

Editorial . . .

Editor's Note: Congressman James H. Quillen has been the representative from the first congressional district of Tennessee for 34 years. He will retire when his term is up this year. The Congressman has done much to improve the quality of life for the citizens of the first district, but many believe his greatest achievement was his part in the creation of the ETSU Medical School that now bears his name. He tells the story of how a medical school came to Johnson City in the editorial that follows.

In reflecting over my 34 years in the U.S. Congress — and even eight years before that in the Tennessee Legislature — I feel extreme pride in the accomplishments of the citizens of Northeast Tennessee in making our region the wonderful place it is to live, to work, and to raise a family.

I am especially gratified to see how our people have risen to the occasion in establishing Upper East Tennessee as a thriving, growing, and committed leader in health care, medical technology, training, research, and development.

The "medical marvel" now underway here didn't happen overnight. It wasn't too long ago that those needing medical care had to travel long distances over antiquated roads to seek the crucial attention that could mean so much to their well-being. Thanks to the farsighted determination by many of the area's compassionate citizens, many of whom have now passed on, for this dream to establish a medical school that began 35 years ago.

The dream began to unfold in the 1960s. Meetings on the matter in 1971 were held in my congressional office in Washington, and I remember them well and feel privileged to have played a part in getting this dream into reality.

The need for such a facility was quite apparent, but the solution was to find a way. A door was opened for such a possibility when the Teague Bill was introduced in the House. I was quick to co-sponsor this legislation as it pointed to a way for a medical school in our area. The measure was introduced by Congressman Olin Teague of Texas. It passed in 1971. A companion bill was introduced in the Senate by Senator Alan Cranston of California which led to the Teague-Cranston Bill. It passed both houses in October, 1972.

President Nixon signed the bill on October 24, 1972, but getting that signature wasn't without its moments of heart-

stopping drama for me. There was tremendous opposition to the school from many sources all along, and when I got the invitation to attend the signing ceremony at the White House I was feeling great. But a few days before the big event I received a call from the President's aide saying the bill would not be approved.

Well, I almost had to have the smelling-salts. I remember that call as I was in Elizabethton at the time. When I gathered my composure, I had to do some fast talking. I pleaded my case as best I could, and finally the aide said he would relate it to the President and call me back. When he returned the call, all was well. The President would sign.

On the scheduled date, I arrived at the White House feeling on top of the world. As I entered the Southeast gate, I was met by Donald Johnson, VA administrator at the time. He asked why I was there, saying Mr. Nixon was not going to sign the bill. Once again, I felt I had been run over by a freight train. I bolted for the stairway with a lump in my throat where I spotted Bill Timmons, the Presidential aide who had called previously. He was smiling. He said the bill would be signed after all, and it was. I began to breathe again.

After the signing, the President gave me several pens, but as a precaution, I remember picking up the bill to take a close look at that signature. It was real. Once again I was feeling great.

Following the Teague-Cranston legislation approval, the medical school war shifted to the soil of Tennessee and to Nashville where tremendous and tenacious opposition was strongly entrenched. Foes of the school were prepared to burst the bubble of this dream.

Despite all previous hard-won victories, the future of the school now came to a showdown at the Statehouse, where legislation from the state level was necessary to breathe life into the facility, which was vital for federal funding. State legislators passed the bill in February, 1974, barely meeting a federal deadline.

But disaster struck four days later when the governor vetoed the measure. It was the darkest of days. Yet, in true and courageous fashion, the Upstate delegation, bolstered by a solid and united front



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from the rank and file citizens and community leaders, did the impossible and overrode the governor's veto. The Senate vote was 18-13. The House was next to take a stand, and 50 votes were needed to keep the school alive. In the mother of all miracles, 51 wonderful souls made that decision and the dream lived on.

The entire story of the school's creation is far too vast and complex to tell in this limited space, and it indeed would be a roll call of honor to read the names of all who played a key role.

The Teague-Cranston Bill and the veto override were only two hurdles. Many, many anxious moments were awaiting the outcome of this dream, and it would be 1982 before the first class of doctors would graduate.

Those early years were full of desperate struggles, with hard-fought battles waged over appropriations, supplemental funding, VA site approval, a letter of reasonable assurance, free-standing status, and numerous other pitfalls that tested the mettle of all.

But the final result brings this wonderful school to our region where it is a source of extreme pride — an outstanding facility that stands as a monument to our area's teamwork and determination to make a dream come true.

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