



A TRUCKER GOES TO WASHINGTON

U.S. Representative Mac Collins

By Jean Feingold

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U.S.

Representative Michael “Mac” Collins, a Flovilla, Georgia, native, got started in business right out of high school at the tender age of

18. “I just didn’t want to go to college,” he explained. “Both my mother and daddy were small business people, very small, and that kind of influenced me, too, so I wanted to go into business for myself.”

His father had a concrete products business and they worked together. Collins got into trucking when he needed a truck to deliver the concrete. That single truck became several as varied types of vehicles were needed for ready mix and other concrete products.

Collins was also motivated to go into business so he could marry his high school sweetheart, the former Julie Watkins of Jackson. They have four children and nine grandchildren. Another is on the way.

“Julie was always working with me,” Collins said. “Even after we started our family, she would bring the young ones to the office and do the books.”

He started Collins Trucking after the manager for a plywood plant Georgia-Pacific was building in Monticello saw his tractor-trailers hauling sand and gravel to the construction site. When the manager inquired whether he was running them enough, and Collins said, “no,” he was hired to haul logs for the timber company. He originally thought he would need five to six trucks for this, but, at its peak, he used 30 trucks and more than 100 trailers to haul more than 20,000 loads of timber and peal-a-cores in one year.

Later, the trucking company became kind of a specialty with Georgia-Pacific. Collins said sometimes the lumber giant would discover they had too much wood at one mill and not

enough at another. When that happened, they called him to provide a fleet of trucks to move a high volume of timber between mills so no mill would be idle. "We could do that because of the number of trucks we had," he said.

Collins ran this company for 30 years. His oldest son, Mike, became its manager in 1988 and his other son, Andy, joined the business in the mid-1990s. All Collins has left of it now are a few trailers and flatbeds he leases to his sons, who have formed their own trucking company with about 70 trucks, Collins Industries.

Entering Public Service

Collins was inspired to enter public service after hearing his mother talk about how much she enjoyed being on the Flovilla City Council. His father often said he wanted to be a county commissioner, but he never ran, partly because he had only a third grade education. Collins feels he fulfilled one of his father's goals with his election to the Butts County Commission, which he chaired from 1977 to 1981.

He served two terms in the Georgia State Senate before being elected to the Georgia Third District seat in the United States Congress in 1992, defeating a five-term incumbent. He has just begun his fifth term in Congress.

During his first term, Collins served on the House Transportation Committee. Since then, he has been a member of the House Budget Committee and the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, which is responsible for all legislation related to revenue measures, managing the public debt, tariff and trade laws, Social Security, and Medicare. A fiscally conservative Republican, Collins works actively to reduce government waste and spending. He chooses not to participate in the government-sponsored pension plan and

Collins in committee session.



does not send out mass political mailings.

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bureaucracy and being involved in the government's policy making process. He served on the committee that handled welfare reform and played a large part in developing the child support recovery portions of that law. He also had significant input into bringing fairness and parity in aviation taxes so airline passengers pay the same amount regardless of whether they fly on large or small airlines.

When two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters were shot down in 1994 by friendly fire, "The Defense Department compensated the foreign nationals killed in that incident at a higher rate than our own U.S. personnel who died," he said. "My office was able to get equal compensation for U.S. personnel." One of the American victims came from his district.

Industry Issues

One trucking industry issue that Congress has considered is hours of service for drivers. Collins believes there will be some changes from the current legislation, but they will be less extensive than the outgoing administration wanted. "Reducing hours of service will require an increase in the number of trucks and the number of drivers," he said. "In the trucking industry, drivers are scarce. With all the regulations, it's difficult to train new people. There are not a lot of young people going into the industry and many of those in it now are retiring. This would be going in the wrong direction for the industry as well as the consumer." He believes the new administration will have a more common sense approach to this issue.

Collins was instrumental in introducing the Fuel Tax Cost Reduction Act of 2000 which attempted to help trucking com-



In a familiar situation: talking to the press.

panies cope with the high cost of diesel fuel. Assuming that a rig gets 6 miles per gallon and travels 150,000 miles per year, it consumes 25,000 gallons of fuel, so an increase of 50 cents per gallon at the pump costs the operators of each truck \$12,500 more annually. Collins' bill would have repealed the 4.3-cent per gallon fuel tax instituted in 1993 and the 5-cent per gallon tax on gasoline and diesel fuel imposed in 1990, resulting in estimated annual savings of \$2,375 per truck annually.

Collins points out that the 4.3 percent tax was imposed as a deficit reduction measure, making it obsolete since the government now has a surplus. "I think that when you end a deficit, you should also end a deficit reduction tax, especially when ending that tax would ease the pain of rapidly escalating fuel prices," he said.

He authored the Electric Vehicle Consumer Incentive Tax Act. Had it been enacted, it would have modified the electric vehicle tax credit to a flat \$4,000 and extended it to 2008. It would also give owner/lessors of electric vehicles the credit if they leased those vehicles to government entities and would give the same \$50,000 tax deduction to electric buses that low emission alterna-

tive gas vehicles get. Collins said he will reintroduce the legislation.

He does not see alternative energy trucks coming into being within the next decade, although he thinks there may be some increased movement toward natural gas powered trucks. With so many diesels on the road, he thinks it would be too expensive for trucking companies to change. He sees alternative energy vehicles as particularly valuable for short commutes and for use at places like major airports, where they could help reduce pollution.

Thoughts on the Economy

Collins said there are three primary things that must happen to boost the current economy. First, interest rates must be lower. He was pleased to see these rates reduced by the Federal Reserve Board on January 3 and is optimistic they will decrease more soon.

"We've got to deal with the tax issue," he said. "Taxes now are the highest they've been since World War II." He feels government takes too much money from businesses and consumers so it can be spent by Congress. He said taxes should

be reduced by repealing the Alternative Minimum Tax, which has long outlived itself, and by reducing the rate on capital gains. Doing this will encourage people to divest themselves of existing assets and reinvest. He also recommends reducing the number of marginal tax rates and consolidating some rates to leave more money in wage earners' paychecks.

"We have to have a domestic energy policy, one that will make us less dependent on foreign oil, not only for fuel and gasoline but also for the many other products based on petroleum like plastics," Collins commented. He would like domestic energy production to increase and favors improvements in energy efficiency.

The Value of GMTA

Belonging to the Georgia Motor Trucking Association is something people in the industry should do, Collins said. "They have access to a lot of information, they share information, they're able to voice your opinion," he said. "It's a collective way of having your voice heard. That's very important. A number of voices are heard a lot quicker than just a single voice in the wilderness. I just think that it's good for all of those in the trucking industry to stay in touch with their congressmen, their state representatives, and their local officials." His son Mike is currently serving on the GMTA board of directors.

"Mac is a shining example of exactly what a congressman ought to be," GMTA President Ed Crowell said. "He is a businessman who went to Washington and did not forget where he came from. Mac still returns his own phone calls and he still has commitments to the issues of the people of his district and the people in his industry. He has not been sucked in by the 'inside the beltway' mentality." ■