

Can I Count on Your Vote?

In addition to being a lawyer, a farmer, and a politician, I'm an actuary. So you know I can count.

WHEN I GET UP IN THE MORNING to do the chores, I don't empty the dishwasher; I dish out feed to my herd of purebred beef cows. I don't move on to check out sports news or the stock ticker; I look over the political news to see if my campaign for a seat in Congress is continuing to grow as it should.



An actuary? With a cow herd? And a political career? Who is this guy? I worry that some of my potential constituents still ask that question, but I have been working hard since early last year to change that while seeking the endorsement of Republicans in the 1st Congressional District in southern Minnesota.

Like you, I am a member of the Academy. I am also a fellow of the Society of Actuaries (SOA), an enrolled actuary, a member of the Minnesota State Bar Association, and a certified employee benefits specialist. (I didn't think I really needed that last designation, but I was teaching a CEBS course at the University of Minnesota and my students convinced me that if they had to take the test, so did I.)

When not tending to politics or the cowherd, I take care of my employee-benefit and actuarial-consulting clients. I've identified a market niche of employers with 300 to 3,000 employees who want "big-firm" services but don't want to pay the high fees that come with them. Being an actuary has enabled me to earn a good living and identify business and

social problems that I can help solve. Being independent has allowed me to lead a flexible, diversified life.

Many people ask me how actuarial skills help with a political career. Sometimes, I'll admit, they don't. Actuaries are detail oriented, and we know about probabilities, contingencies, and variations. To make a point in politics, you often have to simplify so much that your overall accuracy, in an actuarial sense, is diminished. But one of the strengths of my consulting practice has been to communicate complex concepts in a simplified, understandable way that's accurate for the particular circumstances of that client at that time. My clients make good business decisions because I am able to take out the extraneous truth and focus on the kernel that pertains to them. I apply those same skills in politics.

MARK MEYER is managing director of Sylvan Benefit Consultants in Lake Crystal, Minn. You can learn more about his campaign at www.markmeyerforcongress.us.

My actuarial career began in a typical fashion, I guess. I studied actuarial science at the University of Nebraska under Professor Steve Kellison (who later served as one of the early executive directors of the Academy). Kellison was a fantastic teacher who engaged his students and, in the process, launched many actuarial careers. I have two particularly vivid memories of Kellison: first, his pride in his \$400 financial functions calculator (this was in 1973) and, second, his announcement to our class on Sept. 3, 1974, that the passage of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act had just guaranteed all of us jobs.

After college, I worked in the pension department of BMA Insurance Co. in Kansas City, Kan. After working for three years, I left Kansas for Minnesota to go to law school at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. In May 1978, I took the SOA's Part 9 exam (the last one at that time) but only got a 5, the highest failing grade (part of the reason for that failure was the distraction of a new girlfriend, Judy, who has been my wife now for 27 years). While I was disappointed not to have completed my FSA, the train had left the station for law school and that designation would have to wait.



Life on the farm certainly complicated things. I had to buy a tractor, build fences, grow the herd, and deal with the uncertainties of livestock farming.

While in law school, I looked for a job with a law firm in the employee-benefits field, but, surprisingly, the lawyers were not too impressed by my actuarial experience. On the other hand, the actuarial firms thought it was really cool that I was an actuary and an attorney. So I went to work for Touche Ross (now Deloitte and Touche) in its actuarial and benefits consulting department, part time during law school and for one year after graduating.

I left Touche to work for William M. Mercer in Minneapolis as a pension actuary. It was a great experience, and I learned a lot about all areas of the consulting business as an actuary, client manager, defined benefit practice leader, and in a two-year stint on Mercer's national practice group. My career was going great, but I had the farming bug in me and I couldn't make it go away. Plus, Judy and I had three small children that we

wanted to grow up with an understanding of agriculture.

We moved our family from the Twin Cities to a 160-acre farm between the small Minnesota town of Lake Crystal and Mankato, the pre-season football camp home of the Minnesota Vikings. I continued to work for Mercer on a flexible schedule, but it became clear that its business model and my lifestyle were too different to last. So I started my own consulting firm, Sylvan Benefit Consultants, to serve the business niche I had identified. After I got my first client and realized that I needed some technical support, I formed strategic alliances with Van Iwaarden Associates, an independent actuarial firm, and with Kelly, Hanaford & Battles, an independent employee-benefits law firm, both based in Minneapolis.

Life on the farm certainly complicated things. I had to buy a tractor, build fences, grow the herd, and deal with the uncertainties of livestock farming. I was away on business the day the cows got out and were running all over the countryside. Thank goodness for the neighbors who came to Judy's rescue and corralled them back into the pasture. I am very proud of the fact that all my kids have shown cattle at the fair and can handle a pitchfork or a halter. And I will never forget the night last March when a cow was having trouble calving and my 16-year-old son helped me pull the calf. We pulled that calf so hard that when it was finally born, we both fell over backwards into the mud. He got lessons in sex education and cow anatomy that night, along with valuable experience working in stressful and filthy conditions.

Back to politics. The 1976 Republican convention was held in Kansas City, and I became intrigued by a lesser candidate who failed to win the nomination, Ronald Reagan. When I left BMA in 1978, I vowed to myself that I would run for president in 2008. Well, my sights are now a bit lower, but, sure enough, here I am running for federal office.

My political career began in 2000 when I was asked to run for

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school board in my little town of Lake Crystal (population 2,400). My neighbor paid the \$2 filing fee, and friends financed the campaign. I was elected to the board with the second highest vote total (there were four open seats), just behind the local homecoming queen from 25 years earlier. Two years later, my fellow board members elected me chairman, and in 2004 I was re-elected to a second term on the board, running unopposed this time.

Minnesota's 1st Congressional District covers the southern 22 counties in the state, from Wisconsin to South Dakota along the Iowa border. This is farm country, but we also have the Mayo Clinic and an IBM plant in Rochester, and Mankato is home to the Taylor Corp., which is owned by billionaire Glen Taylor, who also owns the National Basketball Association's Minnesota Timberwolves.

As a candidate for Congress, I tell my potential constituents that my talents and skills as an actuary, lawyer, and farmer will enable me to work on the issues that I believe they care about, including fiscal responsibility, financial stability for Medicare and



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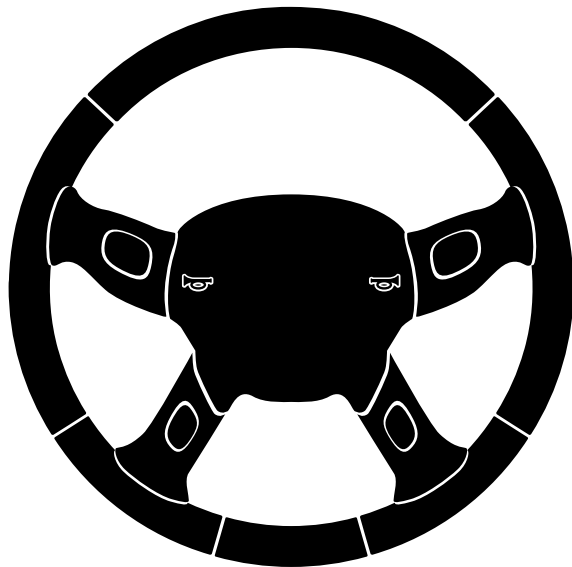
to press, Mark Meyer announced his withdrawal as a candidate in Minnesota's first congressional district, citing the time-consuming nature of politicking. He said he would leave the door open for future political possibilities.

Social Security, support for agriculture, and my favorite issue, universal health care.

My plan for portable and affordable health care without government takeover is a powerful idea. It involves tax reform, insurance reform, and a national catastrophic risk pool to totally revamp the health insurance delivery system in this country without going to a single-payer system. I don't have all of the details and actuarial calculations in place, but I am getting used to the idea that I don't need to have everything worked out at this stage. I may still be an actuary, but I am also a politician now!

I was pleased to read in the Academy's new strategic plan that it is encouraging actuaries to become active in public affairs. I hope that this means that while I may be one of the first actuaries to seek federal office, I certainly won't be the last.

Count him out: As Contingencies was going



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