

## Election Night 2024: *What's at Stake in Minnesota?*

Alert

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Entering the final days of the 2024 general election, Minnesota is proving once again how surprising and unpredictable it can be when election season rolls around. Less than three months ago, Vice President Kamala Harris shocked the political world by choosing Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as her running mate in the presidential sweepstakes.

- That choice set off a lot of speculation regarding who becomes the next governor. The answer, of course, is that Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan would ascend to the governor's office if the Harris/Walz ticket were to prevail in the national general election.
- If Flanagan becomes governor, the lieutenant governor's post would go to the presiding officer of the Minnesota Senate – Senator Bobby Joe Champion – who would become the new lieutenant governor.
- With a slim 34-33 Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party-controlling majority, Champion's North Minneapolis seat would need to be filled by holding a special election in early 2025.
- With a 33-33 tie in the Senate, very little work will get done up to and until Champion's seat is sworn in.
- All of this is pure speculation and is, of course, dependent on Harris winning the presidential race. If former president Donald Trump prevails, everything remains status quo.

Moving on to the legislature, both the House and Senate majorities are at stake with the DFL holding a six-seat majority in the House and a one-seat majority in the Senate.

- The Senate has only one seat on the ballot, and it is a southwest suburban seat previously held by DFL Senator Kelly Morrison, who resigned her seat to run for Congress. This election will decide who controls the Minnesota Senate, where the DFL holds a one-seat majority at 34-33. Although this seat trends blue, it is a heavily targeted race that will obviously deliver the 34th vote for a majority for either side. This race may end up being the most expensive legislative race in Minnesota history.

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- All 134 seats are up for election in the Minnesota House where the DFL enjoys a slim 70-64 majority. About 10 seats out of the 134 are in play and competitive. On election night, legislative districts in the northern suburban communities of Anoka, Blaine, and Coon Rapids, college towns Mankato, St. Cloud and Winona, as well as a handful of Northern Minnesota seats will be closely watched and will likely determine who controls the Minnesota House in 2025.

The following is an in-depth look at several key Minnesota races to keep an eye on for election night. Polling in Minnesota has been as unpredictable as the national polls. However, most local polling shows Vice President Harris holding a 4-6% lead over Trump going into the home stretch.

Our linked legislative scorecard will help you navigate election night coverage. Also highlighted are a few resources that will help you navigate election night information:

- [Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State: Election Results](#)
- [KSTP Elections](#)
- [MPR News Election Coverage](#)
- [Minnesota Star Tribune](#)
- [Axios Twin Cities](#)
- [Minnesota Star Tribune: "The races that could determine control of the Minnesota Legislature"](#)
- [MinnPost: "A month before Election Day, these 16 Races to Watch could determine Minnesota House control"](#)

### KEY DATES:

- November 5, 2024: Election Day.
- January 14, 2025: Start of legislative session.

### PRESIDENT

This year's Presidential race has been interesting. Former President Donald Trump had an attempt on his life by an assassin. The Democratic Party had their own drama, as President Joe Biden, who handily won the primaries earlier this year, stepped down as the candidate after a disastrous debate performance and immense pressure from his Democratic colleagues. Vice President Kamala Harris became the Democratic presidential candidate after an uncontested convention this past August. Making things even more exciting for Minnesota, Governor Tim Walz was a surprise pick as her running mate.

Where does the chaos of the past five months lead us? A tied race that is a complete toss-up. The introduction of Harris as the Democratic presidential candidate brought a sigh of relief for those who grew concerned with Biden's re-election hopes after his poor debate performance and other missteps raising questions of cognitive decline. A burst of enthusiasm for Harris' candidacy boosted her polling, where she

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commanded a lead for most of the late summer and fall. Trump's favorability ratings have remained stuck around 43%. He had a brief surge in popularity after the assassination attempt, but ultimately reverted back to his usual baseline. After 10 years in the spotlight, Trump's numbers aren't likely to move much. Harris' numbers rose dramatically from the mid-30s to 47% after her presidential nomination but she has more room to move up or down as people get to know her and her policies better.

Why the tied race? While Trump might not be liked by the majority of the country, polls show he is trusted more on the two issues that are top of mind for many voters this election cycle: the economy/inflation, and immigration. For her part, Harris leads with voters whose number one issues are abortion access, protecting democracy, and health care. But those issues have ranked behind the economy and immigration in importance for many voters in this election cycle. The seven swing states have been trending in Trump's direction; the latest round of polling averages ([Real Clear Politics on 10/30/24](#)) has Trump leading in six of the seven states. However, all are within the margin of error, and are essentially considered a tie, so any one of those swing states could determine the outcome of the entire election.

Anything can happen on election night. Generally speaking, independent voters and those who are not strong partisans are dissatisfied with both choices of candidates, which makes it all the harder to predict a winner. Several swing states may not finish counting their votes election night, meaning those races might not be called for days. Pundits have suggested one candidate could win all seven swing states, which would leave the winner with a landslide in the electoral college despite the country being close to 50-50 divided in their preference for president. One thing that can be expected is for Harris to win Minnesota, and her margin of victory could have a big impact on the down ballot races, particularly in the hotly contested MN House of Representative races.

### U.S. SENATE

The U.S. Senate race is between incumbent Democrat Senator Amy Klobuchar and Republican newcomer Royce White. This is Klobuchar's fourth run for Senate; she has been in office since 2007. White is a former Minnesota high school basketball standout who briefly played for the National Basketball Association. Polling from January of this year showed that Senator Klobuchar might have some vulnerability in her race with her re-elect number sitting around 49%, which is low for a sitting Senator who usually enjoys high favorability. While this race might have been interesting if Republicans had endorsed a stronger candidate, their chosen candidate White has a history of legal issues and inflammatory commentary. Latest polling in Minnesota shows Klobuchar with a comfortable double-digit lead going into the general election.

### U.S. CONGRESS

Minnesota's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District, which encompasses much of the south metro and goes almost as far south as Mankato, is the state's only congressional seat being targeted nationally as a swing seat. Democrat incumbent Angie Craig is the favorite to win the race over political newcomer Joe Teirab. Craig is

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in her third term and won her 2022 race 51-46%, which was an improvement on her 2% victory of 2020 GOP candidate Joe Teirab a former marine and U.S. assistant attorney, is facing an uphill battle to defeat the popular incumbent and it seems the big outside money groups agree. In 2022, \$19 million was spent by outside groups to influence the election in this district, but almost no outside money has been spent on the race this year. The last poll show Craig up by 8%.

All other congressional seats are expected to be held by their incumbent officeholders. In the 3rd Congressional District, Democrat candidate Kelly Morrison is expected to hold the seat currently held by Dean Phillips.

### **MINNESOTA SENATE**

#### **Senate District 45: Currently an Open Seat Previously Held by DFL**

- DFL Candidate: Ann Stewart Johnson
- GOP Candidate: Kathleen Fowke

With Senator Kelly Morrison (DFL-Deephaven) stepping down to run for Congress in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District, there is one special election Senate seat on the ballot. The seat will determine which party has control of the Senate, which currently sits at 33 Democrats and 33 Republicans. Former Senator and engineer Ann Johnson Stewart (DFL-Minnetonka) is the favorite to keep the Senate in DFL hands in this lean blue district. Realtor Kathleen Fowke (R-Tonka Bay) is the endorsed Republican candidate, and this is her second run for this seat.

In 2022, Fowke lost to Morrison 56-44% in an election year where access to abortion was a top issue. While that issue still lingers, economic issues, including inflation, have become more prominent, which should help Fowke. However, a 12-point deficit is hard to overcome in any year other than a wave election, and no signs point to any sort of a red or blue wave this year. Look for Fowke to close the gap, but for Johnson-Stewart to prevail at the end of the night, keeping the DFL in control of the Minnesota Senate.

### **MINNESOTA HOUSE**

#### **3B: Currently Held by the GOP**

- GOP Candidate: Natalie Zeleznikar (Incumbent)
- DFL Candidate: Mark Munger

A historically blue district, House District 3B flipped to the GOP in 2022, with Natalie Zeleznikar defeating 23-term incumbent Mary Murphy by 33 votes. Given that this is a truly competitive seat, spending on the race reflects it with many hundreds of thousands of dollars being spent on both sides.

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In 2020, Biden won the district by 5.5 points, and Walz won by just under 11 points in 2022. Rep. Zeleznikar is a formidable campaigner, but the DFL candidate, Mark Munger, is a former judge with longstanding family ties to the area. Barring a red wave, the DFL should have the edge in this race.

This race is pretty much a must-win for both the DFL and GOP, and spending on the race reflects it. Indeed, as of the latest finance reports, 3B has pulled in more independent expenditures than any other race for the House, with over \$1.3M spent. The DFL is outspending the GOP in 3B roughly 2:1.

### **7B: Open Seat**

- GOP Candidate: Cal Warwas
- DFL Candidate: Lorrie Janatopoulos

House District 7B, which voted for Trump in 2020, is currently represented by the DFL. The DFL's odds of holding the seat took a major hit when Rep. Dave Lislegard announced his retirement late last May. Lorrie Janatopoulos, former Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development director of career force, is running for the DFL. Cal Warwas, a former miner and former Range Association of Municipalities and Schools board member, is the GOP candidate

Available finance data would indicate that the GOP is investing more heavily in this race than the DFL. The district has been trending towards the GOP for many cycles now, and it will be very difficult for the DFL to hold it this year. For the GOP to have a chance to take control of the House, this race is a must-win. Meanwhile, the DFL can lose it and still maintain a path to the majority.

### **14A: Currently Held by the GOP**

- GOP Candidate: Bernie Perryman (Incumbent)
- DFL Candidate: Abdi Daisane

Biden and Walz narrowly won this district in 2020 and 2022, while the GOP candidates for attorney general and state auditor won by 3 and 5.75 points. Incumbent Bernie Perryman won the seat in 2022 by 201 votes. Both the GOP and DFL are investing resources in this race, though perhaps fewer than might be expected, but the GOP should have a slight edge. Holding this seat is critical to the GOP if they are to have a path to the majority. While less critical to the DFL, it is important because if the DFL is able to win this race, it is highly likely they are going to win the majority.

### **14B: Currently Held by the DFL**

- DFL Candidate: Dan Wolgamott (Incumbent)

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- GOP Candidate: Sue Ek

Biden and Walz narrowly won this district in 2020 and 2022, while GOP candidates for attorney general and state auditor achieved narrow victories. The DFL incumbent, Dan Wolgamott, was first elected in 2018. A relatively more moderate member of the DFL, Rep. Wolgamott is one of the DFL members endorsed by the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers' Association. Sue Ek, a communications consultant, is running on a more conservative platform, particularly regarding abortion.

Rep. Wolgamott has some vulnerabilities, including a DUI incident earlier in 2024, but he has been a strong campaigner for several cycles now. Spending in the district is strong, particularly in defense of Rep. Wolgamott, with independent expenditure data from earlier in October giving the DFL a 3:1 spending advantage, though that ratio will likely have shrunk by election day.

The district is a must-win for the DFL - their path to the majority gets dicey (but not impossible) without holding on to the seat. By the same token, if the GOP is able to win in 14B, their chance at taking control of the House increases dramatically.

### **18A: Currently Held by the DFL**

- DFL Candidate: Jeff Brand (Incumbent)
- GOP Candidate: Erica Schwartz

House District 18A is a rural district centered around St. Peter, a college town that adds to its competitiveness for the DFL. Biden won this district by just under three points in 2020, and Walz won by just under six points in 2022. Jeff Brand won the seat in 2018, lost in 2020, and was re-elected in 2022 in a close race with Susan Akland, who had defeated Brand in 2020. The GOP candidate, Erica Schwartz, is a convenience store owner and relatively new to politics.

Spending is strong on both sides of the race, with the latest independent expenditure data from late October giving the DFL a roughly 4:1 spending advantage, a ratio that has actually increased since early October reports. This is the second most expensive House race, with over \$1.2M being spent thus far by outside groups. The district is a must-win for the DFL - their path to the majority gets dicey (but not impossible) without holding on to the seat. By the same token, if the GOP is able to win in 18A, their chance at taking control of the House increases dramatically.

### **26A: Open Seat**

- GOP Candidate: Aaron Repinski
- DFL Candidate: Sarah Kruger

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This seat, previously held by long-time DFL Rep. Gene Pelowski, is an open race. In 2020, Biden won by over five points, and Walz won by over four points in 2022. GOP candidate Aaron Repinski is a Winona city council member. DFL candidate Sarah Kruger serves as chief of staff for FairVote Minnesota.

This seat had been held by long-time DFL Representative Gene Pelowski until his retirement this year. The demographics of the district look fairly solid for the DFL: Biden won by more than 5 points in 2020, and Walz won by over 4 points in 2022. Yet, this race appears to be a coin-flip at best for the DFL. The GOP has nominated Aaron Repinski, a Winona city council member. On the DFL side is Sarah Kruger, who is Chief of Staff for FairVote MN, an organization that promotes ranked choice voting. Kruger had previously challenged Sen. Jeremy Miller, who defeated her in 2020.

Spending on both sides is very strong, with the DFL holding the edge on independent expenditure spending according to data from late October. If GOP turnout is strong on election day, this seat could flip to the GOP, which would boost their chances at securing the majority. It probably doesn't fall into the "must win" category for the DFL, but with the majority as narrow as it is, every seat matters.

### **32B: Currently Held by DFL**

- DFL Candidate: Matt Norris (Incumbent)
- GOP Candidate: Alex Moe

A classic swing district in the North Metro suburbs, it went for Biden in 2020 by 5 points, Walz in 2022 by 6.1 points, and also voted in GOP candidates for attorney general and state auditor won by 3.5 points and less than a point respectively.

DFL incumbent Matt Norris defeated a GOP incumbent in 2022. Norris has a reputation as a strong campaigner, and the DFL will need him to hold on to the seat. GOP candidate Alex Moe works in Anoka County courts administration and is pursuing a law degree.

Independent expenditure data from early October showed relatively equal DFL/GOP spending on this race; since that time, DFL spending has exploded, with over \$600,000 spent, far outstripping the GOP investment. This race may signal how suburban seats are trending, and whether the DFL is successfully consolidating its gains in the suburbs. If Norris makes a strong showing, that's probably a sign that the DFL is in a position to maintain a majority on the strength of gains in the suburbs. If the GOP wins (or keeps it very close), that could be a sign that the GOP has been able to - for now - staunch the bleeding they have been experiencing in suburban seats.

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### **35A: Currently Held by the DFL**

- DFL Candidate: Zack Stephenson (Incumbent)
- GOP Candidate: Joshua Jungling

In 2020, Biden won this suburban district by just under four points, and Walz won by almost seven points in 2022. DFL incumbent Rep. Zack Stephenson, who also chairs the Commerce Committee, won by almost five points in 2022. GOP candidate Joshua Jungling is the Anoka Ramsey Athletic Association gambling manager.

This suburban swing district that has been trending towards the DFL, Biden won by just under 4 points in 2020 and Walz won by almost 7 points in 2022. However, down ballot races were a little more interesting, with the GOP edging out the DFL by a point in the attorney general and auditor races, and the DFL Secretary of State candidate winning by over 8 points. The district is held by Rep. Zack Stephenson, who chairs the Commerce Committee and has a high profile carrying bills such as cannabis legalization and sports betting. Rep. Stephenson won by almost 5 points in 2022 against former GOP Representative John Heinrich is facing GOP candidate Joshua Jungling who is the Anoka Ramsey Athletic Association gambling manager.

This is an ultimate must-win seat for the DFL. Rep. Stephenson has a reputation as a very strong campaigner and the DFL is supporting him with some of the highest independent expenditure spending in the state. Rep. Stephenson should be able to win this seat relatively easily, but if he's struggling or losing, it bodes very poorly for the DFL's chances to maintain the majority. On the flipside: if Rep. Stephenson is cruising, that would be evidence that the DFL has consolidated its gains in the suburbs.

### **11A: Currently Held by the GOP**

- GOP Candidate: Jeff Dotseth (Incumbent)
- DFL Candidate: Pete Radosevich

This race is a rematch from 2022, and Dotseth's 4th time on the ballot. Dotseth won the district by only 454 votes in 2022, flipping the open seat from Democrat to Republican. This area in northern Minnesota just south of Duluth has been trending toward the GOP in recent years. Despite incumbent advantage and evolving district demographics, the district is thought to be in play.

Recent media coverage has focused on domestic assault allegations from 2008, in which he ultimately pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct. DFL party leaders have called for him to suspend his reelection bid. As of the last campaign finance report, no significant outside spending has occurred in this race



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## **35B: Open Seat Currently Held by the DFL**

- GOP Candidate: Steve Pape
- DFL Candidate: Kari Rehrauer

This open seat includes the eastern half of Coon Rapids and the southern portion of Andover, and is currently held by Jerry Newton, who is retiring. Rehrauer ran for the Minnesota Senate in this district in 2022, losing by 186 votes to incumbent Republican Senator Jim Abeler. The Abeler/Rehrauer race was among the most expensive legislative races in 2022, bolstering Rehrauer's name ID. Biden won this district by 3.9 points in 2020 and Walz by 4.1 points in 2022. However, the GOP candidates for attorney general and state auditor won it by similar margins in the same election.

Also in 2022, Newton won this district by a scant 232 votes when the district was not heavily targeted by outside spending. This race is shaping up to be a highly competitive race again as both caucuses identify it as a must-win in their path to the majority. As of the last campaign finance reports, nearly \$400,000 has been spent here by outside groups with Democrats outspending the GOP.

## **36A: Currently Held by the GOP**

- GOP Candidate: Elliot Engen (Incumbent)
- DFL Candidate: Janelle Calhoun

This north metro district, which includes Lino Lakes, North Oaks, and Circle Pines, was won by Engen with a fairly comfortable 642 vote margin in 2022. While Walz won the district in 2022 by 3.2 points, the GOP candidates for attorney general and state auditor each won the district by about 7 points, and Biden won the district by 2.5 points in 2020. Outside spending has been fairly modest for a targeted legislative race, totaling just over \$140,000. Democrats may be hedging their bets on a poor performance by Trump to help them carry this district.

## **41A: Open Seat Currently held by the GOP**

- GOP Candidate: Wayne Johnson
- DFL Candidate: Lucia Wroblewski

This district, which includes northern Cottage Grove, Lake Elmo, and Afton, is currently held by retiring freshman Representative Weins. This was a highly competitive and targeted district by both the state House and Senate in 2022. Biden won this district by 4 points in 2020, but in 2022 the top of the ticket results were mixed with Walz winning by 5 points while the GOP attorney general and state auditor each won it by about 5 points. With these mixed results and heavy targeting by outside groups in the state legislative races, Weins only won by 128 votes.

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DFL candidate Lucia Wroblewski is a current Afton city council member and former Saint Paul police officer . GOP candidate Wayne Johnson is a local business owner and previously served as a Washington County Commissioner and Cottage Grove city council member. Johnson, who was not endorsed by the local Republican party, and won in a stiff primary challenge to the endorsed candidate who received strong grassroots support from the extremely conservative group, Action 4 Liberty. As of late September, outside spending in this district topped \$340,000 with the majority of that coming from DFL aligned groups.

### **41B: Open Seat Currently held by the GOP**

- GOP Candidate: Tom Dippel
- DFL Candidate: Jen Fox

This south Washington and northeastern Dakota County district includes Hastings, and southern Cottage Grove. Like 41A this was a hotly contested House and Senate race in 2022. Freshman GOP Representative Shane Hudella is retiring after only one term.

In 2022 Hudella won this seat by 373 votes. While Walz won the district by 3 points in 2022, the GOP attorney general and state auditor candidates each won it by 5.5 points. Additionally, Biden barely carried this district in 2020, winning it by under one point.

DFL candidate Jen Fox is City of Hastings at-large city council member and owns a popular brewery in town. GOP candidate Tom Dippel ran for the state Senate in 2022, losing by 221 votes but carrying this side of the district by 75 votes. As of the last campaign finance reporting deadline, about \$280,000 has been spent here by outside groups.

### **48B: Currently Held by the DFL**

- GOP Candidate: Caleb Steffenhagen
- DFL Candidate: Lucy Rehm (Incumbent)

This western suburban district includes portions of Chanhassen and Chaska and is currently held by freshman legislator Lucy Rehm. She wrested DFL control of this traditional GOP District in 2022 by defeating two-term GOP incumbent Greg Boe.

This district, along with many of the western suburbs has been trending away from the GOP in recent years. Biden won the district by 11 points in 2020, Walz by more than 9 points in 2022, while the GOP candidates for attorney general and state auditor each won by less than two points. In spite of the trend lines, more than \$400,000 has been spent here by outside groups so far, with both sides spending heavily.

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### **54A: Currently Held by the DFL**

- GOP Candidate: Aaron Paul
- DFL Candidate: Brad Tabke (Incumbent)

This southwest metro seat encompassing most of Shakopee district has shifted between the GOP and DFL in recent election cycles. DFL incumbent Brad Tabke won the district in 2018, lost in 2020, and was elected again in 2022 by a healthy 1,320 vote margin. Democrats carried the top of the ticket in both 2020 and 2022 by fairly wide margins. Also in 2022, the Legal Marijuana Now party candidate for the state house drew a little over four percent of the vote, likely coming more from conservative voters than from DFL voters.

On the GOP side, intra-party endorsement disputes and contested primary elections have fractured the conservative voting bloc. Former GOP Representative Munson, who a product of this grassroots far-right contingent and alienated a number of traditional Republican voters, did not run this cycle. The current GOP candidate, Paul, did not encounter intra-party divisions.

Tabke has focused on transportation and transit issues at the state capitol, but has recently come under scrutiny for past issues with his personal finances. Paul, a Bloomington police officer, has centered his campaign on public safety, responsible government spending and eliminating fraud in state government spending. As of late September nearly \$260,000 has been spent in this race by outside groups with DFL aligned groups spending more than 2:1 against the Republicans.

### **57B: Currently Held by the GOP**

- GOP Candidate: Jeff Witte (Incumbent)
- DFL Candidate: Brian Cohn

This suburban Dakota County district in the northeast portion of Lakeville was established after redistricting in 2022. Witte is running for a second term. He previously won by a margin of 676 votes. In 2020, Biden carried the district by just under two points, and Walz won it by just over two points in 2022. GOP candidates for attorney general and state auditor won the district by nearly seven points. So far, spending from outside groups has totaled just under \$140,000, with the GOP spending slightly more than the DFL.

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