almost afraid I’ll jinx it just talking about it,” he says with a chuckle.

In 2013, a shift in gas taxes brought \$200 million more to infrastructure needs. But it was not the complete solution required. And Faulkenberg was part of an effort 10 years earlier that raised the gas tax by three cents but stopped short of further reforms.

“That was such a disappointment (not being able to do more even 14 years ago), when we felt like we were at the one-yard line,” he reflects.

And last year the House of Representatives brought forth a road funding bill, which died in the Senate and didn’t have universal Statehouse support.

All the pieces, however, were in the right place in 2017.

“We were finally able to educate folks well enough that the need was there and we had credible data on road and bridge conditions. Everybody seemed to get it,” Faulkenberg notes.

‘I’ve just done what needs to be done’

Long-term road funding is one of the goals set forth in the Indiana Chamber of Commerce’s long-range economic development plan *Indiana Vision 2025*. HEA 1002 was a major policy victory for the Chamber, due in part to Faulkenberg’s advocacy and leadership as chairman of the Chamber’s Infrastructure Policy Committee.

Mark Lawrance, Indiana Chamber vice president of engagement



Dennis Faulkenberg (with former Gov. Mitch Daniels) previously worked for the Indiana Department of Transportation under four governors – two Republicans and two Democrats. “I always thought doing the job right would take care of itself politically, and it always did. I thrived under both political flavors.”

and innovation policy, is the staff leader of that committee.

“Dennis is one of the most knowledgeable people in Indiana about infrastructure and how to improve and adequately fund it. His leadership and experience and assistance are world class. And his knowledge is based on solid principals of how to adequately fund this and the economic impact of it,” Lawrance explains.

Faulkenberg has also been a staunch supporter of the annual D.C. Fly-in and encourages Hoosier business owners to get involved at the federal level. He often leads small groups through Washington during the Fly-in and has been a member of the Congressional Affairs Policy Committee since 2003.

“I do a lot of congressional visits with different groups and when the Chamber

comes to town, they (representatives and senators) sit up and notice. ... (they) are going to be there; they show up for those meetings and they pay attention to what the Chamber says.”

On being named a Volunteer of the Year, Faulkenberg demurs on being worthy of the recognition.

“There are so many more deserving people and I’m honored and humbled by it. I haven’t done anything exceptional. I’ve just done what needs to be done. I would hope everybody that belongs to the Chamber would do that and more,” he asserts.

Volunteerism runs deep with Faulkenberg, particularly relating to disadvantaged children. He is a member of the Golden Sunrise Sertoma Club, which supports Jameson Camp (for youths) and the East 10th Street Children’s Daycare.

Strong foundation

Faulkenberg points to several people that have been vital in his career and life.

One is Laurie Maudlin, his business partner at APPIAN. The company, celebrating 10 years in business this year, is named for the Appian Way, a 2,000-year-old highway in Rome (thought to be the oldest road still partially in existence).

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Dennis Faulkenberg

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“(Laurie) is wonderful with the data. I’m always looking for good data. She’s great at facts and puts together great information and has a tremendous knowledge base. We feed on each other. And she’s good at putting up with me,” he says with a laugh.

Faulkenberg also includes his family: his wife, two daughters and four grandchildren.

“When I was in Washington, the kids were in junior high and elementary school. That was a real critical time and being away so much was really hard then; we didn’t have the communication (tools) that we have now. There were very expensive long-distance phone calls the state would not pay for, or lots of quarters in a payphone that doesn’t exist anymore,” he recalls. “My wife was huge in making that all work while I was gone.”

There’s someone else that he points to as a true inspiration for choosing a business career: his grandmother.

“She was what you’d call a stay-at-home mom, but she was the best businessperson – the most inspiring, hardworking, ethical person that instilled so many values in me. She managed a family of seven on a very meager, meager existence. And she managed it well,” he shares.

He recalls that she sold mail order vitamins to neighbors, and milk and eggs on the side.



Faulkenberg has spent considerable time lobbying on Indiana’s behalf in Washington, D.C. He also chairs the Indiana Chamber’s Infrastructure Policy Committee.

“If she were born today, she would be an incredible businesswoman,” he adds.

Coming full circle

Faulkenberg started out with INDOT on the road crew while he was in college at Indiana State University. During the summers, he could be found “swinging a sickle and mowing roads.”

After graduating, he joined INDOT as a federal auditor. The federal highway system was being completed at that time; he remembers some Indiana interstates opening. He even attended the Indianapolis ribbon-cutting dedication at the Interstate 65 and

Interstate 70 exchange at “spaghetti junction.”

The accessibility and connectivity that the highway system provides was a major influence on Faulkenberg’s career choice.

“When I was in college, they were building I-64 in southern Indiana. It went right through my hometown of St. Croix, Indiana. I remember the days pre-interstate and the impact that had on us,” he notes.

“Coming from a very rural area, I realized the real positive impact (interstates) have on a community. The access it gives you to the world is really amazing and all of that really inspired me about highways and roads.”



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Mr. Faulkenberg