

[THEME MUSIC]

NINA MOINI: This is *Minnesota Now*, and we are broadcasting live from the Minnesota State Fair! Yay!

[CHEERING, APPLAUSE]

We're at the MPR stage on the corner of Judson and Nelson with a wonderful crowd in front of us. Give yourselves another round of applause. You deserve it.

[CHEERING, APPLAUSE]

It's a beautiful, kind of overcast day. It's not too hot, not a bad day to be here. Of course, we know the Great Minnesota Get-Together brings people from all across the state. So it's also a go-to spot for candidates running for office. I'm sure you all have seen them running around here.

Every major candidate has their own booth. Most candidates are here multiple days talking to voters, visiting different vendors. And it's a big election year, of course, we all know, in Minnesota. So voters will choose not only a new governor here in Minnesota, but also a new US Senator. And every single seat in the state legislature will be on the ballot as well.

Joining me now here live at the State Fair booth are two wonderful members of our NPR politics team, reporter Peter Cox and longtime political reporter and editor, now back at MPR News with us, Laura McCallum. We're happy to have you back.

**LAURA
MCCALLUM:** Hello! We're happy to be here.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, so much knowledge here on this stage. But Laura, can you start about talking about why the fair has this rich history of politics? You've been covering it for years. Is it because of how close it ends up being to the November election? Or do you think it would be just as useful anyhow?

**LAURA
MCCALLUM:** That's certainly a factor, that we're just a couple months out-- nine weeks, eight weeks? It's very close, but it's bigger than that. So I don't think I need to tell anybody in the crowd that we are the biggest in the country--

NINA MOINI: Yeah, woo!

**LAURA
MCCALLUM:** Applause. --when you look at average daily attendance. So over the course of the fair, there are two million people here, which is a goldmine for political candidates. Some of them are too young to vote. Some are from other states. But you are going to see people from all over the state.

So they can shake hands and sell merch and do live shots and take photos with us supporters. So it's just a gold mine. Now, a couple fun political facts.

NINA MOINI: Ooh!.

**LAURA
MCCALLUM:** Did you know who was here in 1901?

NINA MOINI: Who's that?

[LAUGHTER]

Are they still serving?

LAURA No.

MCCALLUM:

[LAUGHTER]

They might be. No. Teddy Roosevelt. Did anyone get that? Teddy Roosevelt was vice president.

NINA MOINI: Teddy stopped by.

LAURA And he was here in 1901 and made the famous quote, "speak softly and carry a big stick." Four days after that,
MCCALLUM: President McKinley was assassinated and he elevated to the presidency. So it's been a prominent feature here for a very long time. Now, I've been covering politics since Jessie Ventura was here campaigning. I'm sure everyone remembers him.

NINA MOINI: '98-ish, yeah.

LAURA And he took advantage of the state fair. He was not a major party candidate. He worked the crowd. And I've just
MCCALLUM: covered so many politicians here. And you can just see why, because they get to interact with folks like this.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, a huge opportunity. Peter, let's break down some of these biggest races we were talking about, starting, of course, with this race for governor. And just to remind people, Governor Tim Walz was going to run for a third term. You might have forgot about this. In January, he announced he was stepping out of the race. Senator Amy Klobuchar is running on the Democratic side. And, of course, House Speaker Lisa Demuth is running on the Republican side. Take us more into that race, Peter.

PETER COX: So no matter what happens, Minnesota is likely to make history this fall, electing its first woman as governor. Amy Klobuchar has her booth there. Lisa Demuth has her booth down there, and they're in a pretty tough battle. They're both pretty well-known.

Klobuchar clearly is maybe better known because she's been in the Senate for four terms. but she's facing a tough challenger. Lisa Demuth knows the capital very well. She knows the issues. So it's a race that I expect-- we're already seeing a ton of ad money being spent on it. And I expect in this race the big issues will be Klobuchar trying to tie Demuth to President Trump and Demuth trying to tie Amy Klobuchar to the fraud that's happened in some social service programs.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, we've seen both of the candidates out here, and so many others. Zeroing in, though, on the Republican side, Laura, we know Minnesota hasn't had a Republican governor in 15 years since Tim Pawlenty. What are Republicans focusing on-- Peter touched on this a little bit-- but in hopes of turning the state red?

LAURA Right. As Peter said, the biggest is fraud. They are targeting, in particular, Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan
MCCALLUM: and Attorney General Keith Ellison because they served alongside Walz. Now, Walz was their biggest target. And when he chose not to run again, Republicans are hoping to pin that label to other Democrats.

It's a little tougher case for Amy Klobuchar because she's been serving at the federal level. And I've also heard a number of legislative candidates bringing it up, up and down the ballot. It's not the only issue, though. They're also talking about how under the DFL trifecta government, state government grew quite a bit. So they're talking about growth in government, cutting taxes, crime, number of issues. But in general, a midterm election is, as Peter will talk about later, considered, a referendum on the president in power, so generally considered to be a better year for Democrats because the president's popularity rating is not high right now.

NINA MOINI: We've also seen Amy Klobuchar talking about fraud, though, as well, and zeroing in on the let's make changes or outcomes, not so much excuses. Let's talk about this big race to watch for US Senator. We know US Senator Tina Smith is going to be stepping away at the end of her term. So Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, you mentioned, Laura, is running on the Democratic side and sports broadcaster Michele Tafoya on the Republican side. What are you going to be watching for in this race? This is an interesting one, Peter?

PETER COX: Yeah. Peggy Flanagan is running with the backing of a lot of progressives, like Bernie Sanders and Senator Elizabeth Warren. But she's also come up through the DFL. She's been lieutenant governor for the past eight years. She's really been coming up with this party for decades. And Michele Tafoya is relatively new to politics, but is also a well-known name from being a sideline reporter for NFL games and also having a radio show locally.

She's also a favorite of a lot of Washington, DC Republicans. They really wanted her in this race because they believe that she could take this seat. So I expect a lot of money to be spent in this race. But so far, we have not seen a ton of ads, which is kind of surprising. We saw a ton in the primary with Angie Craig and Peggy Flanagan, but we haven't seen it yet in this race. But I'd expect it to be a tough race. And again, I think tying Tafoya to Trump and tying Flanagan to fraud will be the lanes that each candidate will pick in going after each other.

NINA MOINI: The themes are definitely there, and they've emerged. And what's so cool about the state fair is that you can sometimes see candidates in a different element, or maybe they're doing something fun, or they're trying to say, hey, I'm a normal person. Wouldn't you like to go have a malt with me more than you'd like to with the other guy? But we only have a couple minutes left, and I want to make sure we talk about bingo.

Peter Cox really spearheaded this for us on the politics team. You created political bingo. You talked about the things people tend to see. Either it's ads or there are things that people tend to see at the fair as well. So tell me a little bit about that journey playing bingo yesterday at the fair and how that went.

PETER COX: Well, as Laura pointed out, politicians have clearly been coming to the fair for more than a century. So there's only so many things you can do as a politician when you're at the fair. So you might drink milk. You might drink a beer. You might ride on the giant slide, hold a baby, hold a small animal. There's a lot of weird things that politicians do at the fair, but they're very repetitive.

So we created this bingo card that you can actually download from our newsletter, *Capital View*. And you can just mark off the things you see at the fairgrounds. So if you're looking for something else to do at the fair-- I don't know why you would be, but you can download the bingo card at *Capital View* newsletter.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, it'll make you chuckle, right? There's no prize. Sorry. But it's just bragging rights and a chuckle.

PETER COX: And pride--

NINA MOINI: And who doesn't--

PETER COX: --a whole lot pride.

NINA MOINI: And pride, who doesn't need that? So we have about a minute left. I want to make sure I ask my favorite question of both of you. I hope you've been prepping for this, as you've been out and about on the fairgrounds.

LAURA MCCALLUM: You're going to blindside us.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. What is your favorite thing to eat at the Minnesota State Fair? Peter Cox, you may go first.

PETER COX: Well, I'm going to answer because Laura and I just went and got the donuts at the place next to the Fine Arts Building.

NINA MOINI: So you're taking hers.

PETER COX: Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

But she can talk about it, too. It was worth the 15-minute wait. And the line was super long, but it moves quickly.

NINA MOINI: What are these? Tell us about them, Laura.

LAURA MCCALLUM: The Amish donuts.

NINA MOINI: Oh!

LAURA MCCALLUM: They're like glazed donuts that melt in your mouth, if you haven't had them.

NINA MOINI: Any other thing that you would--

LAURA MCCALLUM: Those are great. But I have another. I'm kind of a favorite of deep fried pickles.

NINA MOINI: Ooh, OK. Any fans in the audience? No? Oh, a couple. All right.

LAURA MCCALLUM: Deep fried pickles.

NINA MOINI: Well, no line there, I guess. No, I think there are a lot of fans of deep fried pickles, too. I'm a fan of you two, Peter Cox and Laura McCallum. Thanks for being with us and breaking down this busy, busy political time. You guys have really been through a lot of stories, and you keep everybody informed. And you work so hard and we appreciate it. Thank you both.

PETER COX: Thanks, Nina.

LAURA MCCALLUM: Thank you.

NINA MOINI: Peter Cox and Laura McCallum are part of the MPR News politics team.