



February 16, 2018

Special Election Results

On Feb. 12, special elections were held in Minnesota House District 23B (portions of Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Waseca and Watonwan counties) and Senate District 54 (portions of Dakota and Washington counties). Republican Jeremy Munson is the representative-elect in HD 23B, defeating his Democratic opponent Melissa Wagner 59-40 percent. Munson, a business owner and longtime Republican activist in the area, currently operates a firm that consults with companies dealing with federal and state regulations. Democrat Karla Bigham was the victor in the SD 54 special election, defeating her Republican opponent, former Rep. Denny McNamara, 51-47 percent. Bigham is a current Washington County Commissioner and former member of the House of Representatives and Cottage Grove city councilwoman.

Though two new faces will be at the capitol and sworn in at the beginning of the legislative session, the margin of the majority party will remain the same in both legislative chambers. The Republicans will have a 77-57

majority in the House of Representatives, while Republicans in the Senate will maintain a narrow 34-33 majority.

Precinct Caucus Results

The first hurdle of the 2018 gubernatorial race has passed, as Minnesotans went out to their precinct caucuses on Feb. 6.

The DFL field of candidates had Congressman Tim Walz winning with 30 percent of the vote, and State Auditor Rebecca Otto coming in second with nearly 20 percent of the vote. Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Minneapolis) and former St. Paul mayor Chris Coleman had disappointing showings in the caucuses, so both candidates have announced the suspension of their campaigns for governor.

The less-crowded Republican field had Hennepin County Commissioner Jeff Johnson come in first place with 45 percent of the vote, with the next highest vote-getter being “undecided” with 16 percent of the vote. There has been speculation that former Gov. Tim Pawlenty is mulling the decision to run for a third term, having not run for reelection

They said it:

“Discrimination and harassment have no place in the House. This is a serious issue that requires serious examination by a formal committee. While we have taken steps to educate members and staff on discrimination and harassment, it is also critical to have a bipartisan group tasked with delivering recommendations so lawmakers can pass needed policy changes.”

– Speaker of the House Kurt Daudt (R-Crown)

Ewald Government Relations Team

David Ewald
651-290-6276
davide@ewald.com

Valerie Dosland
651-265-7857
valeried@ewald.com

Jess Myers
651-290-7465
jessm@ewald.com

Troy Olsen
651-288-3424
troyo@ewald.com

Becca Pryse
651-265-7858
beccap@ewald.com

Owen Wirth
651-288-3438
owenw@ewald.com

Ewald  Consulting

1000 Westgate Drive, Ste. 252 • St. Paul, MN 55114 • 651-290-6260 • Fax: 651-290-2266 • ewald@ewald.com • www.ewald.com

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in 2010. Pawlenty recently sent out an email to prominent Republican donors and has left his position at a firm in Washington, DC.

The next major step in the process will be the Democratic and Republican state conventions to be held the first weekend in June, where both parties will officially announce an endorsed candidate.

Court Ruling on Lieutenant Governor Case

A Ramsey County Court has issued a ruling in the case against Sen. Michelle Fischbach (R-Paynesville), determining if she can maintain her senate seat while concurrently holding the position of lieutenant governor. The issue stems from the resignation of former US Senator Al Franken due to allegations of sexual misconduct and Gov. Mark Dayton appointing the sitting lieutenant governor (Tina Smith) as Franken's replacement. That appointment triggered a constitutionally-mandated order of succession which made the president of the senate (Sen. Fischbach) the lieutenant governor.

The court ruled that the case, which was filed by a constituent of Sen. Fischbach's, was brought to the court too soon and lacked ripeness because the basis for the case is actions that will take place in the future. Because Sen. Fischbach hasn't been officially sworn in as lieutenant governor and hasn't yet voted as a state senator while holding the two positions, the court said it cannot issue a ruling on the case based on hypothetical actions. The decision by the Ramsey County Court may be appealed to the State Supreme Court, so the issue has not been resolved yet — and may not be resolved until the legislature is back in session. The case has the potential to significantly impact the upcoming session, as Republicans look to maintain their narrow one-seat majority. If it is determined that Sen. Fischbach cannot continue as state senator, it is likely that there will be a 33-33 tie in the senate for the duration of the 2018 session.

Subcommittee on Workplace and Safety

Following multiple resignations of sitting legislators due to allegations of sexual misconduct, Speaker of the House Kurt Daudt (R-Crown) has announced that the House has created a Subcommittee on Workplace Safety and Respect, to be

chaired by House Majority Leader Joyce Peppin (R-Rogers). The goal of the committee is to ensure that the House of Representatives is a safe and respectful space for members, employees, and the public.

Members are already mandated to attend harassment training on Wednesday, Feb. 21, the second day of the 2018 session.

State of the State on March 14

Every year, the governor addresses a joint session of the House and Senate, called the State of the State address. Gov. Dayton recently requested that the date be Wednesday, March 14 in the House chambers at the capitol in St. Paul. The speech is typically an opportunity for the governor to lay out his priorities for the upcoming legislative session, as well as championing issues worked on during the governor's tenure. This will be the last of eight State of the State addresses issued by Gov. Dayton, as he has announced his retirement from public office following the conclusion of his term in 2018.

While the State of the State offers the governor an opportunity to preview the upcoming session, next week's Ewald at the Capitol will contain a session preview after the first days of the legislative session have passed.

Road to 2018

Election years are typically accompanied by a number of retirements from public officials, either to return to private life or to seek a higher office. Recently, five-term Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield) announced he will not seek reelection in 2018. Additionally, three-term Rep. Mark Uglem (R-Champlin) has announced this will be his last term at the House of Representatives. Another retirement that may have a cascading effect is that of Congressman Rick Nolan, who has announced 2018 will be his last year in office. The congressional seat will draw national attention from both parties, as the Iron Range district has been a DFL stronghold for years, but has been recently trending in a Republican direction. Speaker Daudt has said he is interested in running for the open seat, but has not committed (he has also expressed an interest in running for governor). Former Rep. Joe Radinovich (DFL-Crosby), who ran Congressman Nolan's campaign in 2016, has already declared he will run for the seat.