Episode 69: The 2020 Election

The "In The Know" team takes you through Election Day 2020 in the Twin Cities, from talking to voters during the day to covering the DFL and GOP results parties.

Ava Kian, Megan Germundson, Yoko Vue, and

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INTRO MUSIC

MEGAN PALMER: Hey everyone, and welcome back to In The Know, a podcast by the Minnesota Daily.

From early morning voting to the Democratic and Republican results parties, our team of reporters covered the 2020 Election Day top to bottom. The day was filled with anxiety and anticipation for Minnesotans as they cast their ballots in many key races. The day began quietly, with voters lining up outside of their polling places before precincts opened statewide at 7am. As the sun rose in the east, reporter Ava Kian began her day speaking with voters at Marcy Open School.

NAT SOUND

AVA KIAN: I'm currently near the exit of the polling area, where they are having voters enter from one side and exit from the other. It seems that people are in a bit of a rush this morning, getting in to vote before their days start and their meetings start.

NAT SOUND — CARS WHOOSHING BY — (FADE UP AND UNDER)

KIAN: Did you — was it easy? Pretty quick?

LARRY FOWLER: Yes.

KIAN: Yeah.
FOWLER: Faster than I thought it was, thought there was going to be a line. Yeah because I went past- when I got off work yesterday I went past the Urban League, they had a line up around the corner. That's why I came early today instead of coming in when I got off of work.

PALMER: Several voters explained the importance and necessity they felt in casting their ballots.

MADELINE WALL: Oh gosh! I mean I think it's a civic duty. I think I really would've regretted it if I hadn't come. I voted in 2016 and it was a big deal, it was my first time voting. And... I'm really excited to see if things might turn out differently this year. I just graduated from the U, so it's my first vote as a citizen outside of college and I think... I think that's important to me.

ROBIN EVANS: I wouldn't say it was a good time, but it was the most satisfying chore I've done in years.

JENNIFER SCHULTZ: I vote in every election, in this particular election I have a keen interest in seeing us change to new leadership.

PALMER: As expected in Minneapolis, many of the people Ava interviewed were voting for Democratic candidates, for one uniting reason — to remove Donald Trump from office.

JEFFREY CARDENAS: So I voted for all the Democrats, so Biden, Tina, all of them.

FLORA HSU: Me too.

KIAN: Any particular reason why you voted for them?

CARDENAS: I don't like Trump.

HSU: I think it's just the policy and the view against the other party.

JOAN ELDARD: If it's not obvious, it's more against Trump than for anyone.

I don't actually have a job, I did have a day program that I attended. Thanks to COVID, it's not only closed for the duration, it may not be opening at all. So that's basically my offline community, just gone.

JOSEPH MILLER: If we don't elect Joe Biden today, that's like taking us more steps towards authoritarianism. This is pretty unprecedented in how close Donald Trump has brought us, and so yeah, this is one part of the process of trying to move away from that.

PALMER: As Ava reported in Marcy-Holmes, reporters Megan Germundson and Yoko Vue were talking with voters at the Brian Coyle Community Center in Cedar-Riverside.

NAT SOUND — BUZZ OF ELECTION DAY INSIDE BRIAN COYLE COMMUNITY CENTER

MEGAN GERMUNDSON: It's about 7 o'clock in the morning and Yoko and I just arrived at Brian Coyle Community Center.

YOKO VUE: Good morning! This is Yoko.

GERMUNDSON: We're feeling good, Election Day!

It looks like we have several people, walking into the polling place.

CINDY BURNS: There's probably about 30 people inside already to vote.

NAT SOUND — OUTDOOR CONSTRUCTION

GERMUNDSON: Security or election officialing?

SECURITY OFFICER: Security.
GERMUNDSON: Just security?

SECURITY: Yeah, it's my first time with the election, but just security.

PALMER: After fears of voter intimidation spread around the country, Minnesota hired security to staff precincts that were most likely to be targeted.

SECURITY: So like, whoever runs the election, the state or whoever it is, hired our company to kinda just oversee it and make there's nothing kinda going on, intimidation or stuff like that.

GERMUNDSON: How many security people do they have here?

SECURITY: Just myself.

GERMUNDSON: Okay.

SECURITY: Then there's a bunch of us at different spots around different polling places.

PALMER: Megan and Yoko had to move across the street near a construction site, in accordance with the polling officials' requests. They were still able to catch plenty of people on their way in and out of the precinct.

NAT SOUND — BALLOT TRANSLATION INSIDE BRIAN COYLE CENTER

GERMUNDSON: So you're headed to vote today, how are you feeling?

ROSHIN GELLE: Pretty good, I hope.

GERMUNDSON: Why do you say you hope?

GELLE: I'm hoping the end is going to be good too. Right now I feel good so ... I'm hoping for the best, I'm voting for the best.

We're family people, so I mean, really the person who cares about the people is really what's important to me... It's all about family and not just about money all the time, you know.

GERMUNDSON: And I see you brought your son here... hi!

SON: [stating name]

GERMUNDSON: What's your name?

SON: [stating name]!

GERMUNDSON: How old are you?

SON: Six and one equals...

NAT SOUND — INSIDE THE BRIAN COYLE CENTER

GERMUNDSON: So, what are you doing here today?

MIKE CHRISTENSON: I'm a poll watcher.

GERMUNDSON: Oh, okay.

PALMER: Poll watchers showed up to challenge anyone who tried to intimidate voters and help people get their ballots cast.
CHRISTENSON: This is a great community, I work in Cedar-Riverside a lot. I helped found the Opportunity Center, the Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center.

I'm just handing out some masks, making sure people are voting safely.

GERMUNDSON: Why did you vote this election?

CHRISTENSON: I always vote. I've never missed an election. It's a... that's what citizens do, they vote.

NAT SOUND — INSIDE BRIAN COYLE

GERMUNDSON: Are you nervous about going in, are you excited, how are you feeling?

FATIMA HASHI: I'm feeling good. I'm feeling good- everything, I'm feeling good!

PALMER: Some people even came to the Twin Cities from far away, like Rick Malinchoc-Devoe, who hoped to curtail voter suppression and rally against Trump.

RICK MALINCHOC-DEVOE: I'm actually here from Red Wing. I own Fair Trade Books, an independent bookstore there. We're part of a kind of wave of independent bookstores across the country that are concerned about the election, we're kind of under the banner of refused fascism. I came up here because of the effort on the part of the Trump campaign, they're calling it Trump's army. That- what concerned me in an attempt to harass or intimidate voters. So, that's why I came up, just to see what's going on.

GERMUNDSON: What are you going to do while you're here?

MALINCHOC-DEVOE: It's been very clear, it's been stated that these quote poll watchers that have been recruited by the Trump campaign are gonna go to minority precincts and you know, attempt to intimidate voters. It's basically voter suppression.

There's a rally tomorrow night that I want to tell people about.

PALMER: Before Rick goes any further, I want to clarify that this rally already happened on Wednesday.

MALINCHOC-DEVOE: It's at 6 o'clock, I'm getting some flyers made. So I wanna kinda let people be aware of that. I think it's pretty clear that if the election is close that the Trump administration is poised to suppress the vote with court challenges to keep all the ballots from being counted.

NAT SOUND — INSIDE BRIAN COYLE CENTER

PALMER: Despite the heavily Democratic crowd, a couple of voters said they were voting for Trump because of his track record and his stance on communism.

GERMUNDSON: Why did you vote for Trump?

XUAN: Oh, because I see he already [won] four years ago, [and he'd] be okay with everybody. He just cares. I pay attention about that. I want four more years.

LINH CAO: I am Vietnamese. We came here because of the communists. We escaped here.

All the people living here, they have everything all right within good reason, to take care of their kids.

PALMER: Others made last minute decisions, thinking about who could best solve the issues in their community, such as Adnan Abdirahman.

ADNAN ABDIRAHMAN: There was a lot of problems, people didn't know who to vote for, people were confused. And I also didn't keep up with the elections, so I didn't make up my decisions. So I decided today is the last day so I just need to put my vote out there.
GERMUNDSON: And what sort of problems do you face in your community?

ABDIRAHMAN: We face a lot of division problems race-wise, religious problems. We need to break that bond.

For now we just need to find the right person who can come out and talk to people about this problem and change it.

PALMER: Polls closed across the state at 8pm. In the evening, the “In The Know” team attended the state Democratic and Republican election parties to see candidate reactions as results rolled in. Yoko and I attended the DFL party in downtown St. Paul, where no spectators were allowed this year as a pandemic safety precaution. The evening was filled with speeches from a range of politicians, such as Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter and Governor Tim Walz.

TIM WALZ: Much has changed with the global pandemic, much has changed as a state, as we started to confront long decades-old questions of racism, the inequities.

PALMER: This is Governor Tim Walz giving a rallying speech at the results party.

WALZ: But what I can tell you is, is that every time we come to election night and every time we get to make these choices, We find out who we are, and I’m proud that we’re having these conversations. I’m proud that we’re ready to start thinking about moving this state forward in a way where everyone is a part of it. And let’s be very clear, no matter what happens tonight, COVID-19 needs to be addressed tomorrow morning. And what we’re seeing in Minnesota is absolutely predictable, horrific, unacceptable, totally avoidable.

It’s not about what’s in it for me. It’s about what we can do together. Our children are watching. Our children are watching election results tonight, and our children are watching how we respond. And I can tell you in Minnesota, we will respond with vision, compassion, with science and with a sense of hopefulness that when we talk about One Minnesota, we truly believe it. So DFLers, we’ve got a long night ahead of us, but I can tell you what the sun will rise tomorrow morning. The work will still be there and our opportunity to make lives better will still be in front of us. Thank you all.

PALMER: Early victories were celebrated as results rolled in declaring Representative Ilhan Omar and Representative Dean Phillips had won reelection in their respective districts.

ILHAN OMAR: We shifted the narrative of who can serve in Congress. We change, we changed rules so that a Muslim woman with a hijab can vote on the house floor... We invited people, not corporations or special interests, to set the agenda and change the politics of what is possible. We centered marginalized people in our politics. We did not allow fear and hatred to defy us because, because we know that my destiny, your destiny and the destiny of workers around the world is linked... This is all possible because we’ve met people where they are. It’s about building relationships and trust with people, not transactional politics, but transformational politics that create transformative change.

PALMER: Other closely watched races, such as the U.S. Senate race between Democrat Tina Smith and Republican Jason Lewis were too early to call. While Yoko and I were in St. Paul, Ava and Megan covered the Republican watch party in Bloomington, where there was a very different atmosphere. Spectators were allowed, with a cap at 250 people. There was no firm consensus on pandemic safety practices at the party, with about half of attendees wearing masks.

AMANDA LUCAS: We were told that there would be measures taken and there have been, I feel very comfortable, I have no concerns. I’ve traveled throughout the country during the pandemic. Not worried.

GERMUNDSON: And what about you?

JENNIFER WERNER: I’m not worried. I’m looking forward to all of this ending soon. I wish we had a more red state and we’re hoping that happens tonight.

NAT SOUND — INSIDE THE DOUBLETREE BALLROOM

GERMUNDSON: So it’s sort of like the threat of COVID isn’t scaring you?

JOHN MACLENNAN: I’ve been a Republican since 1936 ... really. And I only have a few years left to go so I think I’ll stay Republican.
I do this every four years.

NAT SOUND — Inside the DoubleTree ballroom

GERMUNDSON: What local races are you looking forward to hearing about tonight?

WERNER: Our local ones, Bob Dettmer, Karin Housely and our senator we hope to be Jason Lewis.

GERMUNDSON: What sort of issues are top of mind for you in this election?

WERNER: I vote primarily pro-life. And then after that, security, defense, legal immigration.

WOMAN: I don't want the socialists taking over America, that's my concern.

MAN: It's a really clear choice between Trump's vision for America, which is freedom, and the government running everything, that would be a terrible idea.

PALMER: Hannah Smith was particularly outspoken about the political issues that matter most to her.

HANNAH SMITH: Safety and security and just ensuring that our government, our country stays on this path of success. Because I think a lot of the policies that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris and their government people want to put in place are just not American policies, they're not things that really are going to put forward the common good of our country so I'm just hoping for all of the pro-America, pro-safety, pro-law enforcement, pro-business, all of the kind of Trump economy things that our president is running on, that all of that continues in the next four years.

SMITH: In general, I'm feeling good. I think nationwide, Trump's going to win in a landslide. My prediction in like my family we made bets, mine's at like 330 electoral college votes. We'll see, bold prediction, but yeah. I'm feeling good tonight, I think a lot of places are going to have some unexpected switch to red so we'll see.

PALMER: Attendees rallied around Jason Lewis as he took the stage to give a speech supporting his fellow Republican candidates.

NAT SOUND – CHEERING BEFORE LEWIS' SPEECH

JASON LEWIS: And now we're talking about our principles. About the difference between freedom and tyranny. About what it means to be a free citizen and not an oppressed subject. If these people, on the other side of the aisle, get more power, they will be beholden to oppress even more. You see what they're willing to do...

PALMER: Megan and Ava were able to track the former representative down after his speech for a brief interview, asking him about his decision to not wear a mask indoors.

LEWIS: Look, I, my view on the virus is simple: that our health authorities should make public recommendations. That's what we did an H1N1, what we did in the Hong Kong flu, what we did and the Spanish flu. And if people are worried, they should wear a mask. If people are concerned or have underlying conditions, are elderly, they should stay home.

LEWIS: I think we're feeling a lot of good energy, instant karma is what, like we like to call it. I think we've basically resonated with a lot of Minnesotans that didn't have their voices heard, especially in greater Minnesota, where we spent a lot of time in this campaign. it's too early to tell, obviously, polls just closed.

PALMER: Tina Smith won reelection for her senate seat later that night. Though most smaller races have been decided, the country is still waiting to hear the results of the presidential election, despite Trump falsely claiming victory late Tuesday night. Between poll watchers attempting to intimidate election officials counting remaining absentee ballots in Michigan, to anti-Trump protesters taking to the streets, citizen reactions to the election are already making headlines. We'll cover some of those post-election reactions next week. See you then.