**CAPSULE SUMMARY OF MEETING WITH CONGRESSPERSON CHUCK EDWARDS ON FRI. 1/13/23**

Participating from PAHC: Chris Berg; Paul Weichselbaum
Participating from Congressperson’s office: Chuck Edwards; Tommy Laughter
Length of meeting: 30 minutes

Rep. Edwards informed us that we were the first meeting he has had in his district Congressional office. As Chris shared the PAHC mission, vision, principles, and 2022 accomplishments with him, Edwards commented (paraphrase) “aha, the postcards I get from your group”.

We covered some concerns that we theoretically share in common. These included long term viability of Social Security & Medicare; simplifying the income tax code; and assuring high quality of human services (such as nursing home care, hospitals, & hospice care) that are being undermined by for-profit hedge funds & other corporate entities. Edwards agreed that he shares these concerns in general, but he was not responsive to policy recommendations Paul made, such as doing away with the maximum income threshold beyond which FICA tax is not collected ($160,020 in 2023). Chris spoke about the underfunded IRS and the need to adequately fund it to serve the American people. Chris said there is real opportunity for IRS to use its information collection to cut taxpayer prep burden, such as drafting a return for taxpayer approval. Edwards replied, naming TurboTax and nothing else.

Edwards was generally reticent in the half hour, clearly picking & choosing when to comment, as well as avoiding getting into extended policy debates. It may be more accurate to say that Edwards was soft spoken, whereas Chris Berg, Paul Weichselbaum and Chris Walters had seen him be more combative (as a sitting NC Senator) in 2019 about Medicaid expansion and the Leandro order for education funding.

Chris Berg recognized Edwards’ desire to cut Federal spending, and urged that the Department of Defense be the primary area of investigation, given that it has never successfully completed an audit. Chris subsequently spoke about more thoroughly & vigorously prosecuting monopoly cases in various industries. That point led to Edwards’ only extended comments. His concept is that regulations are at fault for the development of a lot of big corporations gobbling up small businesses. (He cited a U.S. Chamber of Commerce assertion that new regulations during the Obama years cost businesses about $890 billion. His staffer was supposed to hunt down the reference to send to us, but that hasn’t occurred as of a month later.) From his expertise in small businesses, particularly banks, he claimed that small businesses cannot afford the cost of regulations that affect both large and small companies alike, whereas the big companies can manage the costs and end up buying up the small businesses (particularly banks, in terms of Dodd-Frank requirements). Paul Weichselbaum offered that maybe certain regulations have to be tailored to the circumstances of particular businesses, but that directly addressing monopolistic structures & practices (to assure competition) is the correct step that the federal government should take. In summary, Edwards said that he had been successful in the NC Senate to make NC very attractive to businesses & his goal is to follow suit in the House of Representatives.

Paul brought up what Edwards might do to advocate for infrastructure projects in Western North Carolina that will be paid for through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2022 [and potentially through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022]. Edwards named a number of his priorities, such as broadband, roads, and bridges, while making clear that he still opposes the infrastructure law but has the responsibility to see that NC 11 benefits from the spending.

Chris spoke about supporting democracy at home. Edwards made it appear that he didn’t understand Chris’s point. Paul said we should do everything required to have free & fair elections. Edwards agreed sideways: (paraphrase) “I want to make it easier to vote & harder to cheat”. We discussed several other topics in the limited time available.

It is uncertain when and whether we will have another meeting with Rep. Edwards. PAHC and Edwards are far apart on almost every policy issue, and PAHC will continue to encourage pointed, honest, and direct correspondence with him via postcards and in letters to the editor.