

CENTER *for* RURAL POLICY *and* DEVELOPMENT

Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future

VOLUME XII • ISSUE 4

WINTER 2010



Executive Director's Note: 2010 Election Recap and What the Results Mean for Greater Minnesota

by Brad Finstad

Gubernatorial elections in Minnesota have been extremely close in recent years, and legislative elections have been highly volatile. This trend continued—big time—in 2010.

As has been the case for sev-

eral consecutive elections, I was up way too late on November 2, waiting for the final vote counts to come in from various parts of Greater Minnesota. The tallies from the late-reporting precincts, just as they did in the 2006 guber-

natorial race (not to mention the 2008 Franken-Coleman U.S. Senate race), would determine who would occupy a critically important office, and I was not going to miss the live returns.

The results? Barring a surprise

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Broadband Use Explodes Statewide, but Adoption in Rural Minnesota Still Inconsistent

Center for Rural Policy and Development Internet Survey Measures Broadband Adoption and Use

Comprehensive research conducted by the Center for Rural Policy and Development has found that broadband adoption and use has exploded throughout Minnesota since the organization first began studying the technology in 2001.



However, the research also found lower adoption rates and less general use of the Internet in Minnesota's more rural counties.

"The growth and use of broadband in Minnesota since we first began measuring it ten years ago truly is remarkable," said Brad Finstad, executive director of the Center for Rural Policy and Development. "But while the story of broadband tends to center on its phenomenal growth, we find that adoption in rural parts of the state is still inconsistent."

To get a closer look at the ques-

tion of rural adoption, Center researchers divided the state's counties into three groups: (1) The seven-county Twin Cities area; (2) Greater Minnesota counties with population centers of more than 10,000 residents; and (3) Greater Minnesota counties with population centers of less than 10,000. The results of the survey show a significant divide still exists in several ways.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Statewide, availability continues to spread: 77 percent of households report having computers, 74 percent (96 percent of those with computers) are connected to the Internet, and 70 percent of households (94 percent of households with Internet) are accessing the Internet via broadband. Computer and Internet adoption are up slightly from the last survey, taken in December 2007 and January 2008, when adoption rates were 76 percent for computers and 72 percent for Internet. Broadband adoption is up sharply, nearly 12 percentage points from 58 percent in 2007-08.
- In Greater Minnesota, computer, Internet and broadband adoption continue to grow and are catching up with the Twin Cities. Computer ownership went from 73 percent in 2007-

08 to 76 percent, while Internet connections have gone from 68 percent in 2007-08 to 71 percent in 2010. Broadband adoption grew from 52 percent to 65 percent.

- A high percentage of Minnesota households with Internet continue to engage in certain popular activities. Email is universal, but close behind are shopping, checking the news and banking. Other activities are also growing in use, such as doing work for an employer, communicating with a child's school, or contacting a legislator or doctor. Greater Minnesota still lags behind the Twin Cities in many activities.
- Income and age continue to be significant indicators of whether a household will have a computer, Internet or broadband. Older and lower income groups still tend to be behind in adopting these technologies, but they show steady growth.
- Within Greater Minnesota, counties without significant population centers lagged behind those with population centers in computer, Internet and broadband adoption, and in activities.

The entire 2010 Minnesota Internet Report can be found on the Center's website at www.RuralMN.org. ●

Board Member Spotlight: Tim Houle



Tim Houle was appointed by Governor Tim Pawlenty to the board of the Center for Rural Policy and Development in 2007, to serve as the board's county representative. Houle has deep expertise in county government administration. He is currently the county administrator for Crow Wing County, a position he has held since 2008. Previously, from 1994 to 2008, he was county administrator for Morrison County.

As Crow Wing County's administrator, Houle reports directly to the elected county board of commissioners. He is responsible for implementing the board's policies and for the day-to-day management of Crow Wing County.

Houle graduated from Little Falls High School in 1981 and went on to receive a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a Master of Arts in Public Administration from Hamline University. Current-

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RECAP

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turn of events in the state-mandated recount (which had just started when this newsletter went to print), Mark Dayton, a Democrat, will be Minnesota's next governor come January 3, 2011. And, for the first time ever, Republicans will be in charge of both chambers of the Minnesota Legislature.

It is incredible how remarkably similar the results of the 2010 Minnesota elections are to the 2006 elections...but, partisan-wise, completely flipped.

In 2006, Tim Pawlenty, a Republican, won a very tight gubernatorial election, while Democrats picked up numerous state House and Senate seats, winning control of both chambers of the Legislature.

This year, while Republicans won race after race for the state House and Senate en route to taking control of the Minnesota Legislature, Democrat Mark Dayton prevailed in an excruciatingly close gubernatorial contest.

Additionally, on the federal level, an incumbent Minnesota congressman was defeated. But, instead of it being a Democrat knocking off a Republican (as was the case when Tim Walz beat Gil Gutknecht in 2006 in southern Minnesota), it was a Republican, Chip Cravaack, knocking off a Democrat—Jim Oberstar, the long-time congressman from northern Minnesota.

This goes to show that all votes matter in Minnesota, and we're still very evenly divided and up for grabs when it comes to picking our elected officials.

So what does all this mean for Greater Minnesota?


On the federal level, we will lose two powerful congressional chairmen: Oberstar, who chaired the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee,

Did You Know?

20 Years of Partisan Control of the Minnesota House and Senate

Partisan control of the Minnesota House and Senate in the legislative sessions following general elections, since 1990.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>HOUSE</u>	<u>SENATE</u>
2011	72-62 GOP	37-30 GOP
2009	87-47 DFL	
2007	85-49 DFL	44-23 DFL
2005	68-66 GOP	
2003	81-53 GOP	35-31-1 DFL
2001	69-65 GOP	39-27-1 DFL
1999	71-63 GOP	
1997	70-64 DFL	42-24-1 DFL
1995	71-63 DFL	
1993	86-48 DFL	45-22 DFL
1991	79-55 DFL	46-21 DFL



Note: House members stand for election every two years, and Senate members stand for election every four years. However, senators must stand for election in years ending in 2, such as 2012 and 2002, after serving just two years in order to provide for the redistricting process done in conjunction with the U.S. Census.

and Democrat Collin Peterson of western Minnesota, who will move from chairman of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee to ranking minority member when Republicans take control in January. However, we will also gain a new powerful committee chairman when Republican Congressman John Kline (who represents Goodhue, Le Sueur and Rice counties, in addition to four metro area counties) receives the gavel as chairman of the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee.

On the state level, we will have a brand new gubernatorial administration, which not only means a new governor and lieutenant governor, but also new commissioners and deputy commissioners in charge of all the state agencies—from Agriculture and Commerce to

Transportation and the DNR. And with the administration changing from Republican to Democrat, you can bet that there will be a lot of new faces and philosophies.

The same change will occur in the Legislature under Republican control. Kurt Zellers of Maple Grove will be the new House speaker, and Amy Koch of Buffalo will be the new Senate majority leader. Additionally, all of the committees in the state House and Senate will have new chairmen or chairwomen—including several from Greater Minnesota.

Some of the new chairs of special significance to Greater Minnesota are Senator Dave Senjem of Rochester and Representative Larry Howes of Walker, who will chair the Senate and House Capital Investment committees; Sena-

tor Doug Magnus of Slayton and Representative Rod Hamilton of Mountain Lake, who will chair the Senate and House Agriculture committees; Representative Bob Gunther of Fairmont, who will chair the House Jobs & Economic Development Committee; and Senator Bill Ingebrigtsen of Alexandria, who will chair the Senate Environment & Nature Resources Committee.

Of course, issues of special concern to Greater Minnesota will also be impacted by the results of the 2010 election. I'll discuss these issues in the next edition of the newsletter.

In the meantime, enjoy the remaining days of 2010, and Happy New Year 2011! ●

CENTER for RURAL POLICY and DEVELOPMENT

Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future

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MISSION: The Center for Rural Policy and Development provides high quality and objective research to examine and advance policy and decision-making, advocacy and civic engagement for Greater Minnesota's development.

VISION: The Center for Rural Policy and Development will be the leading and most trusted source of research and recommendations to advance policies that improve the quality of life in Greater Minnesota.

VALUES:

Research Excellence. We endeavor to strive for excellence in every project in which we engage.

Political Non-partisanship. Political non-partisanship is the historical foundation of our work. We are committed to maintaining that reputation.

Collaboration. Collaboration will be the hallmark of our future work. Our success will be defined by the partnerships we create.

Commitment to Minnesota. A strong Minnesota requires a healthy and vibrant Greater Minnesota. We are committed to supporting quality decision-making that will positively impact Greater Minnesota's ability to thrive.

Rural Perspectives: Tom Renier – Founding President, Northland Foundation



Q: Tom, tell us a little about the Northland Foundation. What is the history of your organization and what does it do?

A: It's hard to believe we're celebrating our 25th anniversary. In the early 1980s the country was in a deep recession, and the McKnight Foundation wanted to address the economic and social problems bombarding rural Minnesotans. In 1986, McKnight established the Northland Foundation and five other Minnesota Initiative Foundations, each serving a specific rural region. Our service area includes Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake and St. Louis counties.

Our mission is to be a resource for the people, businesses and communities in northeast Minnesota, working toward prosperity through economic and social justice. The priorities set 25 years ago remain intact today: Economic Development and Job Creation, Opportunities for Self-Reliance, Connecting Kids and Communities and Strengthening Families, and

Aging with Independence. Core programs are a grant program for nonprofits; a business finance program; an operating program, KIDS PLUS, focused on children and youth; and an assisted living social enterprise serving older adults.

Q: How does the Northland Foundation help people and organizations in northeastern Minnesota?

A: A foundation making direct business loans is quite unique, but it's central to our identity. A strong economy and thriving communities enable people to work productively, live well and invest back into the region. That's our bottom line.

One thing I believe the Northland Foundation does well is listen to the people we serve and assist them however we can, within the bounds of our mission and resources. We've worked hard to establish a clear role in the region. Sometimes we take the lead, but more often we form strategic alliances or build the capacity of other organizations. We have never wanted to compete with the nonprofit community, other economic development groups, financial institutions (our partners in the loan program) or other community foundations. For the region to remain viable the various players have to leverage their strengths and work together. It's been a conscious decision to be respectful, approachable, flexible and consistent about our priorities—so that our constituents know us and understand what we bring to the table.

Q: What is your role with the

Northland Foundation? What in your background helped prepare you for the position?

A: I'm the founding president. I spent 13 years working in economic development at the Arrowhead Regional Development Association and then became the founding president of Northspan. Northspan helped inform McKnight's process of creating the Initiative Foundations, so I technically was part of the Northland Foundation before it officially existed. I grew up in Duluth and graduated from the University of Minnesota-Duluth. The years of economic development experience were great preparation, and I've had exceptional mentors and colleagues. My role is to help keep the vision of the organization, under direction of the board, and to build relationships that benefit the foundation, our communities and this region.

Q: Tell us about the KIDS PLUS Program. What is it all about?

A: The Northland Foundation has always supported children and youth issues. In 1991, we launched the KIDS PLUS Program to more directly impact the well-being of children and families. It's grown into a continuum of programs that build local resources for children, from birth to adulthood. Strong support from funding and community partners has been essential. Their desire to provide a nurturing environment that gives future generations the best start in life inspires our efforts.

KIDS PLUS has grown into a comprehensive family of children

and youth initiatives that promote:

- Technical assistance and support to communities to strengthen local infrastructures around children and youth
- Youth leadership, volunteerism and philanthropy
- Conferencing and training
- Early childhood development

Q: Can you tell us about some of the plans the Northland Foundation has for 2011?

A: The difficult economic environment will likely be with us for a while. Nonprofits, businesses, communities and families in our region face enormous challenges. Solid organizations and businesses with which we have longstanding relationships are struggling. We continue to be not only a source of funding but also of technical assistance, ideas and direction to additional resources. We're going to continue doing everything we can to sustain and move northeastern Minnesota forward. Besides annual grantmaking, we are managing the Strengthening Communities Initiative, which provides technical assistance, cash grants and training to nonprofits. Our assisted living initiative employs more than 60 people in McGregor and Buhl, and more will be hired once construction in Hoyt Lakes is finished this spring. We're aggressively seeking capital to grow the lending capacity of the business finance program, and we're as committed as ever to supporting young children, youth, families and older adults. 2011 will be a time of sharp focus on mission and recovery for the region. ●

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HOULE

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ly he's a doctoral candidate in public administration at Hamline, and is expecting to graduate in 2011.

Prior to working in county government, Houle worked for eight years in the private sector at the *Star Tribune* newspaper in Minneapolis. He held various positions with the paper until, at the time he left, he was part of the management team responsible for circulation in the metropolitan area. His primary responsibilities were to coordinate the financial and human resource systems for the metropolitan cir-

ulation division, and he directly supervised the newspaper's distribution for the city of Minneapolis.

Houle's public service résumé is extensive. In addition to the Center for Rural Policy and Development, Houle is a current or past board member with the Morrison County United Way, Crow Wing County United Way, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud, Morrison County Healthy Communities Collaborative and Community Technology, Inc.

Houle is also very active in pro-

fessional associations, including the Minnesota City/County Managers Association and the Minnesota County Administrators Association, the latter which he has served as president.

Houle chairs the Center for Rural Policy and Development's Research Committee and is passionate about good government.

"I greatly enjoy my service on the Center's board," Houle says. "We cannot have a healthy Minnesota without a healthy Greater Minnesota. The Center brings high

quality, non-partisan research to bear on some of the most difficult public policy issues of our day, lending some of the best research available on rural policy questions to inform the judgment of rural policymakers. In such tough economic times, we can ill-afford to spend resources on things that either don't or won't work. Bringing solid research to bear can save us significant time and money by focusing our efforts towards best-practices, based on sound research. It just makes good sense." ●

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