



# ELECTION PREVIEW

The 2024 general election is two weeks from today. Instead of regurgitating the election previews that local media are generating (which are good and we encourage you to read them), we are going bold and doing the most inadvisable thing in politics – making predictions.

## 2024 Voter Guides

- Axios
- MinnPost
- Star Tribune

## State Senate – District 45

This seat will determine control of the Minnesota Senate (at least for now). Currently sitting at a 33-33 partisan split, all eyes and dollars are on this race.

Both candidates in the race have previously run for the seat. DFL candidate Ann Johnson Stewart held the seat from 2021-2023, until she lost in a primary to Sen. Kelly Morrison. Kathleen Fowke, the Republican candidate, ran in 2022 and lost against Morrison.

**SD45** is located in the western Hennepin County suburbs and was held by former Senator Kelly Morrison (DFL-Deephaven), who is expected to be elected to Congress from Minnesota’s Third Congressional District.

[Read more in the Star Tribune](#)

Once thought of as swing territory, the 3rd Congressional district has been trending Democrats’ way for the past several election cycles. Our team has a few different takes on the race:

### Republicans win

“I think Republicans will take the Senate with a win in Senate District 45 on the effective message of ‘restoring balance’ at the Legislature. I don’t think the district will swing Trump, but I’m anticipating a fair amount of Harris/Fowke/Myers ticket splitting from Republicans on the 45A side of the district that will help get her to the win.”

### Democrats hold

“Despite a stronger than expected showing, I think Democrats will retain their majority with Ann Johnson Stewart returning to the Minnesota Senate.”

“DFL infrastructure and presidential voter turnout will keep Democrats in the MN Senate majority.”

“The Senate will stay at a one-seat majority.”



## Mailers, door knocks and texts, oh my!

State Senate District 45 has been flooded with mail, door knocks and phone calls as political parties and outside groups target this race as well as one side of the district that Democrats in the House hope to pick up.

## Minnesota House

### The DFL path to hold the majority

The DFL have held the House majority for six years (since 2019) – a long time in the body that tends to be more volatile. Statewide, DFL campaigns have generally had three significant strengths: alignment in messaging, party infrastructure and money. This year is no different. State DFLers are doubling down on their middle class-focused agenda from 2023-24 legislative sessions, which they believe are popular and will drive voter turnout.



### All 134 House seats are up for election

- The MN House stands at a functional 70-64 DFL majority.
- Republicans must win 4 or more seats to flip the majority.
- 68 seats are needed for a majority.

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### **Quick look: House DFL playbook**

- 1.** Put in a solid effort but accept defeat in two seats outside the metro area.
- 2.** Hold all remaining seats.
- 3.** Expand in 3-4 suburban/exurban seats where national turnout might help.

To win in the House, Democrats will need to leave no voter unvoted. U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar traditionally lifts overall DFL turnout. Coupled with Gov. Walz in the vice-presidential slot, this is probably the House DFL Caucus's best shot to keep suburban turnout high. The DFL party infrastructure, powered by significant fundraising advantages over Republicans, was built for this.

## **The Republican path to flip the house**

Republicans have been gaining ground in Greater Minnesota for years, knocking off all but a handful of rural DFLers. To battle the money advantage held by Democrats, Republicans will be focused on scooping up some remaining rural seats and DFL seats in regional centers across the state.

At the state level, Republican messaging is laser-focused on restoring balance to state government

and reckless, unchecked spending by Democrats over the past biennium. All national polling indicates that voters are very focused on their own sense of security – whether that be economic or social. If delivered in ways that resonate, this messaging could very well carry them into a Minnesota House majority.

### **The House Republican playbook looks similar to the DFL's:**

- 1.** Hold all current seats.
- 2.** Pick up 4-6 seats with a focus on Greater MN and regional centers.

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## **How the national ticket plays down the ballot**

One of the biggest questions for both parties to wrestle with is how national discourse and voter behavior will trickle down to state legislative seats. The polarization at the top of the ticket cuts both ways for both parties – Democrats in Greater Minnesota will struggle to be associated with the Harris-Walz ticket as suburban Republicans will struggle in their association to the Trump-Vance ticket.

State candidates try to carve a path to separate themselves from the national rhetoric and in Minnesota, it sometimes works. Both parties are making financial and messaging decisions based on how their local candidates historically have performed against their parties' national tickets.

## Targeted districts

Seeing the party playbooks, it's probably not shocking that Republicans and Democrats are targeting just a handful of seats.

Here's a quick look at some of those seats and our take on the matchups.



### Republican targets to hold – DFL targets to flip

## 3B

**Rep. Natalie  
Zeleznikar**  
R

This district, which includes Hermantown and northern townships, was one of the closest races in 2022, with Rep. Zeleznikar beating incumbent Rep. Mary Murphy by only 33 votes. Rep. Zeleznikar took more moderate votes the past two years (clearly aware of her district). Munger is a retired judge and well-known community figure. Republicans probably have an edge here, but it's close.

**Mark  
Munger**  
D

## 41A

**Wayne  
Johnson**  
R

This district includes part of Cottage Grove, Afton, Lakeland and Lake Elmo. Incumbent Rep. Mark Wiens retired to run for county commissioner, making it an open race. As one of the only districts in the state with a DFL senator and two Republican House members, this is one of the DFL's top targets to flip.

**Lucia  
Wroblewski**  
D

## 41B

**Tom  
Dippel**  
R

This district includes the other part of Cottage Grove and Hastings, another top target for the DFL after Rep. Shane Hudella retired. Fox is a Hastings City Council member and small business owner; Dippel has run in this area before, losing in 2022 to Sen. Judy Seeberger. This could be a situation where candidate personality could come into play – Fox is a fairly well-known, moderate candidate and Dippel has alignment with right-wing organizations.

**Jen Fox**  
D

## 45A

**Rep. Andrew  
Myers**  
R

This district includes the western part of Lake Minnetonka and its suburbs. Rep. Myers is one of the most moderate Republicans in the House and votes accordingly. This area has been trending left since 2016, and democrats up and down the ticket are targeting it. A flip isn't out of the question, but with the district stretching out to some rural areas and power of incumbency, Republicans could hold this.

**Tracey  
Breazeale**  
D

**DFL targets to hold – Republican targets to flip**

## 7B

**Lorrie  
Janatopoulos**  
D

This is the last DFL seat on the Iron Range, encompassing Virginia, Chisholm and Eveleth. Incumbent Rep. Dave Lislegard (DFL-Aurora) announced retirement after the end of session. The Iron Range used to be a DFL stronghold, but Republicans have flipped every single House seat except this one. With Trump on the ticket, expect Republicans to flip this seat.

**Cal  
Warwas**  
R

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## 14B

**Rep. Dan  
Wolgamott**  
D

This district contains the majority of Saint Cloud, a regional center that has slowly moved left. This district has been a Republican target since it started flipflopping in 2006. A strong Trump showing could be what is needed to flip it back to Republicans. With some demographic changes and targeted turnout efforts, we think Democrats have the edge here.

**Sue Ek**  
R

## 18A

**Rep. Jeff  
Brand**  
D

This district includes North Mankato and Saint Peter. The seat has changed hands in the past three elections, with Rep. Brand serving a non-consecutive second term. Rep. Brand won in 2022 by 2.5%, but the district is rural enough that nothing is a shoo-in for the DFL. With incumbency advantage the DFL has a slight edge, but this should be a top flip target for Republicans.

**Erica  
Schwartz**  
R

## 26A

**Sarah  
Kruger**  
D

This district includes Winona and surrounding towns. For the first time in decades, this seat is open following the retirement of Rep. Gene Pelowski (DFL-Winona). Rep. Pelowski was the most moderate member of his caucus, and was willing to publicly criticize the DFL, usually winning reelection without a sweat. Kruger emerged as the DFL candidate after a viciously contested primary, where money spent totaled over \$100,000. If Republicans seize on Kruger's depleted campaign funds and some local-grown controversies, they should take this seat.

**Aaron  
Repinski**  
R

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# What to watch on election night

There will be no shortage of media coverage on election night. Here are a few things to check out:

# 1

## Turnout and margins

Traditionally, the highest DFL margin comes out of a South Minneapolis race. Watch Rep. Emma Greenman's (DFL-Minneapolis) race in 63B. If it looks like she's getting more than 85 percent of the vote, it's probably been a strong turnout for the DFL.

**Pro tip:** Hennepin County will likely be the first DFL-majority county to come in. Ramsey, Dakota and Washington usually take a bit longer.

# 2

## Suburban bellwethers

Rep. Ethan Cha in 43B or Rep. Ben Bakeberg in 54B might be good examples. These are both suburban seats with one-term legislators that aren't yet household names in their districts. These could be good measures of generic DFL vs. generic Republican in the suburbs.

# 3

## Open, partisan strongholds

40B (formerly Rep. Jamie Becker-Finn) and 58B (formerly Rep. Pat Garofalo) both saw long-time representatives retire and are expected to be safe DFL and Republican seats, respectively. These could be an interesting gauge of turnout and partisan effect.

# 4

## Practice patience

It could be a long night. We might not know the full breakdown of the House until the next morning, and it's likely we won't know the result of the presidential election for days.

## Goff's crystal ball

We've come to the prediction section. Of course, if we were right, we knew all along, and if we were wrong, this was just for fun, and we didn't mean any of it.



"I think Democrats will keep control of the House with a 69-65 majority, winning most of their competitive northern suburban seats and picking up both open seats in District 41 due to strong DFL candidates in those races."



"I think the House will flip, giving it a 68-66 Republican majority. Trump has a strong showing in Minnesota, which helps Republicans sweep their Greater Minnesota pick-up opportunities and take the majority in the Minnesota House."



"Because of traditionally high DFL turnout in a presidential election year, I expect that Democrats will have a good night in Minnesota and the House DFL will hold a six- or seven-seat majority."



"I think the Minnesota House will end up 67-67 because this is the year that things can't get any weirder."



"I think a combination of cash advantage and presidential turnout will lead to a good night for the DFL. They will hold Senate District 45 and hold the Minnesota House. For better or worse, I think the margins will be the same: 70-64 with a DFL majority. The DFL will get wiped out on the Range and lose the Winona seat and pick up both 41A and 41B."