

News & Events

Minnesota Government Update

November 4, 2010

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No one can say Minnesota elections are boring! Even the best pollsters and political handicappers were left scratching their heads as the final election tallies came in late Tuesday night and early Wednesday morning. The evening began with the Democrats controlling both the House and Senate by considerable margins. So comfortable in fact, that the Senate DFL had a veto-proof majority and the House DFL was within 3 votes of enjoying a supermajority as well. After the election, both bodies will now be in Republican control for the first time in 38 years. When the 87th Legislature convenes Jan. 4, 2011, it is likely that 59 of the 201 members will be new, with only eight of the newly elected having previous legislative experience.

Governor's Race

In the Governor's race, former Senator Mark Dayton holds a lead of just 8,900 votes over Republican Challenger Tom Emmer, and a recount will begin on November 29. If Dayton is ultimately victorious and replaces current Republican Governor Tim Pawlenty, the political landscape in Minnesota will essentially be turned upside down from the current environment.

State House Races

When the polls closed on Tuesday, Republicans defended every incumbent seat in the House and turned a 84-47 deficit in to a 72-62 majority. The 25 seat pick-up erases the gains that the Democrats made in the last two election cycles and brings even more new faces to the Capitol. Several races are close enough to trigger an automatic recount. Under Minnesota's election law, if a race is within .5%, a state financed recount will take place. If the margin is wider than half a percent, the candidate may conduct a recount, but the State will not finance the recount. In District 1B, longtime incumbent Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston) lost a very close race to Deb Kiel (R). According to the Secretary of State's office, Kiel won the race by 134 votes. The race between Maria Ruud (DFL-Minnetonka) and Kirk Stensrud (R) is reported to have Stensrud victorious by a margin of 50.28 percent to 49.66 percent. However, neither of these races fall within the percentage that would require an automatic recount. The three races that appear to be headed for a recount are 15B, 25B and 27A. In the St. Cloud area, House District 15B, King Banaian (R) is up by a mere 10 votes over Carol Lewis (DFL). This is an open seat that was vacated by three term DFLer Larrv Hawes who retired. Incumbent David Blv (DFL- Northfield)

lost to challenger Kelby Woodard (R) by 31 votes in House District 25B. Local businessman Rich Murray (R) defeated second term incumbent Robin Brown (DFL-Moscow Township) by 58 votes in 27A in the Albert Lea area.

Other House races of note include:

- Defeat of longtime incumbent and Ways and Means Committee Chair Loren Solberg (DFL-Grand Rapids) to Carolyn McElfrick (R).
- Chairman of the Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee, Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar), went down in defeat to Bruce Vogel (R)
- Iraqi war veteran John Kriesel (R) was elected in 57A in what was considered a strong DFL district.
- Democrats had high hopes of picking up the seat being vacated by Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague), but Mick McGuire was defeated by Glenn Gruenhagen (R) 51 to 49 percent.
- Keith Downey (R-Edina) held off a challenge by Kevin Staunton (R) in the Edina area race.
- Former state Senator Linda Runbeck (R) returned to the Legislature by beating incumbent Rep. Paul Gardner (DFL-Shoreview).
- Former House Majority leader Ted Winter (DFL) was unsuccessful in his bid to defeat Joe Schomacker (R) and return to the Legislature. This seat was open after Rep. Doug Magnus (R) decided to run for the Minnesota Senate.
- Democrats also targeted House minority leader Kurt Zellers (R-Maple Grove), but Zellers won handily by an 11 point margin and is now likely to become the next Speaker of the House.

Several rematches also took place, this time with the Republicans finding themselves on the winning side.

- Sondra Erickson (R) beat Gail Kulick Jackson (DFL-Milaca) by approximately 11 percentage points to reclaim the seat she once held in district 16A.
- In Eagan, Diane Anderson (R) was able to defeat Sandra Masin (DFL-Eagan) after losing to Masin in the last election by approximately 1,000 votes.
- On the other side of the district, Doug Wardlow (R) beat Mike Obermueller (DFL-Eagan). Although technically not a rematch, Doug is the son of Lynn Wardlow who Obermueller defeated in 2008.
- Like Eagan, both Woodbury seats also went the Republican's way this time when Julie Bunn (DFL-Lake Elmo) and Marsha Swails (DFL-Woodbury) were beaten by Kathy Lohmer (R) and Andrea Kieffer (R) respectively.

On the Senate side

The Senate election results were arguably even more shocking than the Republicans retaking the House majority. The Senate Republicans were virtually neutralized by the Democrat's 46-21 majority prior to the election. In fact, since the State went to partisan elections in the early 1970s, the Republicans have never been in the majority in the Senate. Although not official until the canvassing board meets on November 23, it appears that the Republicans will now hold 37 seats to the Democrat's 30 seats.

To highlight a few of the races:

- Longtime Senator from Coon Rapids, Leo Foley, was defeated by newcomer Benjamin Kruse (R) by approximately 5 percentage points.
- Another shocker was Don Betzold's (DFL-Fridley) loss to Pam Wolf (R) in SD51. Betzold was a committee chair and held the seat for 18 years.
- Former House member Paul Gazelka (R) was successful in his bid to replace Senator

Paul Koering (R-Fort Ripley) by defeating Taylor Stevenson (DFL). Senator Koering lost the Republican endorsement to Gazelka but decided to wage a write-in campaign anyway. Approximately 3,125 write-in votes were cast in the election, but it is unclear how many of these votes were actually cast for Koering.

- In a rematch, former state Senator Sean Nienow (R) beat current Senator Rick Olseen (DFL-Harris) 56 to 44 percent.
- Former Rep. Carla Nelson (R) unseated incumbent Senator Ann Lynch (DFL) in the Rochester area.
- Former Rep. Barb Goodwin (DFL) defeated Gina Bauman (R). Goodwin beat Senator Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley) in the DFL primary after questions were raised about his taxes. Chaudhary was also accused of using his position as Chair of the Senate Environment Policy Committee to get special treatment for a lake where he owned a cabin.

Other incumbent defeats were:

- Senator Kathy Saltzman (DFL) of Woodbury who lost by over 1,000 votes to Ted Lillie (R). Lillie ran as a Republican and is the brother of current House member Leon Lillie (DFL-North Saint Paul).
- In the Southern metro, two other first termers were defeated when Ted Daley (R) beat Senator Jim Carlson (DFL-Eagan) and Dan Hall (R) defeated Senator John Doll (DFL-Burnsville).
- Al DeKruif (R) defeated incumbent Senator Kevin Dahle (DFL-Northfield) and Independent John Grimm by getting 45 percent of the vote in SD25.
- Senator Sharon Erickson Ropes (DFL-Winona) lost a close race to Jeremy Miller (R) in SD31.
- Senator Sandy Rummel (DFL-White Bear Lake) was defeated by Roger Chamberlain (R) in SD53.
- Republican John Carlson defeated Senator Mary Olson (DFL-Bemidji) by a commanding 55 to 45 percent margin in Senate District 4.
- Gretchen Hoffman (R) beat incumbent Senator Dan Skogen (DFL-Hewitt) by over 3,000 votes in SD10.
- Dave Brown (R) defeated freshman Senator Lisa Fobbe (DFL-Zimmerman) in SD16.

In open Senate seats:

- Rep. Doug Magnus (R-Slayton) defeated Kevin Vickerman, a relative of Senator Jim Vickerman (DFL-Tracy), who retired after the 2010 session.
- John Howe (R) will now represent the Red Wing area after defeating Joe Fricke (DFL). The Red Wing seat was formerly held by longtime Senator and Transportation Committee Chair Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing).
- John Pederson (R) defeating Bruce Hentges (DFL) in SD15;
- Scott Newman (R) defeating Hal Kimball in SD18;
- Gary Dahms (R) defeating Al Kruse (DFL) in SD21;
- Dave Thompson (R) defeating Steve Quist (DFL) in SD36; and
- Michelle Benson (R) defeating Paul Meunier (DFL) in SD49.

The Democrats were able to win an open seat on Saint Paul's east side in SD67, the seat vacated by the retirement of Senator Mee Moua, where John Harrington (DFL) defeated Kryisia Weidell (R). The other open seat pick up by the Democrats is Roger Reinert's (DFL-Duluth) win over Rilla Debot Opelt in SD7. This seat was vacated by Yvonne Prettner Solon's run for Lieutenant Governor with Mark Dayton. Katie Sieben (DFL-Newport) was able to hold on in spite of a strong challenge by Karin Housley (R) in SD57. Terri Bonoff (DFL-Minnetonka) was able to hold off challenger Norann Dillon (R) in SD43, and Capital Bonding Committee Chair Keith Langseth (DFL-Glyndon) pulled out a win against challenger Jeff Backer (R).

The House DFL Caucus elected Rep. Paul Thissen from Minneapolis as its Minority Leader while the Senate DFL Caucus elected Senator Tom Bakk from Cook as its leader. The Senate Republican Caucus meets today to elect its leaders while the House Republican Caucus meets tomorrow.

For up-to-date information about the Minnesota Legislature, tune into Almanac: At the Capitol. This lively and informative program is aired Wednesdays during the legislative session on Twin Cities Public Television at 7:00 PM on Channel 17 and at 10:00 PM on Channel 2.

Almanac: At the Capitol is seen on all public television stations throughout Minnesota and in Fargo. Winthrop & Weinstine is the exclusive law-firm partner and a sponsor of the program.

For more information and to see previous broadcasts, check out the Almanac: At the Capitol website at <http://tpt.org/aatc/>.

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- State House Races
- On the Senate Side
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