

The National Farm Bureau Federation and the State Farm Bureau organizations serve their members often times very well representing the interest of Agriculture. They are involved in lobbying efforts in our state houses and in the halls of Congress in Washington and we thank them for channeling membership dues and resources from profit centers within the organization. Their engagements along with other organizations that represent Ag interest are critical to continue to assure that the rural and Ag economy remains strong now and into the future. Again, we certainly are thankful for their efforts. However, if there is governance in place, it has failed at the local and states levels.

A good example of that failure of the need for better governance at the County, District and State level just recently occurred in their Indiana Farm Bureau ELECT process. Several months ago most all of the major candidates seeking the US Congressional Third District Seat interviewed with the Stueben, Lagrange, Noble, DeKalb, Whitley, Allen, Huntington, Wells, Adams, and Jay Farm Bureau Chairman's or Representatives. After interviewing all of the candidates they make their recommendations and it then went onto the ELECT boards or committees at Farm Bureau at Indianapolis for final decisions.

There was one candidate, my father Kip Tom that was among those that went through the interview process. Kip has been active in a family farm for 42 years; he has also been engaged in state, national and global Agriculture advocacy and economic development for many years. Kip gave of his own time and resources to improve the industry as a whole for all those involved in Food, Agriculture and Global Food Security. Kip is also among a handful of limited individuals from Ag nationwide that had the courage to run for Congress and "put it on the line". He understood the challenges that farmers face both large and small and embraced all size of farmers and farming systems. He understood the risk that producers face in feeding a growing global population and in the meanwhile producing a crop under a growing set of regulations from State and Federal Government. He also understood what it takes to grow a farm business as he as well started from a 100 acre farm and limited resources. Kip could have chosen to stay on the farm or some other private sector career but he chose to give back to the great people that make our country great on our farms and ranches.

Well, not one of the candidates received the endorsement of the Indiana Farm Bureau even Kip who was endorsed by the past President of the Indiana Farm Bureau, Don Villwock. The message came to his campaign through a reporter at the Ft Wayne Journal Gazette that the Indiana Farm Bureau would not be endorsing any of the candidates. It took a 2/3 vote to endorse a candidate and none of the candidates reached the 2/3 mark. Calls came in from a number of the members that voted that must of been a part of the minority that said it was very obvious that for personal and reasons related to jealousy of his family's farm business a number of the County Chairman's voted NO on Kip's potential endorsement. This is where the governance (if there is any) broke down and failed the membership of the Indiana Farm Bureau. Individuals County Chairman's put their own selfish interest in front of that of the membership of the Farm Bureau, and Hoosier Farmers. Then when the next step took the vote to the state level where the comment was made "we didn't want to override the County Chairman's" again clearly a lack of governance at this level as well. Finally the Indiana State Farm Bureau got with his campaign and made the comment "well we have a high bar in our selection of candidates". My question to the Indiana Farm Bureau would be just what does it take above what Kip had to offer in serving our Hoosier Rural Communities, Farms and Ranches to clear the "bar" and receive their endorsement?

The final outcome of the vote had my dad only 3 points behind State Senator Jim Banks, or 3,700 votes with a total turn out of over 120,000 votes in the district. We will never know if the Farm Bureau endorsement would have made a difference or not. What we do know is we are going to likely send Jim Banks to Congress in 2017 and with the majority of his support coming from Washington Special Interest like the Club for Growth and others and his alignment with the Freedom Caucus he will be obligated to follow their guidance. Indiana Farm Bureau members and all of the others that call Indiana home for their farms, ranches and lives for generations will faces challenges as Jim Banks is not a supporter of our Ag policies that are so important to our survival. These policies are from Crop Insurance, USDA Farm Programs, RFS and so on and the economic impact can and will affect the members of the Indiana Farm Bureau all because a system of governance broke down and allowed County Chairman's to put their own personal interest ahead of their members throughout their counties. So, the outcome of my dad's race for Congress is past us know but going forward I believe we need to ask Indiana Farm Bureau to "raise the bar" on themselves and put governance in place to assure a fair outcome that allows us to give endorsement to candidates that will deliver positive results back to Farm Bureau members.

In conclusion, as fellow agriculturist we should stand together, not against one another by promoting Agriculture in a positive manner, leaving jealousy and pride behind.

Thank you,

Kassi Tom-Rowland