The Honorable W.J. “Billy” Tauzin

Born on the bayou - but bred to be in politics - W.J. “Billy” Tauzin of tiny Chackbay, Louisiana, has risen from president of the student body at his alma mater, Nicholls State University, to dean of the Louisiana Congressional Delegation and, finally, the Chairman of the United States House of Representatives’ Committee on Energy and Commerce. When he ascended to the position on January 4, 2001, culminating more than 30 years of public service, a jubilant Billy Tauzin called it “a dream come true.”

Today, he is living out that boyhood dream. Guided by deep, abiding devotion to Congress and a belief in the need for civility in the political process, Chairman Tauzin has made bipartisanship the cornerstone of his chairmanship. In just 14 short months, the venerable Energy and Commerce Committee has held more than 100 hearings on topics of critical importance to the future of our nation and approved landmark legislation dealing with a wide range of issues that have bedeviled Congress for years.

Most recently, he worked with former Chairman John Dingell to pass the Tauzin-Dingell “Internet Freedom and Broadband Deployment Act,” which many analysts say will create thousands of new jobs and pump billions of dollars into the U.S. economy by accelerating the rollout of high-speed Internet services across America. In addition, Chairman Tauzin also worked closely with both Republicans and Democrats on the Committee to help combat the war on terrorism. The Tauzin-Dingell “Bioterrorism Response Act of 2001” was approved last year by an overwhelming 418-to-2 vote in the House of Representatives. This sweeping anti-terrorism bill includes everything from beefed up food safety to tightened controls on deadly biological agents.

Under Chairman Tauzin’s leadership, the Energy and Commerce Committee also played an integral role last year in crafting and advancing sweeping energy legislation. The so-called “SAFE Act,” with Chairman Tauzin as the lead sponsor, moves America a giant step closer to a much needed, comprehensive energy policy which will improve the security, reliability and affordability of our nation’s energy supplies. Additionally, Chairman Tauzin utilized his problem-solving skills to help shepherd the “Patient’s Bill of Rights Act” through the House, giving American consumers new rights in dealing with HMO’s and making health care more accessible and affordable to millions of people.

A fierce advocate for the need of vigilant Congressional oversight, Chairman Tauzin has been at the forefront of aggressive investigations recently into Ford-Firestone, Enron, Arthur Andersen, human cloning and the cancer drug, Erbitux.

Over the past two decades, Chairman Tauzin has been a key player in Congress on everything from health care to tax reform, but clearly he has made his biggest impact on telecommunications policy. As Media Week’s Alicia Mundy recently wrote: “Tauzin’s smile and good ole boy demeanor are political tools he uses as a front for what is one of the sharpest minds in Congress.

That may be one of the reasons why this quotable Republican has become one of the most powerful people involved with the telecommunications industry.”

Chairman Tauzin was a key architect of the historic 1996 Telecommunications Act, which has resulted in increased competition across America- and lower prices – for the delivery of telephone and home video services. Recently, he championed another consumer-friendly bill – later signed into law – which allows
satellite companies to offer, for the first time, local television signals as part of their subscription packages, bringing exciting, new video programming choices to consumers. Chairman Tauzin also pushed through Congress critically-needed legislation making 911 the universal emergency response number for both wired and wireless telephone users, a measure which proponents say will save thousands of lives in the United States in the future.

Called a “rising star” by the Washington Times and “crafty, tough, witty and charming” by the conservative Weekly Standard, the easy-going, fun-loving Louisianian is widely credited with giving birth to the direct broadcast satellite industry (DBS). As a result of his program access provisions to the 1992 Cable Act, Americans today are able to receive video and audio programming in their homes via pizza-sized satellite dishes, providing new competitors to the old cable monopolies. During the emotional, often-heated debate, Chairman Tauzin led the successful fight against a veto of the Cable Act by former President George H. Bush, marking the only time during the Bush Administration that Congress overrode a presidential veto.

In recent years, the Louisiana lawmaker also has moved to the forefront of tax reform. Chairman Tauzin has been the driving force behind legislation to abolish all federal income taxes and the dreaded Internal Revenue Service and replace them with a simple, fair, straightforward national retail sales tax of 15 percent. As part of a two-year, 40-city campaign to “Scrap the Code,” Chairman Tauzin and House Majority Leader Dick Armey barnstormed across America, preaching the need for fundamental tax reform.

An author, amateur actor and a native Cajun American, Chairman Tauzin was first sent to Washington in 1980 following a special election to fill the seat of Dave Treen, who resigned from Congress after becoming Governor of Louisiana. Today he represents the state’s sprawling 3rd Congressional District and proudly reflects the culture and values of South Louisiana, where the “joi de vie” (joy of life) is celebrated with a gusto that is envied across the nation. He’s serving his 11th full term in Congress, having won 12 consecutive elections and receiving an overwhelming popular vote on each occasion, averaging more than 90 percent.

Chairman Tauzin is married to the former Cecile Bergeron of Crowley, who has been a civic leader, both in Washington and Louisiana, in causes important to children, families, and senior citizens. Also close to his heart are five grown children: Kristie, Bill, John, Tom, and Michael, and his mother, 82-year-old Enola, and late father, Boone. A former practicing attorney, Chairman Tauzin received a B.A. from Nicholls State University in 1964 and his J.D. from Louisiana State University in 1967. Chairman Tauzin is the only person in American history to serve in the leadership of both major political parties in Congress.