

A Conversation with

Congressman French Hill



What were your career goals when you first entered government? How has that changed over time?

When I announced that I would run for Congress in the fall of 2013, I had spent the last two decades as a community banker here in Arkansas. However, just prior to moving home to take a post at First Commercial Corp. (now Regions Bank - Arkansas), I had spent four years working for President George H.W. Bush during his administration at the U.S. Treasury and at the White House. Prior to my service with President Bush, I had five years working in commercial and investment banking as well as two years on the professional staff of the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking. Thus, with that business background, I ran for Congress with a keen interest on prioritizing government spending, rightsizing and balancing the cost-benefit of federal regulations, achieving pro-growth tax reform, and creating an environment more conducive to spur new company formation and entrepreneurship. During the past five years, I have spoken out on these objectives and have introduced and supported legislation to achieve them; in many cases, I'm gratified by the success that has been achieved.

Over time, my work has expanded to include a great passion for our men and women who have worn the uniform, our veterans. I'm proud to have a crackerjack military and veteran team of advisors on my staff, and together, we are working to advance important veteran legislation and provide quality service to our veterans facing individual challenges here in our central Arkansas.

What has been one of the biggest challenges you've had to face in the federal government?

Clearly, the biggest challenge that I believe confronts all members of Congress, including me, is the intense gravitational pull by so many forces to increase government spending while rarely prioritizing spending programs or alleviating regulatory burden. It's the key reason I have restarted former Sen. William Proxmire's, "Golden Fleece Award" to recognize government waste, fraud and abuse. Any time that we have an opportunity to gain efficiencies, cut out waste, or enhance a program without spending more money it's an opportunity to celebrate. It's the rare visitor to my office seeking to reduce spending for a particular topic or even willing to leave it flat!

But clearly, today and for immediate future, the most significant challenge is the overwhelming public health crisis and the resulting economic catastrophe that is COVID-19. This challenge will continue to manifest itself for many months and years to come.

How do you maintain a work/life balance?

Life in Congress has as its biggest challenge time management. Spending three to four days of the week in Washington and the balance of the time home in central Arkansas makes work/life balance a real juggling act. I enjoy spending time at home with family or on a family trip. Our family loves exploring new places and spending time together on the road. Personally, meaningful time in the outdoors -- hunting, hiking, climbing, canoeing -- are key elements of striking that balance. For five decades, I have treasured my time exploring Arkansas's beautiful rugged terrain. Time on the trail or on the river is immediate tonic to me, and for me, there are never enough hours in the outdoors.

What is the most important lesson you've learned in your career to date?

There is no substitute for hard work. I have worked since I was a teenager. I had wonderful role models in my two grandfa-

thers and my dad all of whom had terrific work ethics — accompanied by warm, witty senses of humor. I've always encouraged colleagues, young people, and students that that "success comes before work" only in the dictionary. There is no substitute for perseverance, and I firmly believe that a key difference between successful people and those who don't make it is that successful people look at that list of tasks that they do not want to do — and they do them anyway.

How would you describe your leadership style? What experiences have you had to cultivate that style?

My leadership style is service-focused. I believe in building a plan and ensuring that the team entrusted with that plan has the training and resources necessary to carry it out to success. I believe in a collaborative effort where leaders lead by doing and setting a positive, energetic example.

Tell us about your experiences working with the Arkansas Bankers Association.

I greatly enjoyed my two decades of association with the Arkansas Bankers Association. I served on the Board of Directors and attended many annual meetings and annual summer seminars. I'm grateful for the friendships that I built through the Association and the knowledge that I acquired from high-quality speakers, training opportunities, and peer-to-peer exchanges.

What is been your greatest achievement that you are most proud of? (Professional, personal, or both)

Personally, I am devoted to our family and live in awe of Martha's legal career and community leadership as well as Liza and Payne for their exceptional talents and abilities. It's been so rewarding to watch our kids grow, learn, and become successful young adults.

Professionally, it had been a goal since my college days of starting a banking-related business before I turned 40. My grandfather and my father had always urged me to develop professional skills and leadership in order to prepare me for heading off on my own and helping start a new enterprise. I missed my goal, as I was 42 years old when I started Delta Trust and Banking Corp. I'll be forever grateful to my fellow investors and our remarkable team of bankers and leaders that built our successful community institution.

Any philosophy or motto you tried to live or work by?

In 1983, I visited the White House for the first time during the administration of President Reagan. President Reagan had given senior White House staffers a lucite block for their desk with his favorite saying on it. A friend gave me one, and I've kept it on my desk ever since. It reads: "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit." It has been a wonderful guide.

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