

Minnesota Politics in 2018

2017 was a year in politics that many Minnesotans won't soon forget. To list a few highlights: Republicans took control of the Legislature; the Governor vetoed funding for the House and Senate leading to a historic Supreme Court case over the governor's constitutional powers; a U.S. Senator resigned over sexual harassment allegations, as did two state legislators; and the Governor appointed his Lieutenant Governor to fill the vacancy in the U.S. Senate, kicking off a chain of succession that has ended up in court. 2018 is postured to have many of its own milestones in politics.

For the first time in state history, all 201 lawmakers will convene session without a budget for their own operations. Because the Minnesota Supreme Court upheld the Governor's line-item veto of two years of funding of the House and Senate, legislatures will need to address funding at the start of the session.

Additionally, the Governor's appointment of former Lieutenant Governor Tina Smith left a vacancy in her office that "shall" be filled by the president of the Minnesota Senate. That person is eight-term Republican Senator Michelle Fischbach. Fischbach, the first Lieutenant Governor to serve with a Governor of an opposing party in decades, is arguing that she doesn't have to leave her current job in the state Senate. Fischbach is relying on an 1898 Supreme Court ruling that allows the Senate president to serve in the Senate and Lieutenant Governor role in support of her position. Democrats, however, argue that an amendment to the Minnesota Constitution in the 1970s took away the ability to serve in a dual role capacity. Fischbach's insistence that she can serve in both capacity has led to a lawsuit filed by a Democrat from Fischbach's Senate district to oust her from her state Senate seat.

Finally, the 2018 midterm elections are likely to be the biggest Minnesota political story of the year. Because of Senator Franken's resignation, both of Minnesota's U.S. Senate seats will be on the ballot for the first time in 40 years. The Governor seat, and other state constitutional offices, will also be on the ballot, including the potential for an open race for Attorney General. Competitive congressional races are also expected in as many as five of Minnesota's eight congressional districts in addition to the race for control of the Minnesota House. The first step towards midterms will be the Democratic and Republican precinct caucuses that will be held on February 6, 2018.

Thus, it is safe to say that there will be plenty to pay attention to in 2018.