NINA MOINI: Nationally, Democrats are also declaring victory. Both the US House and Senate are now in Democratic control. To look at the landscape and how Minnesota sort of fits into it, are two political analysts. Joining me is former Minnesota DFL party chair Brian Melendez. Thanks for being with us, Brian.

BRIAN MELENDEZ: Thank you for inviting me.

NINA MOINI: We're also very happy to have a Republican analyst Preya Samsundar. Thank you for being with us, Preya.

PREYA SAMSUNDAR: Thanks for having me.

NINA MOINI: Let's start with Minnesota here before we talk about how Minnesota fits into the rest. Governor-elect Amy Klobuchar ran a more centrist campaign. And Senator-elect Peggy Flanagan ran a more progressive campaign. Saw this really playing out in other areas of the country as well. But both of them got around the same number of votes, about 1 and 1/2 million or so. Brian, what does it say about what Minnesotans want in a Democratic leader? What does it say about the direction the party should go?

BRIAN MELENDEZ: Well, I think that a lot of what you saw in this blue wave was not necessarily an endorsement of specific Democratic programs. It was just a rebuke against the Trump administration and a reaction against the policies that we've seen out of this administration.

And Democrats, from Flanagan to Klobuchar and everybody on either side of them and in between them, were saying, we're going to rein these abuses in. We are going to look at pocketbook issues. We're not going to spend our time on culture war issues. And a progressive like Flanagan and a centrist like Klobuchar can both sell that message. And I think the people who voted for them thought, that's what I want.

NINA MOINI: Preya, what's your take on that, of where the party goes from here, the Democrats?

PREYA SAMSUNDAR: Yeah. So I think Brian's right. What we saw last night was a repudiation of the administration and some of the policies, whether folks looked at it more from a perspective of things didn't change quickly enough to the president's handling of war or tariffs or the economy.

And so I think at the end of the day, it really didn't make too much of a difference for voters across the ballot. We didn't see this cross-ticket voting that we typically see in previous cycles. What we ended up seeing was-- were folks really just voting down the ballot. And so it really leaves Democrats in a limbo.

To your point, you had somebody like Klobuchar who Republicans consider further to the left. A lot of the policies that she's espoused, both as a senator and as a presidential candidate, really align with more far-left viewpoint.

But Peggy Flanagan has really tried to identify herself with the wing of the Socialist Party. And so as Democrats go forward, this really doesn't answer their question in terms of, what are people looking for? Are they looking for more of a moderate candidate?

Are they looking for more of a stronger, typical Democratic type, or are they looking for more socialist candidates like we're seeing with Abdul Sayed in Michigan, with Peggy Flanagan here in Minnesota? Obviously, with the New York City mayor, we saw that over a year ago.

It really doesn't leave Democrats with a good sense of what direction they're heading in. And so I think you're going to see more infighting because everybody can point to a statistic or a point of victory from last night where they're like, our wing of the party, our faction of the party is gaining ground.

At the end of the day, this really was more about Trump rather than what direction the party is going to go into. And you're going to see that infighting continue on as we approach the next few weeks, months, and head into 2028.

NINA MOINI: Preya, along those lines, on the Republican side of things, candidates Lisa Demuth and Michele Tafoya for governor and Senate, respectively, do you think those candidates did enough to distance themselves from President Trump? What happened for these top Republican candidates in Minnesota?

PREYA SAMSUNDAR: Again, I really don't think that it really came down to specific candidates at the end of the day. Regardless of what happened, we saw this across the country. Republicans, regardless of whether they were weak candidates or strong candidates like we saw here in Minnesota, everybody got painted with the same brush of being associated with Donald Trump. That's part of the typical Democratic playbook that we've seen over the last 10 years.

What I think is an interesting statistic is that when you look at candidates and how they performed and specifically the parties, Democrats actually performed better in Sun Belt states like Georgia, like the Carolinas, whereas they had a harder time competing in the industrial Midwest.

And I think, one, that's a sign of just how far left and progressive Democrat candidates were. But two, I think when you look at the majority of candidates, obviously, we can look to Ohio, and there's several weak Republican candidates that we could talk endlessly about.

But when you're looking at Minnesota, when you're looking at Michigan, for example, you had some very strong candidates who had a lot of support and were able to toe that line pretty well. And as a result, they were able to hold their own.

NINA MOINI: So there were national trends. And midterms are often a rebuke of whoever is the president at the time. But there were also events very specific to Minnesota that got a lot of attention. Discussion about fraud and waste in government programs was talked about a lot, specifically by the GOP.

Also, operation Metro Surge, the surge of federal immigration agents this winter to Minnesota. Brian, how much of a role do you think operation Metro Surge made an impact in this election? We've heard Peggy Flanagan, our new senator-elect, talk a lot about dismantling ICE and ripping it apart. I've not heard that type of language as much in the past from a governor like Klobuchar. What impact does this topic make?

BRIAN MELENDEZ: So Metro Surge was less than a year ago. And in the minds of many of us, it's not really over, because there is still a strong federal presence. A lot of our immigrant communities are still-- a lot of members of our immigrant communities are still scared.

I think it had a big impact. And it proved that you can't trust the federal government, at least the current administration. And so I think people were voting for somebody who believed in constitutional rules and who were against having armed masked men disappearing people by breaking into their houses. I think it had a big impact here because we all saw it, where the rest of the country didn't live it in the same way that we did.

NINA MOINI: Preya, do you think ICE's increased presence in Minnesota made some Republicans vote blue or maybe not at all? Do you see it as having been more of a Twin Cities issue?

PREYA SAMSUNDAR: I think at the end of the day, did it help with turnout, specifically in the Twin Cities? Absolutely. When we look at the demographic breakdown from a national perspective, what we've seen is that a coalition that Republicans have attempted to build over the last 10, 15 years with Black voters, with Hispanic voters, with Asian voters, with young voters.

Republicans have been making consistent gains with those demographics and-- those key demographics since 2016. But that was all wiped away during last night's election. And I think some of that does have to do with the immigration enforcement but not necessarily for the reason that Brian kind of mentioned.

When you look at immigration as a whole, largely, why Trump ended up winning reelection in 2024 is because he did promise to get tough on illegal immigration. That was something that obviously ran abundantly loose under the previous administration--

NINA MOINI: Yeah, and promised mass deportation. Yeah.

PREYA SAMSUNDAR: --in Joe Biden. And so they did want to get rid of criminal illegal aliens. They wanted to make sure that we were stemming the flow of illegal immigration into the country. And so I think folks were looking for a balance.

Obviously, the Trump administration went too far. We saw some of that here in the Twin Cities. But even when you look at polling after the fact, folks were generally supportive of the overall idea of getting rid of criminal illegal aliens, sending them back to their home countries, and keeping Americans safe?

I don't think that that's something that folks necessarily disagree with wholeheartedly, but I do think that the excess aggressiveness that we saw with operation Metro Surge did encourage folks to turn out.

NINA MOINI: I wish I had a ton of time with both of you. And I appreciate you so much. I want to make sure while I have you that we're able to touch on southern Minnesota, the race between Republican Congressman Brad Finstad and Democrat Jake Johnson, too close to call. Finstad is narrowly trailing by 324 votes. Brian, what would it mean if this seat flipped?

BRIAN MELENDEZ: Well, I think it would just be an example of the blue wave that we've seen all over the country. I mean, 300 votes is not a mandate for anybody. And by the way, I don't think it's too close to call. I think it has been called, but it's headed into a recount.

The difference was only 1/10 of-- less than a tenth of a percent in an election where 320,000 people cast ballots. And that's the seat that Tim Walz used to hold. So it has gone back and forth between red and blue in a number of times. I don't think you can read too much into this with the 300-vote margin.

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

PREYA SAMSUNDAR: I would agree with Brian on this. It's going to recount. The reality is the margins probably will get smaller after that recount is all said and done. But I think at the end of the day, this is a swing district. This is a district that has gone back and forth.

Obviously, as Brian mentioned, Tim Walz held it before Hagedorn and Finstad. The reality is farmers have been hurting under this administration, whether it is from tariffs or the war. We've seen the numbers. We've seen the economic impact that has had. That's something that the White House fully recognized, and they've talked about in the hours since we've seen results all across the country.

And we've seen that kind of turnout play out in Iowa. They've lost three congressional seats. Wisconsin's third district is gone. We've seen some areas in Illinois as well. And so it's unsurprising. But I think anyone looking to Minnesota one and determining that this is going to be a blue seat for a very long time hasn't been paying attention to the historical trends there.

NINA MOINI: So the AP has not called the Finstad-Johnson race yet, so we're going to wait and go with the AP. But I do want to make sure that we are able to talk a little bit more about President Trump, who really came out-- has come out and said he's going to honor the outcome of the election, that he wants to work with members of Congress.

A lot of folks didn't know what the reaction might be if there were to be a blue wave. Preya, how does President Trump fit into the party at this point? Are people going to be trying to further distance themselves? He says that had he been on the ticket, it would have been a different story for Republicans?

PREYA SAMSUNDAR: I think that we have to wait and see what happens. I think right now there are a lot of things that are taking place. Folks are starting to run for leadership positions in both parties. We're taking a hard look at what life in DC is going to look like over the next two years.

Obviously, Democrats, as soon as they realize that they won the House, immediately started sending letters and sending out tweets saying that the next two years is going to be filled with subpoenas and inquiries and lawfare. And so not the typical we're going to lower your taxes, we're going to focus on affordability, things like that.

And so I think the reality is the next two years are going to look vastly different depending on what happens. We obviously know that the president marches to the beat of his own drum. And so really it is going to be watch and wait.

But I think for a lot of folks, we're looking ahead to 2028. They're looking at seats that were lost here in '26 that can be picked up again in '28, '30, '32. We're looking at a presidential election that starts in a little over a year from now already.

And so folks are going to be lining up to run for president, and the president won't be on the ballot at that time. And so we are going to be looking at what folks are looking for in terms of the future direction of the party and whether or not the president is part of that.

NINA MOINI: I want to thank you both for your time. I hope you'll join us again soon, OK? Take care.

BRIAN MELENDEZ: Thank you, Nina.

PREYA SAMSUNDAR: Thank you.

NINA MOINI: Thank you. That was Republican analyst Preya Samsundar and Democratic analyst Brian Melendez.