

# Minnesota's ballot breakdown and the future of the DFL trifecta

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Kaylie Sirovy and City Desk Editor Jack O'Connor talk key races, Minnesota ballot questions and the impact of the upcoming elections on the state's political future.

**KAYLIE SIROVY:** Hello, everyone. My name is Kaylie Sirovy, your host from the Minnesota Daily. Right now, you're listening to In The Know, a podcast dedicated to the University of Minnesota. And today in the studio with me, I have Jack O'Connor again. Hello, Jack.

**JACK O'CONNOR:** Hello.

**SIROVY:** Jack is here today to discuss the upcoming election as it's a pretty big topic right now. For the Minnesota ballot, what's on there?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, so we've got a lot of stuff on the ballot. There are state house races, state senate races, a few ballot questions, obviously we have the presidential election, and then there's also gonna be a senate seat. As well as some lesser known stuff like school board and some judicial races.

I guess we could start with the ballot questions. If you're in St. Paul, you actually have two city based ones. There is one ballot question, which will move elections from odd years to even years and another one which would fund child care stuff. In terms of the odd to even stuff, that's meant to increase voter turnout.

But there's some concern that this is going to cause a bit of chaos just in terms of like how that's going to work with city council members and their elections. Are they going to have to decrease a year? Are they going to have to get an extra year on? So just stuff like that, and child care, the mayor is basically saying that he's not gonna implement it regardless of how the voters vote, which I find interesting.

**SIROVY:** So for the specifics on that childcare question, what is it?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah. So the childcare ballot question would essentially raise property taxes. It would levy a property tax in order to fund more childcare stuff, whether that's daycare or healthcare, things like that. But the St. Paul mayor, Melvin Carter said it's grossly underestimating it. A, how much it's going to fund, and B, how much the true cost of it, of childcare are. And so he's basically saying he won't implement it. So, I guess it doesn't really matter, maybe.

**SIROVY:** OK. Well that's maybe a little concerning. Why does St. Paul want to move the elections to even years? Like, why did they start that anyway?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, so, it basically just all has to do with voter turnout. Voter turnout is always higher on presidential election years. So, when it's always on odd years, there isn't really much else that's going to be on the ballot. And so, people who are in support of this ballot are basically saying that if we move the elections to there, we'll see more people engaged with the electorate; more people interested in what's on their ballot; more people interested on what's going on in the city in terms of elections.

Opponents of the measure believe there are some concerns about how it will extend how long people are elected for, and there's concerns about that. There's just concern that city based issues, city based elections are going to fall to the rear side in those elections.

**SIROVY:** I can see both sides of that, like, playing out. I understand both sides there. So, last episode we talked about the trifecta here in Minnesota. Let's talk about that as we're getting closer to this. So, what does this upcoming election, upcoming presidential election, mean for the trifecta here in Minnesota?

**O'CONNOR:** Yes, so this upcoming election is going to decide if the trifecta is going to last another two years. DFL was calling, or I guess I should clarify, DFL, the Democratic Farmers Labor Party, otherwise known as the Democrats here in Minnesota. They hold both the Senate, state Senate, state House, the governorship, which basically allows them to pass almost anything they want as long as they have a unified party support.

They pass many, many, many different things if you are paying attention. This upcoming election is going to decide if we're going to see a part two of that. DFL was calling it the "Minnesota miracle." Republicans were very upset with how the DFL used extra state funds. So, voters are basically going to decide if they want to see this again.

**SIROVY:** Why should voters care about this trifecta?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, so, if you're a voter who believes that the "Minnesota miracle," as the DFL puts it, was something that was really great. That something that really benefited our state, that had just so many good, positive things, then they're gonna want to see this trifecta remain. With the trifecta, the Democrats don't really need to coordinate with Republicans. Not that they don't, but they don't really need their approval for what gets passed.

And so they can continue to do the kinds of things that they did the last two years. But if you're conservative minded, you don't think that the state legislature really had your best interest these last two years, then you're going to want to see that changed. With Republican control of just one of those branches, we will see a drastically different two years.

**SIROVY:** What are the specific races that will decide if that trifecta remains? Like, is it the House? Is it the Senate?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, it's definitely going to be the state Senate this year. State House seems like it's going to be a safe DFL and in terms of which state senate seats are the ones to watch, it's going to be a lot of the suburb races. Here in Minneapolis, it seems pretty cut and dry that it's going to be DFL. In some of those deeper, rural areas, it's gonna be Republican.

So, some of, if you live in the suburbs, if you vote in the suburbs, those are some really important races you're really gonna want to vote on. So some of those suburban, places like Chanhassen, Bloomington, Cottage Grove, Lino Lakes — those have a lot of important state Senate races. And if the DFL can retain at least nine, or I guess win nine of those key races, then they will retain theirs. If Republicans can switch a few more of those, then they get it.

**SIROVY:** Do you have any predictions for that?

**O'CONNOR:** It's really hard to say for all of them. I think Republicans are gonna switch the state Senate this year. I think this is gonna be, they're gonna just narrowly take it.

**SIROVY:** Let's talk about that Senate race. Senator Klobuchar, versus the opponent, Royce White, how do we think that's going to go?

**O'CONNOR:** Klobuchar is going to win. I'm sorry to the Royce White fans listening, but it's just not really going to be a close election. Sabato's Crystal Ball, which is an election forecaster, has listed the seat as a safe democratic hold. And Royce White just really is not doing himself any favors. He keeps coming out with comments that are concerning for a moderate voter, and just, he's a really active poster on Twitter.

**SIROVY:** Maybe not a good thing.

**O'CONNOR:** Not a good thing. There are a few different ones that I've just been noticing. I recall one where in a post, he basically just says something, I don't know, he gets aggressive about people who aren't in support of some of his policies. Someone replies to him saying like, "Oh, hey, I saw you in one of your, I saw you down in the suburbs once. I thought you had some good ideas. I'm a supporter, but you need to be concerned about this. I don't want us to lose these type of people."

And Royce White basically just responds with like, "Man, screw you. If you're not a supporter, you're not on board." And then the guy just responds like, "OK, I guess you just lost my vote." I think that's just the kind of thing that shows that Royce White isn't really ready for the big time.

**SIROVY:** That's a little aggressive to be playing out like the people that are gonna vote for you.

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, I think Royce White is misunderstanding what he needs to do in order to win. Royce White needs to kind of convince those suburban voters that Amy Klobuchar doesn't really have their interests at heart, that she isn't really concerned about Minnesota,

and he needs to kind of like, portray himself as more of a unifying figure that he can bring balance. But he just really isn't doing that. He's heavily leaning into that Trump-era-Republican politics. And I'm just, don't believe that's going to resonate in Minnesota.

**SIROVY:** I heard that he's gonna have a watch party for election night.

**O'CONNOR:** Yes, Spencer really wants to go to it. So, I'm sure I will send him that way and he will have his fun.

**SIROVY:** I just need someone to be there so that they can talk about, so that they can talk about what they saw cause I think it's, incredible. It's kind of funny. Incredible, maybe not. Funny, yes.

**O'CONNOR:** You know, I think sometimes politics can seem a little serious. Sometimes it's fun to just take a step back and see it as a game, and it's kind of funny that way.

**SIROVY:** Yeah. I'm thinking that Royce White sees it as a little too much of a game, though instead of politics.

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, sometimes you need to lock in a little, and I don't know if he's doing that.

**SIROVY:** Yeah, from what I can tell, probably not.

**O'CONNOR:** No.

**SIROVY:** Alright, so let's talk about the presidential election, the big one. How will Minnesota vote as a whole?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, Minnesota is likely to vote Democratic. Sabato's Crystal Ball, again the same election forecaster, lists it as a likely Democratic hold. It doesn't really seem like it's gonna be a flip. JD Vance has made a few visits to Minnesota. Donald Trump had made one a few months ago, I believe.

But, with Tim Walz on the ballot, with just how Minnesota politics are, it just doesn't really seem like this is going to be the year Republicans can take Minnesota.

**SIROVY:** For the presidential election, is it just going to be Minneapolis, and like, the Duluth area more blue, and the rest of the state red, or what's kind of the divide there?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, so, like every other state basically, the heavily urban areas of Minnesota drive the politics here, drive the results of elections here. However, the urban areas aren't quite large enough to single handedly decide it like it would be in Illinois with Chicago. So, if a Republican candidate hypothetically just dominated the suburbs, they could win an election. That is very doable, but just no Republican has really been able to tap into that for quite some time now.

**SIROVY:** What are the counties in Minnesota that are usually blue and usually red?

**O'CONNOR:** It's just going to be decided in those suburban areas surrounding the Twin Cities. And also in kind of the suburban areas of Duluth. St. Cloud itself is kind of, iffy on which way it goes.

**SIROVY:** It's usually a mix, yeah.

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah.

**SIROVY:** What else is on the ballot that we should be watching out for?

**O'CONNOR:** There's another statewide ballot question. This one will decide whether lottery funds will be used for conservation efforts. Lottery funds have been used for conservation efforts for the last, I think it's three decades now. Minnesota has already voted twice before on renewing that, and essentially this is going to be Minnesota deciding to renew that once more. Based on polling, based on how Minnesota goes, it seems like this is going to be a yes. We are going to use lottery funds for conservation efforts once again.

**SIROVY:** And what do you mean by lottery funds?

**O'CONNOR:** So essentially like the money that's made from the lottery.

**SIROVY:** So like people buying the tickets?

**O'CONNOR:** Yes. Yes. Money made from that.

**SIROVY:** Do you know what sort of conservation stuff, some of it has been used for in the past?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah. Yeah. It doesn't have to be used for like one specific thing, but I know river cleanups, some of those like clean air initiatives, trash pickups, things like that. That's what all of this goes for. It's pretty important if you're someone who is concerned about environmental protection, and this is going to be really key.

In the hypothetical scenario in which this is voted against, that would be very consequential in terms of how all of those environmental protection efforts are going to get their money. A lot of the key stuff, a lot of what the environmental protection efforts rely on is those state funds. And a lot of those state funds come from the lottery.

**SIROVY:** I had no idea about that.

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah.

**SIROVY:** You said for the past three decades?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, Minnesota has voted twice in the past on basically the same ballot question.

**SIROVY:** I had no idea about that. I was wondering where they get some of that money. I wish they got more of it, but oh well. Let's talk about predictions, specifically for the swing states, because I think that's super important.

**O'CONNOR:** Yes. So, election forecasters are basically saying there are seven swing states that you really need to watch out for. Those states are Arizona, Nevada, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Georgia. In the last election in which Biden won, Biden won all of those except North Carolina. This time around, North Carolina is one of those swing states that's being added on. Partially because of demographic changes. Partially because their senate candidate, Mark Robinson, has had his fair share of scandals that are really costing him votes and that's probably going to hurt Republicans up the ballot.

**SIROVY:** He doesn't seem too well liked over there.

**O'CONNOR:** No, I believe the last time I checked his polling was around like 41%, which is like atrocious in North Carolina.

**SIROVY:** OK. So what about all the other swing states?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah. All the other states are expected to be pretty safe. Minnesota here, as we mentioned, should be democratic. All the surrounding states — the Dakotas, Missouri, Iowa should be pretty safe Republican. But, in terms of how the swing states will go, this is my official prediction, I can put money on this; I think the Democrats are going to have a pretty good night. I think they're going to take six of the seven. I think they'll have all of them except Georgia, in which I do believe Republicans take it back.

**SIROVY:** What are the factors, cause they had, the Democrats had Georgia in the last election. Why aren't they gonna have it in this one?

**O'CONNOR:** Yeah, so last time around when Georgia was a really important state that Democrats managed to switch. There were two very important senate races that Democrats both took the Senate, but they were also very crucial in driving voter turnout.

And I think that is why we saw so many Democratic voters come out in droves in Georgia, which ultimately allowed Biden to take that state. But this time around, I don't believe there are any senate seats. You might have to fact check me on that. I don't believe Georgia has any senate seats up for reelection.

**SIROVY:** Well, I will certainly be a lookout for that. This is a question I have for you based on what you've seen, kind of, in your reporting and as a City Desk editor. Do Minnesotans like Gov. Tim Walz as the vice presidential candidate for the Democrats?

**O'CONNOR:** That's a really important question, especially with Tim Walz being our governor. Tim Walz, by large margins, is heavily liked by Minnesotans. Even, according to favorability ratings, ever since he's become the VP candidate, he's actually become more well liked in Minnesota, but obviously there are still people within the state.

My own aunt is not the fan of Gov. Tim Walz, but I think Tim Walz at the end of the day is really helping Democrats on the ballot here in Minnesota. He's bringing a lot of likability to the Kamala Harris campaign that I think is really important for a presidential election.

**SIROVY:** That Midwestern dad energy. I've been seeing memes about that. It's pretty fun. What are some of the concerns of the people who do not like Gov. Tim Walz as the vice presidential candidate?

**O'CONNOR:** You know, a lot of conservatives have painted him as like this very progressive governor. Someone who is very far left. Well, I will, probably wouldn't go that far myself in saying that he's of some far left candidate, like a Bernie Sanders type. I would say that that is definitely going to be a concern. With the Minnesota miracle, Democrats were able to get a lot of what they wanted passed. And if a Republican sees all those things, they don't like the legalization of marijuana. They don't like the raising of taxes. They don't want to see more funding going towards this program or that program, then they might think Tim Walz isn't the kind of guy that they want to see in the White House.

**SIROVY:** Do you have anything else about the election that you kind of want to talk about in a question that I didn't ask?

**O'CONNOR:** Let's see. I guess I think I'll just make a quick note about the Congressional House and Congressional Senate races. According to polling, and this is probably also what I believe, Democrats will probably, in my mind, take back the House with a very slight majority, probably like in the 220s range. But, the Senate map looks really terrible for Democrats. It looks like they're going to lose one or two seats, which means that they will lose the Senate. So, yeah.

**SIROVY:** Well, I hope everyone has a chance to go out and vote this year. I know I will. I'm super excited to exercise my right to vote. I will be early voting because I do not, as a student, have time on election day. Anything else before we head out?

**O'CONNOR:** Just make sure to vote.

**SIROVY:** Alright. This episode was produced by Kaylie Sirovy. As always, we appreciate you listening in, and feel free to leave us an email at [podcasting@mndaily.com](mailto:podcasting@mndaily.com) with comments, questions or concerns. I'm Kaylie.

**O'CONNOR:** I'm the election nerd, Jack O'Connor.

**SIROVY:** The election nerd, OK. And this has been In The Know.