

AT THE CAPITOL

Special election will shape House

Roseville outcome could restore DFL-GOP tie in chamber





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Control of the Minnesota House of Representatives will be determined by the result of a special election scheduled this Tuesday for a vacant Roseville-area seat.

Republicans have had a one-seat advantage in the House this legislative session because the winning Democratic Farmer Labor candidate in District 40B was disqualified after the election when a Ramsey County judge ruled he didn't live in the district.

Now, after more than two months of that seat being vacant, and a resulting power struggle that led to a weeks-long DFL boycott of session, Republican Paul Wikstrom and DFLer David Gottfried are on the ballot for the seat in a special election.

If Gottfried wins, a 67-67 tie returns to the House and a power sharing agreement resumes between the parties. If Wikstrom wins, Republicans will have 68 members to the DFL's 66, a fully functioning majority and can pass bills without DFL support. District 40B, which includes parts of Roseville and Shoreview, strongly leans Democratic. In the November election, Curtis

Johnson won 65% of the vote in the district compared to Republican opponent Paul Wikstrom's 35%.

However, a Ramsey County judge found there was enough evidence to prove Johnson did not live in an apartment in the district he had rented to run for office, and was, in fact, living in nearby Little Canada.

Johnson didn't appeal the decision, leaving the House at a 67-66 tie when the Minnesota Legislature convened on Jan. 14.

Wikstrom faces a tough climb, but he says his residency challenge against Johnson raised his profile.

"When I campaigned last fall, the name recognition wasn't anywhere near what it is now," he said in a Friday phone interview. "That's probably the biggest change that I've noticed in the campaign."

Wikstrom, who has a background in engineering and lives in Shoreview where he and his wife raised three children, is campaigning on fighting fraud and waste in state government and boosting public safety. He says DFLers in the district were aware of issues with Johnson's residency well before the election but chose not to speak out.

Meanwhile, Gottfried provided a statement describing himself as a "policy nerd" who was born and raised in Roseville and drawn to public service. His top issues include lowering the cost of prescription drugs, defending paid family and medical leave and boosting funding for education.

"My relatives missed crucial hours with their dying father because they couldn't afford time off of work," wrote Gottfried, who works at a law firm providing free legal services to people in need and lives with his wife in Shoreview. "Paid Leave would have delivered much-needed relief for them and I will fight to make sure Minnesota families can count on it next year."

House power sharing

With their one seat advantage in the House, Republicans have been acting as the majority under an agreement with DFLers reached in February. They currently control committees and the speakership, but the catch is that they can't pass any bills without at least one DFLer supporting them.

It's part of an agreement that ended a weekslong boycott of the session by House DFLers, who successfully denied Republicans a quorum for weeks until they could get a guarantee that they'd seat DFL Rep. Brad Tabke, whose election Republicans had disputed in court.

DFLers gave up the speakership for two years but got other concessions in the agreement. If a tie returns, Rep. Lisa Demuth, R-Cold Spring, will remain speaker until the end of 2026, but DFLers and Republicans will once again split control of committees.

Republicans have had a one-seat edge for a little longer than originally expected because of the special election delay. In late December, Gov. Tim Walz had called for the election to happen on Jan. 28.

Republicans filed a lawsuit to challenge that date, and the state Supreme Court later sided with them. With the special election now on March 11, the vacancy in 40B likely won't be filled until the following week.

With extra time as a majority before the election, Republicans have advanced bills to the floor intending to put DFLers on the record on issues ranging from transgender athletes in girls sports to removing a "duty to retreat" requirement from self defense law.

Those measures failed on partisan lines, though Republicans have tabled them for later consideration.