

CATHY WURZER: And the primary is Tuesday of next week. A primary, as many of you know, is a contest that narrows the field of candidates who will advance to the November general election. There are a lot of races to watch. All this week, we've been talking with the candidates running for Hennepin County Attorney.

There are some interesting legislative primary races too and some congressional contests. That is where we will focus. Our reporter, Mark Zdechlik, has been watching the congressional primary races, and he joins me now for a preview. Hey, Mark.

MARK ZDECHLIK:

CATHY WURZER: Let's start in Southern Minnesota. First district Congressman Jim Hagedorn died earlier this year. Next Tuesday, voters there will choose someone to replace him. Is that right?

MARK ZDECHLIK: Yeah, but Cathy, only for a few months. Hagedorn's February death triggered the special election in the first district. There was a primary for that election in May. Republican Brad Finstad narrowly won on the GOP side Democrat. And first-time candidate Jeff Ettinger won on the Democratic side, so the contest is between them.

Finstad has been trying to link Ettinger, who was once the CEO of Hormel Foods, to national Democrats, including President Biden. He's been talking a lot about inflation and what he says is reckless government spending.

For his part, Ettinger has been emphasizing the need for more cooperation in Washington. He's been underscoring his history of supporting Republicans and Democrats in past elections. He, Cathy, has also been talking about protecting the future of the nation's democracy following the January 6 insurrection and all the continuing denials about the 2020 election results.

CATHY WURZER: So help me out here. It's a little confusing. There's also a primary for the first district seat on Tuesday, right?

MARK ZDECHLIK: There is, and this is where it gets interesting on the Republican side. And it is confusing, Cathy. I know that people in southern Minnesota next week are likely going to be scratching their heads when they go to vote.

State representative Jeremy Munson, who came close to winning the special election primary, is hoping to knock out Finstad in the primary voting for the general election so he can be the Republican in November's general election. Munson has been criticizing Democrats but also Republicans for overspending taxpayer dollars. He says Finstad has a history of being part of that problem.

Finstad has been saying Munson is heavy on criticism but light on solutions. On the Democratic side for that November primary, Ettinger has no-- he has some opponents, but he's considered a front runner by far. So voters next week in the first district get two bites at the apple on one ballot.

CATHY WURZER: So really, someone could win the special election Tuesday and then not be on the ballot in November, which is a little tangled.

MARK ZDECHLIK: It is. And even as a reporter who's been doing this for a long time, it's taken me a while to get my hands around that. That's exactly right. Secretary of State Steve Simon, Cathy, told me yesterday afternoon that election workers in southern Minnesota have done some special training to field questions from confused voters about how it's all going to play out.

CATHY WURZER: Yeah, so earlier, I made that-- you probably heard me, Mark. I mentioned that Jacob Frey was throwing his support to Don Samuels in the fifth congressional district primary. That's in Minneapolis or it includes Minneapolis. That's where DFL Ilhan Omar is seeking a third term this year. Let's talk a little about the Omar-Samuels race.

MARK ZDECHLIK: Sure. Democrat Don Samuels says he should be on the November 5th ballot, not Representative Omar. Samuels is well-known in Minneapolis. He was on the city council there and a member of the school board and has been very critical of Omar's defund the police comments.

He also says Omar should be focusing more on bread and butter issues facing her Minneapolis area constituents rather than all the kind of high-profile national issues that she's been associated with.

CATHY WURZER: Ilhan Omar has survived a couple of other primaries before.

MARK ZDECHLIK: She has, and her polling suggests she's in a strong position to win again next week and go on to November, but we'll see. Samuels has mounted a very aggressive campaign and Representative Omar is certainly taking him seriously.

CATHY WURZER: Let's see here. East metro-- let's talk about a longtime member of congress also facing a primary challenge from another DFLer, so let's run that one down.

MARK ZDECHLIK: Yeah, Cathy, Democratic activist Amane Badhasso who is an Ethiopian, rather, refugee, says McCollum is entrenched in a Democratic Party that's failed to deliver on big changes many on that side have been calling for, from election reform to environmental and health care legislation.

McCollum says her seniority in congress is a big benefit to Minnesota. She also points that the Republican control of the US Senate as the reason so many Democratic initiatives in the house are stalling out. McCollum, just like representative Omar, has been working harder than ever to make her case to fourth district Democrats amid her challenge.

CATHY WURZER: Yeah, Betty McCollum has been around since, I think, what, 2001, so she's been there for quite some time. Let's talk about-- of course, there's a lot of local races too. Any idea of how many voters might turn out in the primary?

MARK ZDECHLIK: Well, we know, Cathy, that primary turnout is typically low even in Minnesota, and we lead the nation in general election turnout. That's especially the case in years like this one because there's no presidential contest on the ballot, and the presidential races fire up many more voters than some of the other races. So most eligible voters in Minnesota are not expected to weigh in on the various primary contests.

But it'll be interesting to see where there is interest, especially with those two elections in southern Minnesota's first district the special election and the primary election for the general election. People are going to be watching to see what side is more-- which side is more fired up.

And that's something that people will be watching for from all over the country, at least people who follow politics, in the hope that might give some indication of what the midterm elections in November might look like.

Also Cathy, another note on primary day next week for Minnesotans is an inner Republican Party battle for one of the state offices, which every eligible Minnesotan has an opportunity to vote on. Republicans endorse Jim Schultz for their attorney general candidate.

Schultz is facing a primary challenge from Doug Wardlow. And some people might remember that Wardlow, who is pretty well known in Republican politics, was the GOP nominee for attorney general four years ago. So Cathy, those are just some of the more high-profile races we're going to be watching next week.

CATHY

Oh, boy, it's going to be busy. Mark Zdechlik, thanks so much.

WURZER:

MARK

Absolutely. Have a great day.

ZDECHLIK:

CATHY

You too. Mark has been reporting on the primary races happening statewide in Minnesota. He'll, of course, be

WURZER:

busy next Tuesday. To learn more about the races and the candidates, you can go to our website, mprnews.org.