

## Jim Gottschald

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**From:** Mike Thom <mthom@NRCC.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 20, 2017 12:27 PM  
**To:** Pete Stauber  
**Subject:** Nolan Mills Article

I found the article-quote at the very end.

### **Why House Democrats Could Have a Minnesota Problem**

National Journal

Ally Mutnick

March 21, 2017

<https://www.nationaljournal.com/s/649552/democrats-might-need-few-good-house-candidates-minnesota?mref=daily-landing>

Democrats might need a few good House candidates in Minnesota this cycle, if three popular Democratic incumbents vacate seats in the heart of the state's Trump country.

With Reps. Tim Walz and Rick Nolan eyeing the open governor seat and Rep. Collin Peterson biennially topping the retirement-watch list, Democrats could be forced to field recruits in precisely the kind of rural districts that have been abandoning them, while also producing challengers for two GOP congressmen based in the Twin Cities suburbs.

"Obviously, if they decide to run for higher officer and/or retire, that presents unique challenges for the Democrats as we figure how to keep those seats," said Ken Martin, the state's Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party chairman, who touted the party's infrastructure and incumbents' personal strengths as reasons they were able to hold all three last year.

Those three incumbents, whose districts Donald Trump carried by the largest margins of any Democratic-held seats last cycle, are top GOP targets in 2018. Walz and Nolan held on by less than 3,000 votes as Trump won their districts by 15 and 16 points, respectively. Meanwhile, Trump carried Peterson's Western Minnesota district by 30 points, boosting an unknown challenger who raised only \$20,000 to within 5 points of unseating the congressman, who won a 14th term.

Walz appears almost certain to vacate his seat. Multiple sources in the state said Peterson endorsed Walz for governor Saturday at a local DFL dinner in Granite Falls. Asked about his plans Monday, Walz told National Journal a decision will come in the "very near future."

Democrats insisted the bench is deep for Walz's district, which twice backed Barack Obama. Walz said he sensed buyer's remorse among Trump voters watching the debate over the GOP health care proposal.

"A midterm with a Trump presidency certainly puts us in a strong position," Walz said. "And yes, I definitely believe we can hold that seat. With the exception of this last election, it always runs just slightly center-right but pretty balanced, and I think it will come back to that point."

Both Walz and Nolan stressed that they would make their statewide decisions independently, with a field already getting crowded without them. The rural appeal that makes Nolan and Walz so indispensable to the House Democratic caucus is also the reason Minnesota Democrats are urging them to run statewide.

Yet Democrats in the state questioned whether there is space for two rural congressmen in the race, and Walz appears to be further along in his decision-making process. Nolan supporters have formed a coalition to draft him, but Nolan said last week he hasn't had time to fully consider a run and consult with the appropriate party leaders.

Rep. Denny Heck, who leads recruitment for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, described the rural districts as “tough seats even with the great incumbents we have,” but he said he is confident the two wouldn’t run against each other for governor, citing their strong friendship.

Still, the calculus is complicated, especially with 2021 redistricting looming. Nolan said that if he wins his seat in 2018 but Democrats lose the governorship, it’s possible “we saved it for one term and lost it for the next decade” when Republicans draw new district boundaries.

“Those are the kinds of tough decisions you have to factor in,” he said in an interview in the Capitol. “I wish I had a crystal ball; then I’d know exactly what to do.”

Republicans plan to contest the seats whether they’re open or not. Rep. Steve Stivers, who chairs the National Republican Congressional Committee, said they have promising potential candidates for both Walz’s and Nolan’s seats. Peterson’s district, he conceded, would be more of a challenge if the incumbent stays put.

“I would rather be us than them if any of those seats are open,” Stivers said.

Peterson, a staunch agriculture advocate who regularly bucks his party, sounded unconvinced that Democrats could keep the seat without him: “I don’t know, but it’s just so Republican.” He told National Journal he hasn’t decided yet if he’ll run again in 2018. “I’m actually having fun—so, might hang around,” he quipped.

Besides being a recruiting headache, a slew of competitive races clustered in one state brings other downsides. Nolan had one of the most expensive House races in the country last cycle, drawing more than \$20 million combined in candidate and outside spending. That likely sapped some resources away from offensive opportunities near the Twin Cities, the DFL chairman said, noting that an opening in Walz’s district could exacerbate that problem.

Though the DCCC hasn’t started recruiting candidates for Democratic-held seats in Minnesota that are not yet open, Heck said he constantly checks in with members considering statewide runs to create a list of strong candidates to replace them.

Democrats will again target the suburban, well-educated districts of Reps. Jason Lewis and Erik Paulsen. Lewis last year pulled off an upset over wealthy health care executive Angie Craig, who is considering another bid.

Paulsen won reelection with 57 percent of the vote despite Hillary Clinton carrying the district by 9 points. Heck said Paulsen’s 2016 opponent, former state Sen. Terri Bonoff, isn’t interested in running again, but he hinted that the DCCC has already found a likely top-tier challenger.

Other rematches are on the table.

Jim Hagedorn, a former Minnesota congressman’s son, who nearly unseated Walz in a race that was not previously considered competitive, has already launched his third attempt, and he said he has met with the NRCC. Also mulling a third bid is Stewart Mills, who invested millions to best Nolan in the upstate district that houses the state’s Iron Range and is the most Democratic-leaning of the three rural seats.

“That compels me—if he’s running—to want to run for the House again,” Nolan said. “Make sure he doesn’t get elected.”