

## Honored Guest: State Representative Candidate Mark Thompson for Iowa House District 56

### Background:

Mark Thompson is running unopposed for the Iowa House District 56 seat, so he will likely represent Belmond-Klemme in the Iowa House in January. I invited Mr. Thompson to our September 15 school board meeting. I shared with Mr. Thompson our school board's legislative priorities.



Mark grew up on an Iowa farm, graduated from Eagle Grove High School and Buena Vista College. Commissioned a Marine in 1977.

As an infantry officer he led Marines in every Division around the world, trained extensively in special operations, conducted counter drug operations in Columbia and led Marines in refugee operations during the Mariel boat lift out of Cuba.

He arrived at the Department of State Counter-terrorism Bureau at the end of his 20-year Marine Corps career, and was asked to stay in a civilian capacity. He has been a key member in, or led, nearly every deployment of the Foreign Emergency Support Team (FEST) since the late 90's, providing subject matter expertise from throughout government to US Ambassadors in preparation for, or in the aftermath of terrorist attacks.

When not deployed, Mark discreetly coordinated some of the most sensitive counter-terrorism activities around the world. In the course of those duties, he traveled to over 60 nations. In 2008, he was promoted to the Senior Executive Service.

In 2013, Mark testified as a whistleblower before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee regarding the terrorist attack on the US diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya

Since his departure from the Department of State in 2016, he has returned to Iowa with his wife, Jacki, where they have reintegrated into their childhood community. He is a co-chair for the Republicans of Wright County. He substitute teaches and works part time during harvest with local farmers.

Mark and Jacki live outside of Belmond, in Wright County. They have been blessed with two daughters, their husbands and six grandchildren.

**Candidate Thompson's Platform:**

**PRO-LIFE**

Life begins at conception. As adoptive parents, we have been blessed by two very courageous women who made the choice to give birth and provide us the joy of being parents. Our daughters learned at a very early age that not only did we love them, but their birth mothers loved them so much they chose to give them life.

**PRO- SECOND AMENDMENT**

The 2nd Amendment was designed for citizens to defend themselves, no matter the adversary. Strict gun laws are already on the books, and in places like Chicago such laws have illustrated the fallacy of their passage. Each citizen must have the right and opportunity to defend themselves, particularly in light of efforts to de-fund law enforcement.

**PRO FAMILY FARM**

Corporate or foreign ownership of farms compete with the foundation of our farm economy over multiple generations. It's not old fashion to have families producing the vital products that end up in our grocery stores. Bigger is not always better.

**HEALTH CARE**

Health care is vital for our Iowans. Doctors must have the freedom to make their own professional decisions unfettered by government mandates or government funding. While many of our hospitals have excellent and high standards in physical health care, Iowa ranks in the bottom 10% of all states when it comes to mental health facilities. Mental health is part and parcel with physical health. Mental health has a significant impact on local law enforcement. Our police and sheriffs are often tasked with incarcerating people who are mentally ill and deserve treatment, not jail. We can and we must do better to care for Iowans.

**EDUCATION**

Parents are their children's first teachers. Elected school boards are designed to represent the interests of their community. They are the connective tissue between teacher and parents. This local involvement and leadership have proven to be effective for generations. As a substitute teacher I see the complex and stressful situations our teachers face.

Fall is a good time to connect with legislators before they go into caucus and solidify their party platforms. After their platforms are decided, many legislators lose flexibility. This kind of one-on-one time can pay big dividends down the road.

## **Legislative Priorities Belmond-Klemme Board of Directors**

Our legislative priorities as a school board include the following:

### **1. Funding and support for mental health services in Iowa schools and across the state.**

The Belmond-Klemme Board of Directors supports efforts to establish comprehensive community mental health systems to offer preventative and treatment services and comprehensive school mental health programs that include in-school access for students to mental health professionals and provisions for reimbursement by Medicaid and private insurers.

### **2. Fund all schools on the same per-pupil amount.**

All Iowa schools are funded on a per-pupil basis. On October 1 of each year, we count the number of students in our desks, and we get a set amount of dollars per student.

- Belmond-Klemme this year receives \$7,227 per student;
- Clarion-Goldfield-Dows this year receives \$7,232 per student; and
- Eagle Grove this year receives \$7,315 per student.

We respectfully disagree that Belmond-Klemme students should be worth less than other Wright County students.

### **3. Defeat vouchers.**

Iowa's public schools are under-funded. The evidence is all around as displayed by the shortage of teachers to teach our classes. Vouchers will further divert public funds from the public schools to private schools that have no transparency and no accountability to the state. Public funding should be used to support public community schools which are open to all students regardless of race, religion, gender, socio-economic status, and disability.

### **4. Remove the arbitrary cap on Dropout/At-risk funds.**

Other school districts get 5% of their per-pupil budgets to spend on dropout prevention. Belmond-Klemme was arbitrarily capped at 4%.

According to Iowa law, all public schools are entitled to levy an additional 5% of their per-pupil budgets to spend on dropout prevention. This law is still on the books. However, seven years ago, the Iowa Legislature determined that schools not levying the full 5% could never increase their levy. Despite the rise in diversity and poverty within the Belmond-Klemme Community, our school can never increase our dropout prevention levy to the 5% both of the other two Wright County schools receive.

Once again, we respectfully disagree that Belmond-Klemme students should be worth less than other Wright County students.