



Episode 916: Last House Republican to Oppose Iraq War Joins Me

Guest: Jimmy Duncan

WOODS: Now apparently you are the last remaining member of Congress to have voted against the war in Iraq?

DUNCAN: Yes, I'm the only Republican left.

WOODS: That's what I mean, yes.

DUNCAN: There were only six of us in the first place. But you know, I came to Congress as a very conventional Republican. I believed everything the military industrial complex told me, and I remember — In fact, I voted for the first Gulf War, because I went to all these briefings with Colin Powell and General Schwarzkopf, and I heard them talk about Saddam Hussein's elite troops and how he was another Hitler and so forth and how dangerous he was. And then I watched those same elite troops surrendering to CNN camera crews in empty tanks, and I thought then that the threat had been greatly exaggerated, and so I started looking at things a little bit differently.

I remember a few years later I was speaking to a group at the Greenbrier, and they had a front-page story in the newspaper that morning that said it was called the "forgotten war." And it said we were bombing every fourth day and spending \$4 million a day on a forgotten war that even I didn't know was still going on in Iraq. That was long after George said — the first George Bush had pulled out of Iraq. And then I remember also a front-page story from *The Washington Post* in which they wrote about one of our bombs going astray and 6 little boys from 7 to 13 who were playing soccer in a field were killed, and it described the anguish of a father whose 13-year-old son had had his head blown off by a bomb. And so I started — by the time of the second Iraq War, I was looking at things a little bit differently.

WOODS: Okay, that really interests me. You mention *Chronicles*, *The American Conservative*, LewRockwell.com, the Mises Institute, and you say that you began as a conventional Republican. Of course those outlets are not conventional Republican. What was your introduction to that wing of what we might call right-of-center thought that is not mentioned or acknowledged in the media? We don't exist, as far as they're concerned.

DUNCAN: Well, I honestly don't remember exactly when I started reading LewRockwell.com. I do remember — I've always been a big fan of Pat Buchanan, and so

I was familiar with *The American Conservative* magazine right from the start almost. And so that led to some of my thinking. But I also remember that at the time of the second Gulf War – I mean, I've heard several people say, well, if they had known what they knew then, they wouldn't have voted for that war. But I can tell you, I remember reading an article in *Fortune* magazine saying, "We win. What then?" And it says that if we went to war in Iraq, it would make American soldiers sitting ducks for Islamic terrorists. And there was an article in *U.S. News and World Report* that said, "Why the rush to war?" And so those articles were out there before the second vote.

And the interesting thing I was going to tell you about was when I got called down to the White House when they found out that I was leaning against the war.

WOODS: Yeah, let's hear that story.

DUNCAN: Well, they called four of us down and put us in a little secure room with Condoleezza Rice and George Tenet, the head of the CIA, and John McLaughlin the second in command of the CIA. And they had me and three other members, and it very quickly became evident that two of the members were just shells and were really going to vote for the war, but the other one who was there was a young congressman named John Hostettler from Indiana, and he actually ended up being one of the six.

But just that day or a couple days before, there was a front-page story in *The Post* quoting Lawrence Lindsey, who was a Harvard professor who was President Bush's main economics advisor, saying a war with Iraq would cost us 200 billion or more. And I asked about that, and Condoleezza Rice said, Oh no, it wouldn't cost nearly that much, maybe 50 or 60 billion, and we'd get some of that back from our allies – which had to be the worst cost estimate in the history of the world.

And then I asked them, after listening to everything they had to say, I said, Well, if you could get past the traditional conservative position of being against massive foreign aid, and if you could get past the traditional conservative position of being against the U.S. being a policeman of the world, and if you could get past the traditional conservative position of conservatives being the biggest critics of the UN – we're going to war to enforce UN resolutions – if you can get past all those traditional conservative positions, do you have any evidence of any imminent threat? And they didn't. And George Tenet confirmed that in his first speech at Georgetown University the day after he resigned.

WOODS: What did your constituents think about the fact that you opposed the war? How did you deal with that, and was there anything to deal with?

DUNCAN: The night before I did that vote, one of the television stations in Knoxville had conducted a poll, and they said 74% were in favor of the war and 9% against and 17% undecided. And so that was one time that I really thought I was possibly ending my political career when I pushed the button to vote against the war. And for about three or four years, it was clearly the most unpopular vote I had ever cast. I was supposed to speak at a Baptist church about a year after that vote one Sunday, and the minister called me and very apologetically said that he was sorry, but his main deacon, his biggest contributor, would pull out of the church if I came. And I said, Oh,

that's all right because it just gave me a free Sunday instead of having to go to that church —

WOODS: [laughing]

DUNCAN: But I had many people — One man against me totally on the war in the Republican primary, and I had people sending in letters saying that I wasn't supporting the soldiers and so forth. But I will tell you that what was definitely my most unpopular vote slowly, slowly, slowly became probably the most popular vote that I ever cast. It's amazing how that all worked out.

WOODS: Did the GOP come after you in any way in your reelection bids or anything like that?

DUNCAN: No. I think they realized that I had always gotten some very high percentages of votes, and I think — I've always been in a little bit of a minority here, I think. I think maybe some of them just think that — you know, I've always had this little bit independent, contrary streak in me. I remember — and you know, this is my 29th year here. I've been here a long time. And in my first six years, we were in a minority, and all the Republicans were voting the same way that I was voting. We were voting against most of the bills and most of the spending. Then after we took control, I kept voting the same way, and Tom DeLay came to me, and he was a congressman from Texas who really was more powerful than the Speaker at that point. And he told me, he said, These are Republican bills now, these spending bills, these appropriations bills. And I told him, I said, Yes, Tom, but you're spending more than the Democrats are spending.

Now, I will give them credit in that they weren't spending as much as the Democrats still wanted us to spend, but we greatly disappointed our base when we had control and had a president in the White House and so forth, and yet we kept increasing the spending in a tremendous way. And you know, my heritage is Scottish, I guess — or I know — and maybe that has something to do with it, but I was brought up by parents who made me believe that I'd rather sleep on the floor than sleep on the bed that's not paid for. And I thought it was terrible when we had a \$3 trillion national debt; now we've got a \$20 trillion national debt, and nobody can even humanly comprehend it.

WOODS: What were your thoughts about candidate Trump and what have been your thoughts about President Trump?

DUNCAN: Well, I like candidate Trump a whole lot better than President Trump so far, because I had hopes for him because I thought he was the least hawkish after it became obvious that Rand Paul was not going to go anywhere, had gotten out. You know, it got down to John Kasich and Ted Cruz and Trump. And so I asked one of the Ohio congressmen what they thought in Ohio. I said, What do the people in Ohio think about John Kasich? And he said, Well, we've got a saying in Ohio that there's only two people that never made a mistake in the history of the world: Jesus Christ and Kasich. And he said that's why none of the Republicans from Ohio have endorsed Kasich other than Teaberry, who used to work for him. So really it was between Trump and Cruz.

And I went ahead and endorsed Trump at that time entirely because I thought he was the least hawkish of the people running. In fact, I'm not only opposed to the war in Iraq. I've been saying for years that we need to get out of Afghanistan. In fact, Walter Jones and Thomas Massie and I are having a press conference tomorrow about that. That's been the graveyard of empires, as it's called, and it's just ridiculous. In fact, I have a speech on the floor last week and I quoted Eisenhower — of course his most famous speech was his military industrial complex speech, his farewell address. But he gave a speech in April 1953 called "A Chance for Peace" that was a great speech, and I can tell you, I ended that speech saying that I don't think Eisenhower would have ever put up with a 16-year war in Afghanistan.

WOODS: No doubt, no doubt. You're on the board of the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity, which is a great thing. And to me, one of the great contributions Dr. Paul made to American life was to make it acceptable to be antiwar without being a leftist. You can be pro-market and antiwar. Trump was a little bit doing that during the campaign, and now he's squandering that. And to me, that was one of the most important legacies of Ron Paul. Now, with the Democrats, you've been in Congress over several decades. What have you seen from them on war? Do you see consistency there?

DUNCAN: No, there's none. There's not consistency there. It's changed. I mean, it's like 80% of the Republicans voted against the bombings in Yugoslavia, in the former Yugoslavia. And I've said that I think 80% of the Republicans would have voted against the war in Iraq if Gore had been president. And the same situation has occurred with the Democrats. They've switched their position a couple times. I mean, it's just like in these dealings with Russia now. The Democrats used to be all in favor of Russia when it was the Soviet Union and they were run by communists, and now, of course, they've changed their position on that too.

WOODS: If you had it to do over again, am I understanding you correctly that you would not have voted for the first Gulf War?

DUNCAN: That's correct. I wouldn't have. I think, you know, all these leaders, they want to be seen as new Winston Churchills and they want to prove how tough they are and how powerful they are, but they end up not only spending — we've ended up spending not only trillions of dollars, but even worse is all the young soldiers who've been killed or maimed in these needless wars. And I mentioned Eisenhower, but even President Reagan used to say you should never go to war unless there's no other reasonable alternative, and even then as a very last resort. But we've gotten away from that. I wrote an article for *The American Conservative* magazine about how disappointed I was that all the Republican candidates in this last election were trying to prove how hawkish they were and how when I was a young man first getting started in politics, the Republican Party had a legitimate argument that they could make about being the peace part, and I wish we would be the peace party again.

But it's an interesting thing, though. Even William Buckley changed his position about the war in Iraq. He was for it, strongly for it for a while, and then finally — he had a great quote. He said, "A point is reached when tenacity conveys not steadfastness of purpose but misapplication of pride." And he finally came out against the war in Iraq and he said, where there had been skepticism, he said if we continue on, there will be

contempt. And he said that shortly before he died, I think in 2005 or '06, whenever it was that he passed away.

WOODS: Leaving aside China for a minute, I'd say the two countries that are most demonized in Washington these days would be Russia and Iran. I'm curious to know what you think U.S. policy should be toward those countries and whether you think there's justification for the demonization.

DUNCAN: No, I disagree with the demonization. I think we should try to be friends with everyone. I think we should try to be friends with Israel, but we need to have more balance in our foreign policy. We need to try to be friends with Iran too, and there is a way that we can do that. I mean, Iran is sticking by the agreement that was entered into, and then I agreed with Ron Paul in that we were expanding NATO far too much and going right to the borders of Russia. So you can't really blame them for some of the feelings they've had. But if we would develop —

George W. Bush, when he was running — and that was a disappointment to me also, that when he was running, he said we needed a more humble foreign policy. And he came out very strongly in his campaign against nation building. But then when he got in there, the neocons got a hold of him and we got into the nation building business, much to our dismay. And now, as I've said, we've entered into all these wars that we simply can't afford. I disagree with it. And we're exaggerating these threats far beyond any common sense, and most of it is just so that there can be more money for the defense contractors. And the defense contractors hire all of the retired admirals and generals. They talk about the revolving door of the Pentagon, and unfortunately there's revolving doors in every department and agency in the entire federal government.

WOODS: Congressman, we'll continue this discussion after this short break to thank our sponsor.

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Congressman, you're right there in Washington. You've been there a long time. Is there anything you look at with optimism for the future, or is it just pessimism?

DUNCAN: Well, I hate to say it, but I'm very pessimistic about it. I think it's unfortunate. I know that there's no future Congress that's going to come in and cut social security and cut all these different things, and so we're just going to start simply printing more money. More money, more money, more money. I mentioned a while ago this debt of \$20 trillion, and it seems to me that in all the reading I've done, every country that's gotten into this situation has tried to inflate their way out of it, and they haven't been able to do it. I mean, Germany in the 1920s was the most educated country in the world at that point, yet they had almost the worst inflation that's ever been had in the history of the world. And the great biography about Bonhoeffer it mentioned there about all the inflation that they had. And I heard a presentation in the early '90s where, in Argentina, another greatly educated country in South America, they had inflation so bad they were having to raise prices in the grocery stores every four hours. And I think we're headed for some of that same territory unless we make

some pretty big changes in the very near future. And you talked about Ron Paul. Ron was a very close friend of mine and in my opinion a great man and a courageous man.

WOODS: Young people by and large, I find, are more skeptical of the bipartisan foreign policy than the older folks are. They're not so good on government spending and government overall, but they're sort of good on that, so it makes me think, at least on this, we might make some progress. But on the other hand, it seems that the foreign policy proceeds as if there is no American public. It just goes on and on and nothing changes. It doesn't matter what we think.

DUNCAN: Well, I think you're right, and it does give me some hope, I suppose, that when I did what was obviously a very unpopular thing in my very conservative, pro-military district that opinions changed so much. And that was good. So you're right; on the foreign policy we've become a little more skeptical, although it looks like we still have too many people who want us to bomb too many places even now.

But when you talked about the socialism, that is discouraging to me that so many young people were infatuated with Bernie Sanders. And I tried to tell people in my newsletters and my speeches and all around that I wish they'd look at Venezuela and they'd look at every country around this world that has followed socialism. The people are having a pitiful existence. I mean, God has blessed every nation in this world with natural beauty and natural resources that could make those countries wealthy, and yet 58% of the people in the world are having to get by on \$4 or less a day and having a pitiful existence compared to us.

I wish they'd look around at those countries, and then I wish they'd look around at every city and state in this country that's had liberal, left-wing leadership for the last 40 or 50 years. They're in terrible trouble. People are moving as fast as they can get out from the high-tax states to the low-tax states. New York had 41 congressmen in the 1970s; now they've got 27. If they just had ordinary, average growth, they would have 10 million more people and 14 more members of Congress. And it underlies all kinds of problems. I mean, we sent 250 million to Flint, Michigan, far more than we should have, but they lost almost half their population since the '70s, so they haven't been able to take care of things. But there's potential Flints all over the Northeast and Midwest where people have been moving out, and it's not fair to my taxpayers in Tennessee, where we've acted in fiscally conservative, fiscally prudent ways, to have to bail out all the high-tax states and counties around the country, in the Northeast and Midwest in particular.

WOODS: Have you ever had higher political ambitions, say for the Senate or even the presidency?

DUNCAN: [laughing] Well, a friend of mine, Bill Kauffman, wrote a real nice article in *The American Conservative* magazine urging me to run for president one time, but I said — I had a lot of people say things like that to me, but I said I'd get slaughtered. But I had a couple of — I was urged to run for the Senate a couple of times years ago, but I've always felt very lucky to have the job that I have. And I have four grown children and nine little grandchildren, and my job has enabled me to speak around the country a lot and write a lot of articles, and yet still have a family life. And in fact, I congratulate you on your five daughters, I think it is.

WOODS: It is, yes. Well, as a matter of fact, people have told me that I should seek the Libertarian Party nomination for president, and I have not taken them up on it. I feel like if I'm going to leave my five daughters for extended periods of time, it would have to be for something less, I don't know, insanity-inducing than that. Don't get me wrong; I appreciate the vote of confidence, so to speak, that people think I could do some good spreading the message that way, but I think I'm already doing that in my current capacity the best I can.

DUNCAN: Well, let me tell you, in the books and the articles that you're writing and the podcast that you're doing, you're doing great work. You inspire people like me, and I think you inspire a lot of young people, so I think you're a really valuable asset to this country where you are.

WOODS: Well, that is a very kind thing to say, and of course I'm very grateful for what you've been doing and the message that you've been spreading. And as a matter of fact, you mentioned Bill Kauffman. Bill wrote a book on the antiwar right, and there is a section on Congressman Duncan in that book, and I love what you had to say in there and what you had to say here today. And moreover – let me add one more thing – what really pleases me about all this is that your office contacted me about having you on the show. And let me just put it this way: you can probably count on one hand the number of U.S. congressmen who would approach Tom Woods about being on *The Tom Woods Show*.

DUNCAN: Well, I will tell you this: this is the first time that I've ever had my office do that. We've never asked to be on any program. We've been – I've been on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and O'Reilly and most of the others at some point or another, but I've never asked to be on a show before. But I have such admiration and respect for you, and I thought maybe the people who do follow your podcast might like to hear a little bit about what I had to say on some of these things.

WOODS: Well, you know what else, congressman? Let me say one more thing. I think a lot of my listeners will have heard of Thomas Massie, Justin Amash, Rand Paul, of course. And I bet a lot of them are not familiar with Congressman Duncan, and yet here I am talking to somebody who reads LewRockwell.com, who actively seeks out *The Tom Woods Show*. This is a very unusual situation [laughing]. And I think a lot of people are going to say, How did I not know about this guy? This is a terrible injustice. Well, we have rectified that injustice, at least in part, today with this conversation. People can find out about you at Duncan.house.gov, and I will link to that on today's show notes page, which is TomWoods.com/916. Once again, Congressman Duncan, thanks so much for your time, and we will look forward to what you have to say at the press conference.

DUNCAN: Okay, thank you very much. It's been a real honor to be on this podcast with you.