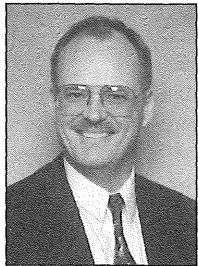


Inside scoop

Thompson brings a combination of government knowledge and teaching experience to the Legislature

By THERESA STAHL

Rep. Mark Thompson (DFL-New Hope) says public education is his top priority, and that his teaching experience will help him



Rep. Mark Thompson

make important decisions in that area because he knows the ins and outs of the education system in Minnesota.

"As a teacher I'm well aware of the good and the bad things going on in public education," said Thompson, who

teaches eighth grade government at Minnetonka Middle School West.

Fellow teacher Kerry Hoeschen cites another reason Thompson's experience as an educator may be valuable to being a State legislator: "He lets students' voices be heard."

Instead of lecturing, Hoeschen says Thompson, who is in his ninth year of teaching, holds more class discussions and makes his best effort to be impartial toward the issues.

"He's very good at looking at both sides of an issue," said Hoeschen, a colleague and friend of Thompson's for four years. "He considers the pros and cons."

"I try to keep my political biases separate from my teaching," Thompson said.

Thompson won't be teaching the second half of the school year when the Legislature is in session, but said he plans to teach in the fall because he would miss it too much. "I won't give it up," he said.

Thompson grew up in south Minneapolis and St. Louis Park and has lived in Minnesota all of his life, except the time he served in the Army, and when he spent a year studying in Nigeria.

The 2000 election was Thompson's first run for legislative office, and he won District 46A, which was an open seat, by only 65 votes

(after a recount). In 1998 he won a seat on the New Hope City Council, where he served for two years. He said that campaigning for the Legislature was a lot of work, but at the same time it was fascinating.

By his side during his run for office was Thompson's wife Patty.

"She's a good political advisor and a very good friend," he said. "She loves campaigning. Actually, after the campaign was over she said, 'I kind of miss door-knocking.'"

Having always had strong political interests, Thompson said he's wanted to be in politics for the past 20 years. "I've always been

interested in public service, helping people and solving problems."

Reading many newspapers from different countries on the Internet and being a longtime "news junkie," Thompson said he has learned much about government systems around the world. He has brought his knowledge of political processes into teaching and all of that information also transfers into what he's doing now as a legislator. Thompson realizes that the Minnesota Legislature has some distinctive features that he will learn as he goes, "but overall I understand the process."

Hoeschen said Thompson has a thorough political background. "He's so knowledgeable," he said. "He knows so much about government and international issues."

Besides education, Thompson is concerned about the rising cost of health care and prescription drugs. Transportation gridlock is also an important issue for him. "Getting stuck in traffic is not a pleasant experience," he said.

Thompson said Gov. Jesse Ventura has interesting ideas on taxes, one in particular that

he has supported previously — when a city makes a purchase they should not have to pay a sales tax.

"That seems to be inefficient when government taxes itself," he said. "I support anything that would not require cities to pay sales taxes on their own purchases."

Thompson's tax interests fall right in line with his predecessor, Sen. Ann H. Rest (DFL-New Hope) who left the House in 2000 to pursue the Senate seat. Rest was formerly the chair of the House Taxes Committee and served as the DFL lead on that committee during 1999 and 2000.

In education, Thompson's main concerns lie in funding. "There has been a funding shortfall and class sizes are high," he said.

As a teacher, he knows the importance of keeping class sizes small.

"The difference between 27 kids and 32 kids in a classroom is huge. The amount of time

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spent just getting them quiet is almost doubled." He added that teachers could give more attention to each student if there are fewer students in the class.

Thompson said K-12 education funding has not kept up with the rate of inflation in the past 10 years. And knowing teachers throughout the state, he said he understands the financial crunches they all face, while still accomplishing a great deal.

"I think that in general, schools are doing a very good job with the limited resources they have," he said. "I'm proud to be a teacher."

DISTRICT 46A

1998 population (estimate): 32,325

Largest city: Crystal

County: Hennepin

Location: northwest of Minneapolis

Top concern: "Public education — We have to improve K-12 schools."

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