

- NINA MOINI:** We are going to dive deeper into the results and what it means for November with our MPR News political analyst. Chas Anderson, a Republican, is the CEO and senior principal at Park Street Public, and Todd Rapp, DFL political analyst with Rapp Strategies, is here as well. Thank you both for being here in the studio.
- CHAS ANDERSON:** Thank you for having us.
- TODD RAPP:** Good to see you.
- NINA MOINI:** We've got a full house as I was telling--
- INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, that's right.
- NINA MOINI:** Every seat is full. Let's start with the significance of all these women at the top of the ticket on both sides of the aisle. Chas, what do you take away from this?
- CHAS ANDERSON:** Yeah, without a doubt, this is an historic election in terms of first we're going to have our next female governor. That's going to happen regardless of the outcome in November. That's already done. And the fact that we have two really prominent highly regarded women running for US Senate as well is another historic moment for Minnesota. So I think that's something to walk away and be excited about.
- INTERVIEWER:** Chas, Lisa Demuth overcame quite a bit to get this nomination. She wasn't the endorsed candidate of the party. She didn't have President Trump's endorsement. What do you take away from that, and does it say anything about Minnesota Republicans and their affinity toward this president?
- CHAS ANDERSON:** I think Speaker Demuth and her team were just uber focused on what they needed to do mechanically to get the race into the victory column. No, they faced a lot of odds like you said. President Trump didn't endorse Lisa. The Republican Party endorsed someone else, but they really just grinded it out county by county and managed to pull off really an historic victory.
- INTERVIEWER:** Well, more people voted for somebody else than voted for Lisa Demuth in that Republican primary. Mike Lindell has yet to concede. Kendall Qualls has. Do you think there's going to be any kind of problem with uniting the party heading forward?
- CHAS ANDERSON:** I think in the end, once we get closer to the general election, Republican base voters will vote for the top of the ticket, whether it's Michele Tafoya, Lisa Demuth. Sometimes it takes time to work some of that out, but I think there's going to be a lot of good, positive energy on the top of the ticket for Republicans.
- NINA MOINI:** Well, Lindell has not conceded quite yet to Demuth, raising concerns about election integrity. So let's take a listen to a little bit of what he had to say last night.
- MIKE LINDELL:** If there-- if I find there was nothing happened there and it was just a mathematical deviation of history that doesn't make sense, I will let you all tomorrow. But I need until tomorrow to get reports from my teams, and hopefully we find the answers because there has to be an answer for what happened up there.
- INTERVIEWER:** Well, Todd, Mike Lindell, can't-- Democrats wanted Mike Lindell perhaps on the side on the ticket. How does the calculus change without him?

TODD RAPP: Yeah. One of the ways it does change is that it looks like it's going to be a high turnout general election. By the way, congratulations. You were the first one who said to me there's going to be a million primary voters. And the - and while I agree that this is going to make it easier for a lot of Republicans to back the ticket as a whole, you still got to bring those Trump voters along. And there's 130,000-plus of them who voted for Mike Lindell.

And Donald Trump has had difficulty with his candidates and actually Republicans having good turnout during off-year elections here in Minnesota since Trump entered the national political scene. All of this is going to play out because Demuth and Tafoya will be put on the spot about particular things the president does.

Do you support Todd Blanche as attorney general is just one example. And how they answer those questions is going to somehow determine how those Trump voters decide whether to turn out or just sit at home.

NINA MOINI: And Amy Klobuchar came into the race as the presumptive winner. Really, what will she be up against now with Demuth, Todd?

TODD RAPP: Well, I think Demuth is-- was absolutely the choice Republicans had to make to make this a competitive race. Now Amy Klobuchar has consistently won with more than double digit victories, and she's had the largest vote total this year of anybody who's ever been contested in a primary. She's got a very strong anti-Trump record. She's already got a fraud plan. That's a lot that's there, but I agree that for this race, Lisa Demuth was the best choice for Republicans if they want a competitive race.

INTERVIEWER: Chas without Mike Lindell, there's less shiny object moments in this race. It seems like this is shaping up as one of the more substantive, issue-centered campaigns that we'll have seen in quite some time for governor.

CHAS ANDERSON: I completely agree with that. I think both Senator Klobuchar and House Speaker Demuth are very policy substantive driven. And so I think you're going to see a lot more in the weeds policy discussions and conversations at debates at forums than you've ever seen before and less of the performative politics we've been seeing of late.

NINA MOINI: Let's turn to the US Senate race. Peggy Flanagan blew Angie Craig out of the water really. She won by 20 percentage points, and people ahead of this race thought it would be very close. We kept being told it's a coin flip. It's a coin toss.

Todd, what do you think happened that led Flanagan to win by such a wide margin?

TODD RAPP: She won seven out of eight congressional districts and she almost won congressional district 2. So congratulations to her, impressive victory. Richard Carlbom at the party, congratulations to him, too.

It feels just a little bit, not to date myself, like 1990 when Paul Wellstone eventually defeated Rudy Boschwitz. And as we went into the last weekend, it was pretty much tied with Jim Nichols, the agriculture commissioner. And then we started making calls, and undecided Democrats were falling six and seven to one in favor of Wellstone. It feels a bit like that at the end as people decided what's the issue that matters most to us. I think the Democrats have decided late said who's going to be the strongest pushback against the president.

INTERVIEWER: And, Chas, I know Republicans were somewhat hoping for Peggy Flanagan. They thought they could draw a sharper contrast, but she seems to have quite a bit of grassroots energy behind them. Is it be careful what you wish for type of thing.

CHAS
ANDERSON: Yeah, what I'll say is even though Republicans had the best case scenario night last night, they have a huge uphill battle in front of them because the president's numbers have dropped off. They're going to have to answer a lot of questions related to the White House. Midterms traditionally for the White House party in charge is not favorable.

And so while last night is a reprieve for them, they won the elections they needed to win. They have a pretty big battle coming up in November, and Flanagan to her credit has a lot of energy behind her candidacy. And we saw that last night.

NINA MOINI: We do see sometimes, Todd, where we hear from people before an election that it's going to be a coin toss. It's going to be a coin. It's so close. And then things turn out really differently, and I think people in the public wonder how does that happen. Is this just part of this national trend of a progressive blue wave, or was it certain issues that the candidates were talking about?

TODD RAPP: Well, I would say the first problem is that people spend way too much on pre-primary polls, and it's one of the hardest things to poll is who's likely to turn out to vote. So polls are going to be done regardless, but that's a big issue.

I think in this campaign, I felt like the commercials that were on TV, not that TV dominates these races, but the commercials I saw were very substantive. And I think particularly the Lieutenant Governor did a great job of personalizing her message and being very direct about what the differences were. I was pretty impressed having watched those, and it's not to say I wasn't impressed with much of what Angie Craig did. But the Flanagan commercials stood out to me as the kind of thing that Democrats were listening for.

INTERVIEWER: Money usually speaks pretty loudly in these races, and the money was definitely on the side of Angie Craig. Is this a case where the vibe was more important?

TODD RAPP: I-- well-- but-- we in terms of the money, you normally see that as it's spent on advertising and the like. What you don't see is some kind of way of monetizing the grassroots support that's out there. And let's remember the DFL party has a very strong network, great lists, and Richard Carlbom is a really thoughtful chair. And I'm guessing they had a pretty big role in this victory in part because look down at congressional district 2, Matt Little was outspent, but he won pretty comfortably.

NINA MOINI: Chas, I know a lot of people called this race between Craig and Flanagan pretty negative compared to what we might usually see here in the state of Minnesota or races in the past. Is that something you think Republicans are excited about? Both candidates Craig immediately said I'm supporting Flanagan. Let's turn the page. But what does that mean as this race continues?

CHAS
ANDERSON: Certainly it is a very negative between the two candidates, but in the end, Congresswoman Craig has endorsed Flanagan-- Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. The Democrats, Republicans, they're going to go back to their own party and who's the nominee eventually, and that's just going to work itself out. So I think Minnesota, just like in Michigan and Wisconsin and other states, you see a lot of negativity in the primaries, but eventually that kind of works itself out.

INTERVIEWER: How much base work is Michele Tafoya going to have to do? You heard Adam Schwarze saying he can't get behind her. We know Royce White is probably going to be unpredictable, and they were questioning whether she stood with them on core party principles. Is that going to be an issue?

CHAS Yeah, sometimes these things have a way of working themselves out because the alternative is even more unacceptable to a Republican voter. So what you might see is there might be some disappointment, in fact, in some of the positions Michele Tafoya has taken. But in the end, the choice will be between the Lieutenant Governor Flanagan and Michele Tafoya, and that's where they'll make their decision.

INTERVIEWER: And there's more space in the middle it sounds like.

CHAS Correct.

ANDERSON:

NINA MOINI: Tafoya is really positioning herself and is an outsider, having never held office in that regard. Do you think that helps her as she maybe tries to break through in the state of Minnesota, which we know hasn't sent a Republican to the US Senate since Norm Coleman almost a quarter century ago, 2006?

CHAS Sure. One of the advantages that both Demuth and Tafoya have is that they did not rely on the president's endorsement to win the primary. So as attempts get made to tie those candidates to the White House to President Trump, they can really say I got here on my own and my own volition, and I think that's going to be very powerful for them as they face negative attacks related to the president.

ANDERSON:

NINA MOINI: In 2002. I misspoke. My apologies.

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

NINA MOINI: What do you think about that, Todd?

TODD RAPP: Well, one thing just-- set context here because while they're thinking about where national money is going to flow and how people are going to pull their organizations together. This is right now a 34 Senate races nationally. It's probably 10th or 11th on both parties' list. Michele Tafoya is going to have to do something to demonstrate that she's got the ability to make this a relatively close race to elevate that to the point where we're going to see truly tens of millions of dollars come in.

But that's what August and early September are for. Lay out your organization, get to the state fair, start meeting people, and then-- and at that point, I think some of the national money is going to look carefully at what's going on in Minnesota and probably make their final decisions.

INTERVIEWER: We know there's going to be at least one new senator, and if Amy Klobuchar wins, there's a possibility-- well, there would be two new US senators at some point. There's been some intrigue about whether Governor Tim Walz or the incoming Governor Klobuchar, if it's her, would fill that. How might it play out, Todd, and how long is that list or line of wannabe senators?

TODD RAPP: I'm sure that the line of people who think that they should be in that position is very long. I would say this. If lieutenant governor wins a comfortable victory, 6 points, 8 points, something like that, it would not surprise me to see Angie Craig on a short list that a future Governor Klobuchar would be looking at. And remember if Amy Klobuchar does become governor, well, who we're about to elect is going to be the senior senator from Minnesota.

INTERVIEWER: And there would be a special election at some point I think some people say as soon as 2027. So Angie Craig maybe would have money in reserve to run again. Is that what you're saying?

TODD RAPP: Yeah, that could very well be true. I just-- I don't think Angie Craig in this race did anything to in any way diminish her star. I think Peggy Flanagan ran a great race. That's what ended up happening here, but I think Angie Craig is still very much respected.

NINA MOINI: Let's close out talking about, again, this record-breaking turnout, the Secretary of State's office again saying more than 1.1 million ballots were cast, the highest total ever. Also though Democrats it looks like turned out two to one compared to Republicans.

Chas, I'd love to start with you. Does that signal more energy in the Democratic base, or what does that mean for Republicans in November?

CHAS ANDERSON: Sure. I think it signals two things. One-- two things. One is there is a lot more energy on the Democratic side, and you just saw that in the primary turnout. Second is that there's a lot more spending in that US Senate race for the Democratic primary versus the Republican primaries on the Republican side. And so I think that was also a factor in turnout as there was just more resources on the DFL side to push turnout.

But no doubt that Democrats are way more organized this cycle, probably more organized-- more energized than they were back in 2018, which is the last Trump midterm. So that's something that Republicans are going to have to deal with when they look at the top of the ticket and also legislative races.

NINA MOINI: Todd, how do Democrats continue to build upon that?

TODD RAPP: Yeah, and Republicans have not had higher turnout in the primaries since 1994 in the state when Arnie Carlson was challenged by Allen Quist. So this has been a regular trend over time. I think having Craig endorse Flanagan right away was pretty important. This is going to be a race towards 1.4 million votes.

And right now, just the primary voters between those to make up over basically half of that whereas if you add Tafoya to Schwarze, they're not even at a quarter yet. I think that provides a pretty good way of defining what the challenges that Chas just talked about. It's not to say-- elections are decided by what's ahead of us. There's a lot that can still happen to change these races, but I think Democrats even if the results on the Republican side weren't what they were looking for, I think they like the position they're in right now.

NINA MOINI: Thank you both so much for your time. We really appreciate it.

That's MPR political analyst Chas Anderson and Todd Rapp.