



# *Minnesota* Influencers

Nationally, Minnesota has been known as the liberal bastion of Hubert Humphrey, Eugene McCarthy and Walter Mondale. It's common to see a national political writer also mention that a Republican presidential candidate hasn't claimed the state since 1972 - the longest streak in the nation. But what is overlooked is that a Democrat hasn't won the governor's seat since 1986 - the third longest streak in the nation. You only need to look at the nearly eight month long recount in Minnesota's U.S. Senate race in 2008 to show how the state is divided politically.

Minnesota voters also have a quirky streak. Voters sent a professional wrestler (Jesse Ventura) to the governor's mansion and a comedian to the U.S. Senate (Democrat Al Franken). The state also sent the first Muslim to Congress (Democrat Keith Ellison), and embraced the darling of the Tea Party movement (Republican Michele Bachmann). One thing is for certain, Minnesotans take their voting seriously. The state repeatedly ranks first in voter turnout across the country.

# TOP TEN Republicans

## Tim Pawlenty

The two-term Republican is leaving the office at the end of the year but his influence in GOP politics has never been greater. Pawlenty, who is ramping up a bid for the White House in 2012, is connected to both Minnesota's business community and the social conservatives in the Republican Party. Can he develop the same relationships on the national level?

## Michele Bachmann

The Republican Congresswoman has become a darling of the conservative movement in Minnesota and nationally. Her decision to create the Tea Party Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives only bolsters her standing among that movement. The key question is what Bachmann does with her popularity. She's mentioned as a possible challenger to DFL Sen. Amy Klobuchar in 2012. Others say she's a dark horse candidate for the White House.

## Robert Cummins

Many Minnesotans have never heard of him, but his influence in the Republican Party is massive. The CEO of Primera Technology has given millions to Republicans in the Legislature and conservative groups that tout low taxes and a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage in Minnesota.

## Vin Weber

Weber is a D.C. based lobbyist and political consultant who hasn't forgotten where he came from. The former Minnesota Congressman has given political advice and fundraising help to Minnesota candidates. Weber advised George W. Bush's White House run and most recently helped Mitt Romney's bid in 2008. Many wonder if he'll stick with Romney in 2012 or sign on with Pawlenty.

## Tom Emmer

Emmer is a three term state legislator who has never won a statewide race. Republicans are counting on him to keep the governor's seat in GOP hands. Emmer is a populist candidate who has strong support from the conservatives within the party.

## Norm Coleman

The former U.S. Senator was considering a run for governor in 2010 but decided against it. Instead, he may be run to become Chair of the Republican National Committee in 2011. Coleman lost his senate seat to Democrat Al Franken in 2008 by 312 votes. He's currently working for the 527 group, American Crossroads, which aims to rebuild the GOP brand.

## John Kline

Kline is a four term Republican who doesn't have the sizzle of Bachmann but is quietly building a name for himself in Minnesota and in Congress. He's a former Marine Colonel who takes the lead on military issues in Congress. He's also the ranking member of the House Committee on Education and Labor.

## Michael Brodkorb

It's not often that the Deputy Chair of the Minnesota Republican Party ranks higher than the Party Chair but Brodkorb. Prior to being elected to the MN-GOP, Brodkorb made his name by creating a blog that destroyed Democrats. His understanding of technology and social media is helping a Republican Party that seemed to be more focused on fax machines than Facebook before he arrived.

## Bill Cooper

The CEO of TCF Bank is a big time donor and key supporter of the Republican Party. Cooper is unabashedly conservative. At times he criticized Gov. Pawlenty for being too soft on the state budget. Cooper also has the ear of MNGOP Chair Tony Sutton, giving him influence over the party he once ran.

## Kurt Zellers

The Republican House Minority Leader has been influential in sustaining Gov. Pawlenty's vetoes during the last legislative session. Since Democrats have a veto-proof majority in the Minnesota Senate, Zellers and his caucus have stuck together and stopped Democrats in the House from picking up the three votes needed for a successful override.

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## TOP TEN Democrats

### Amy Klobuchar

Klobuchar is still serving her first term in the U.S. Senate but her clout in party politics has been larger than ever. Her high approval ratings and easy going speaking style has made her a critical asset for the Democratic Farmer Labor Party. The one criticism is that she rarely risks that high approval rating by taking stands on controversial issues. She's up for reelection 2012.

### Jim Oberstar

Oberstar has served in Congress since the 1970s and his clout in Congress is now catching up with his political clout in Minnesota. He currently chairs the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. When he visits Minnesota to talk transportation issues, even the Republicans in the Minnesota Legislature tread carefully for fear he could pull funding for a road or bridge in their legislative districts. Oberstar has also quietly raised money and made decisions to ensure Democrats are successful in bottom of the ticket races.

### Mark Dayton

The former U.S. Senator is hoping that he can be the first Democrat to win a governor's race in Minnesota in 24 years. He's running on a populist message of raising taxes on Minnesota's top earners to fix the budget deficit. Republicans say he's too risky and point to past problems during his one term in the Senate.

### Alida Messinger

Messinger, one of the heirs to the Rockefeller family, has given millions of dollars to Democrats and groups that work to elect Democratic candidates. Since she's such a big time donor, her influence in the party is unprecedented. Messinger is also the ex-wife to former U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton.

### Al Franken

Franken is in his first term in the U.S. Senate and has tried to keep a low profile after he won a bruising eight month recount to win the seat. Franken has used his federal and state political action committees to elect Democrats. It will be interesting to see how many Republicans line up to run against him in 2014.

### R.T. Rybak

The mayor of Minneapolis was unsuccessful in his attempt to win the party's nomination for governor. But he hasn't slowed down as a result. Instead, he's working to elect Democrats to the Minnesota Legislature. It's a near certainty that Rybak will make another run for higher office.

### Larry Pogemiller

The Majority Leader of the Minnesota Senate has been instrumental in shaping the Democrats message in the Legislature. Some see Pogemiller as a master chess player when it comes to Legislative maneuvering but the biggest criticism is that he doesn't understand how his message plays with the general public.

### Tom Dooher


The executive director of the state's teacher's union holds considerable pull among Democrats in the Legislature. Candidates who cross the union may find themselves facing an uphill battle for reelection. Republicans, and a few Democrats, say Dooher has been too focused on protecting the status quo in education and is not focused enough on improving the state's schools.

### Collin Peterson

Peterson doesn't always toe the party line when it comes to voting in Congress but that may be why his rural district keeps sending him back. He chairs the House Committee on Agriculture and his fingerprints will be on the current and future Farm Bill. Peterson is one of the original founders of the Blue Dog Democrats – a group committed to keeping government spending in check and improving national security.

### Tony Sertich

Sertich, still in his mid-thirties, currently serves as House Majority Leader and is running the reelection efforts for his caucus. If Democrats retain their majority, Sertich is highly likely to take the role of Speaker of the Minnesota House. He is also considered a contender to replace Oberstar when he retires.



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# MINNESOTA Influencers

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## **Tim Flaherty**

Flaherty would have listed higher on this list except that he has strong influence over both Democrats and Republicans in the Legislature. Flaherty is a lobbyist for cities in rural Minnesota and he makes sure legislators know when a funding or policy issue directly impacts their district.

## **Chris Coleman**

St. Paul's Mayor declined to make a run for the governor saying he has too much work to do as mayor. He's active in party politics which signals a future run for higher office is on the horizon.

## **Tom Horner**

Horner is the Independence Party candidate for governor. The former Republican staffer and PR executive has high hopes that he can catch the same lightning in the bottle that Jesse Ventura created when he won the governor's race in 1998. His success in the race will also determine whether the I-P remains a major party in Minnesota.

## **Scott Fischbach**

The executive director of the anti-abortion group, Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, holds tremendous clout among social conservatives. Need proof? Fischbach's criticism of a former legislator's abortion credentials immediately scratched her off Emmer's list of running mates.

## **Dick Cohen**

As Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, the Minnesota State Senator holds the purse strings on which state programs get funded and which don't. But his role as a fundraiser is even more impressive. He's been a bundler for President Obama and John Kerry.

## **Stanley Hubbard**

Hubbard owns the ABC affiliate in the Twin Cities but he also gives big bucks to Republican candidates and causes. He helped fund a 527

in 2006 that helped Pawlenty win a bruising reelection battle. Hubbard is hoping those dollars can work the same magic for Emmer and candidates in the Legislature.

## **Tom Bakk**

Bakk was a candidate for governor but dropped his bid after he failed to gain traction. His role as Chair of the Senate Taxes Committee means he'll be instrumental in shaping Minnesota tax policy regardless of who wins the governor's race unless, of course, he decides to take a chance to become Senate Majority Leader.

## **Betty McCollum**

McCollum has two things going for her. She sits on the U.S. House Appropriations Committee that makes critical funding decisions in Congress. She also has the ear of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi which gives her considerable clout. Her only downside is that she's gotten behind Democrats in Minnesota races that haven't made it to the finish line.

## **David Olson**

Olson runs the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and has tremendous clout among lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. His decision to support an override of Governor Pawlenty's veto of a transportation funding package paved the way for members of both parties to support it.

## **Eliot Seide**

The current head of the state's largest public employees union, AFSCME Council 5, doesn't pull punches with either party. He repeatedly rips Republicans for protecting businesses at the expense of Minnesota's low income and labor members. He also rips Democrats for not being strong enough on the same issue.

## **Tony Sutton**

Sutton went from local party activist to Chair of the Republican Party of Minnesota. In his first year as Chair, he's working to resurrect a party that has seen losses in Congress and the Minnesota Legislature. His key test will be to hold on to the governor's seat.

## **Linda Berglin**

Berglin is chair of the Senate Health and Human Services budget division. No one understands health care policy better. Governor Pawlenty learned that the hard way in 2005 when he invited Berglin in to his office for a "public budget negotiation." The meetings were closed to the press after that.

## **Erik Paulsen**

Paulsen is finishing up his first term in Congress and it's a nearly safe bet that he'll return. He could be in that seat for quite some time if he plays his political cards right.

## **Vance Opperman**

Opperman is a big time donor to Democratic groups and candidates. His influence also helped pave the way for the 2008 Republican National Committee to be held in St. Paul.

## **Jeff Larson**

The political consultant most recently served as CEO of the Minneapolis St. Paul 2008 Host Committee, which organized the 2008 Republican National Convention. A majority of his work focuses on telemarketing and voter contact.

## **Dave Senjem**

The Minority Leader of the Minnesota Senate has repeatedly worked to get Republicans and Democrats in the Legislature to compromise on issues like the state budget. The low number of seats held by his caucus will likely increase in 2010. If it doesn't, Senjem may be calling for compromise from the back bench.



## **Charlie Weaver**

Weaver heads the Minnesota Business Partnership, a group of more than 110 chief executives from Minnesota's largest employers. The group is focused on improving the business climate and education standards in Minnesota. He's also heavily involved in a corporate funded PAC aimed at electing the GOP candidate for governor.

## **Tim Walz**

Walz is currently serving his second term in Congress after upsetting a long-time GOP Congressman. Republicans are hoping they can send him back to his teaching career in Mankato but it's easier said than done. Walz is popular because he's a former teacher, high school football coach and National Guard member.

## **Brian Melendez**

The Chair of the Democratic Farmer Labor Party has helped Democrats win both U.S. Senate seats, a majority of the state's congressional delegation and made gains in the Minnesota Legislature.

## **Cullen Sheehan**

Sheehan's clout in Minnesota politics picked up in August after party leaders picked him to take control of Tom Emmer's floundering campaign for governor. He hopes the outcome is better than the last race he ran – Norm Coleman's 2008 Senate race.

## **Walter Mondale**

The former Vice President of the United States doesn't maintain a heavy political profile of late, but he will work for Democrats he believes in, especially lobbying the critical senior citizen vote that grew up pulling the lever for him.

## **Tim Owens**

The CEO of Voyager Bank has been Gov. Pawlenty's finance chair and is one of Pawlenty's biggest supporters. He could play a significant role if/when Pawlenty starts his presidential run.

## **Andy Kozak**

The lobbyist represents some of the biggest national names at the State Capitol including American Express, AT&T and Pfizer. But his role as lobbyist for the Minnesota Indian Gaming Association means his calls get immediately returned by Democratic legislators.

## **Keith Ellison**

The first Muslim elected to Congress hasn't been afraid to call for a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. He is also well known in mobilizing minority voters, a group that doesn't typically have high voter turnout on Election Day.

## **Phil Krinkie**

The head of the Taxpayers League of Minnesota is influential because the group opposes tax increases of any kind. The annual legislative scorecard is critical for Republicans looking to get reelected.

### Mark Ritchie

The Minnesota Secretary of State's reelection hopes in 2010 will be a referendum on his work on the recount of the 2008 U.S. Senate race. He's been widely praised by Democrats for his work. Republicans have been heavily critical.

### Chris Georgacas

Former MNGOP Chair is quickly becoming an elder statesman to the party. He was asked to advise Tom Emmer's gubernatorial bid after a series of setbacks struck the campaign.

### Keith Langseth

His role as Chair of the Senate Capital Investment Committee means he has incredible power on which bonding projects get approved. A Democrat in a tough reelection battle is certain to see a project included. A Republican could suffer the opposite fate.

### Jerry Samargia

Samargia makes phone calls. Lots of them. In 2008, he was the main phone vendor for Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

### Lori Swanson

Minnesota's Attorney General doesn't work the political scene like attorneys general from other states but she has maintained the office's long-standing practice of focusing on consumer protection.

### Brian Sullivan

The Republican National Committeeman's name always pops up when GOP names are discussed for governor and the U.S. Senate. He hasn't put his toe back in the water after losing a marathon long endorsing convention to Tim Pawlenty in 2002. Well connected to fiscal conservatives.

### Jeff Blodgett

He ran all of the late Sen. Paul Wellstone's campaigns and the Minnesota state campaign for Barack Obama in 2008. Blodgett now runs

Wellstone Action, a group that works to elect progressive candidates in local, state and federal office.

### Bob Schroeder

Pawlenty's Chief of Staff has been holding the office together as Pawlenty travels the nation ramping up his bid for the White House. No one is more loyal to Pawlenty.

### Sara Growing

Growing currently serves as Chief of Staff to St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman but also worked as district director to U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar. She is also active in helping elect Democrats to office. Her presence in debate prep is a requirement for any Democratic candidate.



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## Ken Martin

A Democratic Political Operative who is heading up an independent group's effort to elect a Democrat governor in Minnesota. He will heavily influence the message on why Minnesotans should not vote Republican in 2010.

## Tom Prichard

The head of the Minnesota Family Council is directly connected to social conservatives and makes sure they know who to vote for in elections. His top issue in recent years has been to ban gay marriage in Minnesota.

## Andy O'Leary

The executive director of the Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor Party has been praised for his work on creating a voter file that is the envy of Democrats in other states.

## Rebecca Otto

Minnesota's State Auditor is serving her first term. She's working to show that her role is making an impact on local government finances. She faces a tough reelection battle against the person she defeated to win the office – Republican Pat Anderson.

## Annette Meeks

Meeks is the Republican Party's candidate for Lieutenant Governor but she's also been heavily involved in pushing conservative issues. Prior to her Lt. Gov. candidacy, Meeks ran the conservative Freedom Foundation.

## Yvonne Prettner-Solon

The state Senator from Duluth is one of the big reasons Mark Dayton is the Democratic nominee for governor. Dayton's running mate delivered northeastern Minnesota and the senior vote for Dayton in the primary and will be expected to do it again in November.

## Rich Stanek

The Hennepin County Sheriff is a law and order candidate who has hopes on making a run for higher office.

## Stanley Crooks

Chair of the Shakopee Dakota Tribe is a Democratic donor. His influence is a major reason the state's horse track doesn't have slot machines which would provide major competition to the state's Native American casinos.

## Paul Thissen

The state Representative didn't win the Democratic endorsement for governor but surprised many with his showing at the party convention. He's expected to make waves in the Legislature and could run for higher office in the future.

## Dan Cramer

Democratic candidates approach Cramer before they make a run for office to get key advice. He worked as a field organizer for Wellstone and now uses that experience to train and mobilize individuals at Grassroots Solutions. He worked to help Franken win in 2008.

## Brian McClung

He wrote many of the talking points for Governor Pawlenty before moving over to run MN Forward, a corporate funded PAC working to elect business friendly politicians. The group's decision to back Emmer put Target Corporation in crosshairs of Democrats and gay rights groups.

## Tina Smith

Smith's fingerprints have been on several statewide campaigns. She ran several gubernatorial campaigns for Democrats, worked on Barack Obama's Minnesota campaign and served as Chief of Staff for Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak.

## Ben Golnik

Golnik is well connected in GOP circles since he served as Regional Director of John McCain's presidential campaign and as executive director of the MN-GOP from 2005-2007.

## Denise Cardinal

Runs the labor and Democratic backed Alliance for a Better Minnesota. The group is expected to run millions of dollars in ads ripping Tom Emmer.

## Javier Morillo-Alicea

The SEIU organizer is well connected within Democratic politics. He also led the union's federal efforts on immigration reform.

## Scott Cottingham

The political consultant shapes the message and talking points of GOP candidates across the country.

## Mike Kennedy

He runs the election operations for the Democrats in the Minnesota Senate and is one of the key reasons they have a veto proof majority.

## Jim Abeler

The state Representative is a moderate Republican who cuts deals. That's a rarity in a highly partisan Minnesota House.

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### **Jaime Tincher**

Tincher ran Margaret Anderson Kelliher's unsuccessful campaign for governor. She's a whiz when it comes to microtargeting key Democratic voters.

### **Jeff Johnson**

The Hennepin County Commissioner is extremely active in GOP politics. He lost a bid for Attorney General in 2006 but is ambitious enough to run for other offices.

### **Matt Dean**

The GOP state Representative is active in policy and politics. He's raising money for the House GOP and worked to craft a compromise health care bill in 2010 session.

### **Tarryl Clark**

The Democrat is challenging GOP Rep. Michele Bachmann – no small task. She's raising lots of money and is making a serious bid to defeat her.

### **Shanna Woodbury**

She's the top GOP fundraiser in the state. She raises money for Pawlenty's PAC and several other GOP congressional candidates.

### **Lou Frillman**

Frillman is becoming a major Democratic donor. He bundled more than \$100k for Obama in 2008.

### **Erin Murphy**

The Democratic state Representative has impressed the Legislature with her knowledge and passion for health care policy. She's rumored to be interested in being the next MN House Majority Leader.

### **Bill McCarthy**

Some argue the head of the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation is one of the most effective union operatives in the state. His influence and input touches a third of the state's labor workforce.

### **Ron Schutz**

The influential attorney has become a top GOP fundraiser. Rumored to aspire for a statewide office run in the future.

### **Alex Conant**

The Minnesota native is the official spokesman for Gov. Pawlenty's federal PAC. If Pawlenty pulls the trigger on a White House run, Conant will play a major role in shaping Pawlenty's talking points.

**Harry Melander** – Head of the St. Paul Building and Construction Trades Council. Works with both sides of the aisle in order to deliver projects for his members.

### **Tom Rukavina**

The long time Minnesota House member lost his bid to become governor but helped pave the way for another to win the endorsement. He delivers votes on the Iron Range, a DFL stronghold.

### **Don Ness**

Duluth's Democratic Mayor is young and energetic. Many say he has strong potential to make a run for higher office.

### **Ross Kramer**

The lobbyist is usually called in to ensure that a deal gets closed at the Capitol.

### **Laura Brod**

The state Representative is leaving her position this year but she's careful to mention that she isn't retiring. A sure sign she's looking at a possible run for the U.S. Senate in 2012 or 2014.



## **Steve Knuth**

The CEO of Public Affairs Co. worked his way up as a Republican staffer but is now active as a Republican donor.

## **Kevin Goodno**

The former Commissioner of the MN Department of Human Services has built the Frederickson and Byron lobbying operations from the ground up. Extremely well liked by both members of both parties.

## **David Hann**

The GOP state Senator didn't make traction in his gubernatorial bid but many think he has the skills to make another statewide run for office.

## **David Lillehaug**

A well respected adviser for DFL candidates. Also a skilled lawyer who wins legal challenges that impact or reverses state policy.

## **Brian Rice**

He ran the floor operations for one DFL candidate for governor, orchestrated several behind the scenes endorsements for the eventual winner and then worked to help Mark Dayton win the DFL nomination.

## **Andy Parrish**

He ran Republican Congresswoman Michele Bachmann's 2006 and 2008 campaigns for Congress. He is now a senior adviser to Bachmann.

## **Judy Cook**

Her lobbying firm represents some major business interests like AT&T, Altria, 3M and others.

## **Chris Tiedeman**

A Republican political consultant who mostly works behind the scenes. He is heading a conservative 527 that could play a major role in the governor's race.

## **Mark Drake**

The spokesman for the Minnesota Republican Party has influence in shaping the message and talking points for the GOP.

## **Peggy Flanagan**

Her endorsement can literally deliver thousands of Native American votes. She has helped train Native American organizers at Wellstone Action and helped Franken win in 2008.

## **Keith Downey**

The first term Republican has impressed several Capitol insiders with his quick

ability to grasp complex issues. Considered a rising star in the party.

## **Ted Grindal**

The lobbyist at the State Capitol has a long client list.

## **Jack Uldrich**

The Independence Party Chair has a key role in determining whether his party stays relevant in Minnesota. His test is getting a major I-P victory other than Jesse Ventura.

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**Erratum:** *The following individual was inadvertently omitted from the NY Influencers list (Democrats to Know and Watch) published in the September 2010 print edition.*

## **Jerry Goldfeder**

Election lawyer; Was counsel to AG Cuomo. Author of treatise, Goldfeder's Modern Election Law.



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