



Podcast Transcript

The Cloakroom with Peter Roskam: 37th Annual Legislative Seminar – Congressman Brad Knott (R-NC)

Date: Thursday, June 11, 2026

Guest: Peter Roskam, Heath Shuler, Congressman Brad Knott, **Host:** Leeann Lee

Run Time: 30:42

For questions and comments contact:



Peter Roskam

Partner
Washington, D.C.
T: 1.202.861.1605 | proskam@bakerlaw.com



Heath Shuler

Senior Advisor
Washington, D.C.
T: 1.202.861.1763 | hshuler@bakerlaw.com

Lee: Welcome to “The Cloakroom with Peter Roskam.” Former Congressman Peter Roskam leads BakerHostetler’s Federal Policy team. Through interviews with leading members of Congress, Peter provides an insightful, firsthand view into the latest policy and political debates on Capitol Hill.

In today’s episode, Peter is joined at the 37th Annual Legislative Seminar in Washington by his BakerHostetler colleague, former Congressman Heath Shuler, and Congressman Brad Knott, a Republican from North Carolina. Knott is in his first term representing a district that includes the Raleigh suburbs. A former federal prosecutor, Knott focused on prosecuting drug cartels, human trafficking, financial crimes and national gangs. In Congress, he serves on the Judiciary Committee, the Transportation Committee and the Homeland Security Committee.

Peter, Heath and Congressman Knott discussed the Republicans' pre-election agenda and how Knott works as freshman member of Congress to make an impact in a seniority-driven Congress.

Let's listen in to "The Cloakroom with Peter Roskam."

Shuler: It is great to welcome a North Carolinian to the stage. Brad, thank you for being here.

Knott: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Shuler: First question I must ask. I mean, when you start doing a little research about Brad, you start realizing that your life must have been pretty chaotic as a child. I mean, you are one of a quadruplet in your family.

Knott: Yes.

Shuler: So, which is more chaotic and is it being a freshman member or growing up in your family?

Knott: Well, revisionist history has told me over and over that I was a picture perfect child, never complained, always fell in line. But now that I have two young children myself, I don't know how my parents did it.

Shuler: How did they do that?

Knott: They were going for, those of you who don't know, my name is Brad. I'm a quadruplet. My parents had two children, just like me. My mom wanted a third child and my dad wanted no more children. And needless to say, my mom won because accidentally they had three, four, five, and six. And when I was born, my oldest sister was two and a half. So, my mom had six children under three with four babies. And so now my wife wants a third child. I'm like, Joanna. my goodness. So, it was chaos.

Shuler: Well, I can't even imagine how that must have been as a kid, your parents, poor parents. I mean, having the first was always the most challenging, it was really challenging, but to have all of them in diapers at one time is incredible. As a member of the Transportation Infrastructure Committee, I mean, you're getting ready to go, you're marking up the highway, reauthorization bill in Congress, talk about a couple of the real points of emphasis now. You got gas tax, you got usage tax now, EV tax. Where are those areas in particular falling as it relates to the reauthorization? Give us an insight of what is going on.

Knott: Yeah, it is a great question and one that I've been very focused on on this committee. And I'm very grateful that this surface reauthorization bill seems to be moving forward in normal order and with a bipartisan basis. And obviously funding is the name of the game of everything in Washington. And you have various revenue streams that are carved out to support infrastructure. The greatest concern that I've had, and I'm very grateful to Chairman Graves that he's been receptive of, is going back to my legal career and that is the regulatory

climate. You have these huge infrastructure needs that are being patchworked from state to state, region to region, even county to county when you break it down. And the regulatory cost for infrastructure is about the same on a percentage level in terms of its increase, whether we're talking about a residential home, whether we're talking about an office building or even a bridge, highway system, et cetera. It can go up to sometimes 60% cost increase for various projects, not intentionally, but just because of the varying degrees of uncertainty or the delayed timing of it.

And so, one of the focuses that I've been working on with Chairman Graves is trying to generate incentives for states to provide regulatory certainty on the front end. So, when they give a permit to a contractor who is receiving federal dollars and state dollars, that it can be, once you get the permit, it is free range to go forward. And the estimates that I've seen will reduce costs dramatically in that effect.

Shuler: That is incredible. Talk about the gas tax holiday. That's been a point of emphasis as of late with the President. And obviously that money is you, the tax dollars for that is used for the reauthorization. So, it would lower the amount that would be available for that. Walk through that as a freshman member having to start making some of those big decisions.

Knott: Sure. I'm for right now, I'm certainly in favor of it. And it is got, from what I've heard, we'll see what happens if we get to a vote. It is a, I don't know if you've noticed this, but it is a fairly polarized time in Washington, D.C. But there seems to be percolating efforts to suspend the gas tax and to provide some relief for consumers at the pump. And I would certainly support that on a short-term basis. Obviously, the issue is the oil market is very inelastic. There will be some systemic issues going forward with the oil infrastructure, just internationally speaking. So how long to make the gas tax suspended, that is a real question.

Shuler: Do you think it'll show up at the pumps? Because we had a senator basically, Republican senator just here, and he was saying, hey, I just don't know if it'll actually show up at the pumps.

Knott: That is a tough question. For those of you all who know this, I'm certainly an elementary level student, but the commodities markets are very complicated. They're very international. You had to deal with paper supply, physical supply. You had to deal with long-term future sentiment. That is in the weeds, but I would be surprised if it affords real relief immediately at the pump, given all that is going on in the world right now.

Roskam: Brad, when we had dinner a couple of months ago, we had a chance to discuss your background as a federal prosecutor, and you gave some insight into some cases that you had been involved in. And not to drag everybody through the details of them, because what you were describing were monstrous situations. And that was part of your motivation for running for Congress. Part of them were people who were here illegally who had committed monstrous crimes. So, there is nobody who is going to hold a candlelight vigil for any of those guys. The

question then becomes, how do we find a sweet spot as it relates to immigration policy in the United States? There was, what happened in Minneapolis was just incredibly unfortunate. And there is a stepping back by the administration in some cases. What do you think? Where is the balance on this that would give you a level of confidence and not asking you to squish out on a tough on crime position, but that is to say, how should we be thinking about this?

Knott: Yeah, that is a great question, Peter, and thank you for it. One of my passions is public safety. We always talk about various rights that people are passionate about, and rights of religious freedom, right to speak freely, right to assemble, right to have intellectual property protected, all of them are very important. But I would submit that if you don't have your right of public safety realized, you certainly can't exercise the rights that we hold dear to our hearts. And as a former prosecutor, I did cases all over the country. And I think that there has to be a very sobering acknowledgement that we do have a very real problem of people who are not native to the United States in the country who commit crimes. And there's various stats that you can use to point to this.

But there is two that paint the picture for me most clearly. Number one, just the known revenue that goes from North America, South, and then around the world. directly tied to criminal activity exceeds the annual revenue of Walmart. That is astounding. That is astounding. And the sophistication of the criminal enterprises around the world mirror that financial prominence, whether it is with the potency of the drugs, the immigration, fraud sophistication, getting people into this country, getting product into this country. They're very sophisticated actors.

But secondly, and the one that I found to be the most harrowing, is in the year 1990, there were less than 4,500 people in the United States who died from drug overdoses, less than 4,500 people in one year, one calendar year in 1990. Since the year 2000, you go up to the close of last year, you're around 1.5 million Americans who have died. And that doesn't even take into account those who have lost their life to addiction, those who have lost their life to depletion of neighborhood resources or safe streets or all the accompanying effects of a vibrant drug trade. So, we have to acknowledge we have a very real problem that affects every American.

But then secondly, we have to restore the notion that A, every person, regardless of income, regardless of zip code, regardless of their personal plight in life, advantaged or disadvantaged, is due a safe street, right? Every child in the United States deserves a safe street. And to effectuate that, you had to go against some very problematic trends, I would submit, around the country. There is a real defund the police effort. There is an anti-law enforcement effort. There is a real adamant movement that says any law enforcement that goes beyond a certain level of force is a problem. And let me just tell you, there is absolute need for accountability, but there is also the need to recognize and to fight these hardened criminals.

So, with that as my backdrop, I believe that the way forward with immigration is on an individual, personal basis. If you're in the United States, you must

contribute to the United States. Who are you and why are you here? Those are the two foundational questions that any sane immigration policy must have recorded. And if there are millions of people who we have no idea who they are, why they're here, or where they came from, you cannot achieve it. I am all for a rational, transparent immigration policy that services our agricultural business, our hospitality business, our high-tech industry. But if we don't have a sane controlled system, we lose track of it.

Roskam: It is interesting, your comments about every child deserves a safe street and how can you prosper without it? There is a friend of mine, a guy named Gary Haugen here in town who founded International Justice Mission. And he wrote a work and he basically made that argument to the international development community saying, look, you can do all these development programs, but if somebody doesn't feel safe where they are in this mountain town in Peru, there is no future. The future is really difficult to contemplate.

Okay, let's shift gears. Let's go to the Judiciary Committee. Spicy, lots of action on your committee. And it is one that gets a lot of attention from an intellectual property point of view. There's been concerns that have been raised by our IP lawyers and others about intellectual property just getting devoured by artificial intelligence. How are you thinking about that? How are, you represent North Carolina, lots of high tech, lots of stuff that is there. What is the future like? And is there a concern that people's intellectual property gets so deeply cooked into these models that extracting it just becomes a massive damage claim? Like how do you protect that at the front end?

Knott: Well, it is a great question, Peter. And just simply speaking, I come from the backdrop of, I believe that the private property, the intellectual property of the big man and the little man, metaphorically speaking, must be protected equally. And we are engaging on one hand a new frontier, but we have weathered those frontiers before. You look at the internet, you look at digital publishing, you look at iTunes, Spotify, there is a whole revolution that's taken place in the last 30 years with the internet that we have navigated, and there is still some tweaks to be made, granted. But this is a grander version of that. However, we cannot abandon the incentive structure that allows America to be such a robust marketplace at every level. And one of the ways, this is not very, I would say kosher with my party, but one of the ways that you have to protect it is you have to make the court system available to the little man, the little person, the songwriter, the burgeoning engineer, whoever it may be, because basically saying the AI took it and copied it and monetized it, that is not going to be an excuse. We have to allow the protections and the safeguards for people who originate these ideas and these products to be protected. And if an AI company monetizes an idea or a product that was designed before that company got its hands on it, there ought to be a return generated.

So, I think the same principles that have protected innovators for the last 250 years, they must be applied, even if it is more difficult. And ultimately, that will make a better AI product. It'll make a better algorithm. And if we protect the AI engineers, like we're going to hopefully protect the songwriters or whoever else,

we're going to have better AI companies as well. So, protecting the innovation, protecting the economic rights to your product, I think is the way that we have to view this.

Roskam: How did you end up in this seat? You were not the plan.

Knott: No.

Roskam: You didn't want to run.

Knott: Well, you asked me to come here.

Roskam: Well, I asked you to come here today. I definitely did. I was all over you on that. So, this wasn't really an aspiration for you. And there were other people that were happy to take this seat, thank you very much. How did you end up here?

Knott: Well, there is two reasons. I'll be very brief. I don't know how much time we have left, but one came from what I saw as a federal prosecutor. I went all over the country and saw what I just described to you, the unchecked power of criminal organizations and the effect that they had on the United States. And my personal opinion, I thought we were losing that battle in the last administration. It was just overwhelming. And we had huge attrition in law enforcement, huge attrition in the ranks of prosecutors. I felt like I could not make a difference and that made the job unbelievably taxing. So, I actually decided to resign before I decided to run.

And another motivation that I had stems back to my grandfather. My grandfather is the little man that I'm referencing in my talk. He was a native born North Carolinian, barely high school educated World War II vet who had unbelievable creativity, ingenuity, and work ethic. And he's never written a term paper. He doesn't know how to write in cursive but he has had one successful endeavor, many failed endeavors after the other. He just tried, he tried, he tried. And he's always told me, if I was starting in your lifetime, I could have never done anything that made me independent, anything that made me successful. He is not a vastly rich man, but he is an independent man. He is still alive. He just had his 100th birthday. He donates his social security check to the church every month because he is offended by it. That is the mantra he has. And I don't mean that to brag. I'm just saying that is his mindset. And he has done everything from apartment buildings to housing developments to a farm supply store, a very small airport that is still in existence. He never had a bureaucrat come and tell him yes or no.

And I understand we'll never go back to that paradigm, but we should seek to open up the marketplace to people who have ideas. And in so doing, I believe that we can lift up people. We can redistribute prosperity, if you will, and enable people who don't have access to capital, accountants, lawyers to succeed. And losing that window, I think, is a very real problem for the country. And what a blessing for me to have him as an example of what is possible when you protect the marketplace, protect ideas, protect efforts from even the smallest of the

small. And so those two things, public safety and restoring a balance of economic freedom.

Roskam: And then you ended up in a primary with a jillionaire.

Knott: Yeah. 14 people in my primary. We were the number 13 to get in. You can tell I have no idea what I'm doing. It was a terrible idea. It was just awful. And we, it was the most expensive primary in the Southeast. I'm ashamed to admit how much we had to raise and put in, but we were, number three or four on the overall spend list and we got into a runoff. My opponent was spending \$1,000,000 a week on me. And I really hated the guy that she put up on TV, I'll tell you that. She made me seem like just the most odious person in the world. It was not great. It wasn't fun, but we made it through. And it was certainly a team effort and somehow we made it.

Roskam: And how did you flip Trump?

Knott: How did I flip Trump? Well, I got, we were, this is in the weeds of the race, but we were getting pummeled so badly. I was like, there is no way we're going to win this thing. And so, I was very surprised when he called us up to Mar-a-Lago or down to Mar-a-Lago. And I viewed it honestly, Peter, as, at least I can take my wife out of dreary, cold North Carolina, and we can go down to Palm Beach and have a great day and a half getaway. And she was ready. She was excited. She threw her bags in the hotel room, went right out to the beach. I took a nap, get up and go to meet the President. And again, I was so exhausted and just I had resolved that we were probably going to lose this thing. And I went and sat down with Trump and we got an hour and a half with him. And if you thought I was exhausted before the meeting, I was just crawling out of that meeting. I mean, he was just every which way, but we had a wonderful conversation. He had stories that I cannot share because of the language, but he was, I found to be unbelievably engaging. The amount of information that he had at his fingertips was astounding.

Roskam: And his team was on the other side, right?

Knott: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. My opponent had hired everybody else that worked for him, Fabrizio, his consultants, whoever. I'll tell you this one story. He called Fabrizio and pollster, the pollster who was working for my opponent and he put it on speakerphone and did not tell Fabrizio who he was with. And he was like, Tony, I want you to tell me about this Brad Knott fella in North Carolina. And I'm like, well, dagnabbit, we're going to lose this. This ridiculous. And Tony was like, that is one tough mother bleeper. He just will not go away. And Trump mutes it and he looked at me, he was like, I like that. I like that a lot. And he unmutes it and my spears were lifted. Because we were being outspent. All I could do is just beg people for dollars and then go to every event I could and just go after my opponent. And so, after that phone call, I think that the cards tilt. Senator Budd was a huge asset for me, a huge advocate for me. That got us in the door, I think. But again, I have no answer as to how we flipped it. Just by God's grace, we were able to and we landed here.

Roskam: I love it. So, you're in a competitive state now?

Knott: Yes.

Roskam: What is the state of play? You got a lot of Yankee refugees that are coming down. and that are bringing, I would imagine that are changing the underlying political orthodoxy for what is it like. Is North Carolina reverting to the way it was a few decades ago where it was just a purplish, bluish state or where are we? What do you think?

Knott: Yeah, it is a great question and I think time will tell obviously, but my heart of hearts tells me that North Carolina is still very much a center-right state and of course, I'm biased in my analysis, but traditional North Carolina is a place that can have a three generation, four generation farm. We can have a small business. We can have Google, IBM, Apple, all of which we have. We are world leaders in various industries like the biopharma space. And we still do have third, fourth, fifth generation tobacco farms. People want the opportunity to succeed. They want their way of life protected and they want opportunity. And yes, that is a very difficult needle to thread. But we are not one for the radicals. We're not one for the extremes. And North Carolina still has some of the most robust opportunities anywhere in the country. And my favorite places in North Carolina...

Shuler: The Western part?

Knott: Well, I was going to say, yes, the Western part, but it is a great point. You go to the West or the East and you can still see old North Carolina. It is a precious place and it is worth protecting. And I think that what I just articulated is the sellable message. We are for public safety. We're for opportunity. We're for good schools. We are for protecting what made North Carolina great, even if it means welcoming the Fortune 50 companies that we all have there. And that is a very simple message, but I think it is the one that most North Carolinians.

Roskam: Last question. What is the biggest surprise that you've had coming into Congress that you talking to your wife, you're like, Honey, I had no idea.

Knott: Yeah. This is a little bit pessimistic and it is not intended to be, but you can probably relate to it, having been a former member, how hard it is to get very important things done. And in my old job, when I left, I could be very decisive and immediate. We could have search warrants done and executed in an hour in Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia like that.

My expertise is very limited. My contributions are very limited, but some of my ideas have been very sellable and they've been included in legislation, either standalone or as part of a broader package that have passed, I'm very proud of this, passed with very real bipartisan support out of the House, even a tough immigration bill, very tough, that increased penalties for people here illegally that are convicted of crimes. It got like, I want to say 15 or 20 Democrat votes and I

was unbelievably proud of that, but it goes to the other chamber and there is nothing you can do. Nothing.

That is very frustrating to me. And it is just, I understand that there is some benefit to slow government, but even in the House, there's some very real problems we have. Look at the national debt, look at the over-criminalization, look at the over-regulation, tax, whatever it may be. And unfortunately, it is just a very hard time to get things done even though the problems are very obvious. And that is my greatest frustration.

Roskam: So, let me just give you a word of encouragement on that because we've all dealt with this. And I think part of it in my estimation, and as I've been thinking about this and communicating the nature of governance, we've got a challenge right now in that we are an instant gratification culture where we want what we want when we want it, and we want it now. And I'm right at the front of this line. And yet, our founders never contemplated instant gratification. They couldn't care less. Instant gratification for those guys was eating an apple. You know what I mean? It was not, there was no...

Knott: Can you imagine if they had ice cream?

Roskam: They had ice cream probably. But then the founders said, basically, we're going to build in restraints, the likes of which you can't even contemplate. They rejected a parliamentary system. They rejected everything about it because a parliament is basically a legislative gang and instead they came up with their three co-equal branches of government. And they were so suspicious about the legislature that they split it in two. And so therein lies, there is a wisdom to that, that yes, it is frustrating, yes, it is difficult, and there is a season to it. And I think my prediction is, Brad, that you're probably entering Congress at a time when the crisis is going to continue to manifest itself, the dam is going to break, and I think you're going to be part of a generation of congressional leaders that is actually going to be able to get things done.

Knott: Let me, can I ask you both a question? It is the same question. How would you respond or what would your counsel be? I fear that most of the resistance in the gridlock now is personal more than ideological sometimes. Like a dirty secret is one of the people I enjoy most going to talk to is Jamie Raskin. He is a robust intellect. He is a great conversationalist, a great chess player. But because of where we are, there is just so much personal vitriol that good bipartisan ideas don't see the light of day. And that is the part that I just really, how are we going to break through that type of gridlock?

Shuler: Be intentional about it. Physically walk over and introduce yourself to somebody on the other side that you don't know. I mean, that was one of the things that, there was four members of Congress that I went to and have a conversation with. And I asked them each 10 questions. And I collectively took those 10 questions and put forth, I mean, it was simple stuff like never have a town hall meeting, public town hall meeting. I mean, like all four of them said never do that. If you start it, you have to do it. But one of them I'll never forget it was John Tanner

from Tennessee. John says, be intentional about your relationships with the people across the aisle. Interesting. And because there is going to be a time that you will need those individuals. And if you have those relationships, then it can be plentiful for your constituents back home.

Knott: That is great advice.

Roskam: Let me build on that, because Heath's insight is incredible. So, I chaired the oversight subcommittee at Ways and Means, and the IRS was doing something terrible to small businesses. And it was provocative. It was outrageous. It was like Inspector Javert level of self-righteousness, just completely insufferable. And they were just shaking these people down. I went to Charlie Rangel and John Lewis, who was my ranking member, talked to them about what the IRS was doing. And this is at the time when the IRS was actually targeting conservatives, which was all true, by the way. Lois Lerner, complete disaster. She was going after people. But that wasn't part of their dynamic and they couldn't hear it. So, I went to each of them individually and I said, I'm not here talking about IRS targeting of conservatives. I'm talking about this other case. And I said, you're not for that, are you? And they said, no, we're not for that. And then I brought in the IRS commissioner and I'd met with him in advance.

Knott: What year was this, Peter?

Roskam: Oh, man. It was John Koskinen, who was the commissioner during the Obama years. So, 2012, 2013, 14. And I told the commissioner, I said, you think you got friends on the subcommittee? You don't. I said, they're all my friends. And so, we brought in the witnesses. and asked them to tell their story about how they were treated. And then I put Koskinen on as the next witness and said, Commissioner, do you, you heard the testimony? Are you familiar with the case? Well, I'm not really familiar with the case. I went after him three times, got him to apologize publicly to these people. And I had Charlie Rangel saying, Mr. Chairman, when are we bringing him back in to tell us what he is doing to make restitution with these people? And John Lewis was egging me on. Why? Because of the, it was reaching out to them, to Heath's point, reaching out to them and not presuming that they're against you. It was like, they're not, they weren't, they were not comfortable at all with what the IRS was doing. They were scandalized by it. And they were helpful in pushing me.

And then The IRS returned the money by 50 million bucks to small business owners. We passed a bill that took away the IRS's authority in these civil asset forfeiture cases, just took it away. And it passed unanimously out of the House and then it passed out of the Senate after I left Congress. So, this maybe 2017.

But the point is, so much of this is relational. And you've got, my late father had an expression for guys like you. He said they wear well. So, you've got that personality. You've got a worldview. You're conservative, but you're not a bucket of crazy. And you are somebody who can take yes for an answer. And you've got firmly committed views. So, they're not going to roll you based on, you don't have some insatiable desire to be liked, heaven help us. And you've, and based on

that disposition, you can negotiate and you can let your opponent take a victory lap, importantly. And just let them put something in your bill and be cool about it.

And then, but I think you're all upside, man. I think your timing on being here is perfect because this stuff is going to break. The crisis is going to continue. They're going to come to the institution. And based on how you carry yourself, I really am of the view that you're going to be one of these people who has the disposition to lead thoughtfully in ways that don't spike it in the end zone. There is no percentage in that. But you're just...

Shuler: Don't be the guy that is always on you never have a seat at the table.

Roskam: No.

Knott: I've never asked to be on TV, so that is not a problem.

Roskam: Yeah, no. Well, that is interesting. Brad Knott, thank you. You've been generous with your time.

Lee: Thank you, Peter, Heath and Congressman Knott. If you have any questions for Peter, his full contact information is in the show notes. As always, thanks for listening to BakerHosts and "The Cloakroom with Peter Roskam."

Comments heard on BakerHosts are for informational purposes and should not be construed as legal advice regarding any specific facts or circumstances. Listeners should not act upon the information provided on BakerHosts without first consulting with a lawyer directly. The opinions expressed on BakerHosts are those of participants appearing on the program and do not necessarily reflect those of the firm. For more information about our practices and experience please visit Bakerlaw.com