

Know Before You Go: MN-02 District Primer

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In the last election, Republican Jason Lewis won this district by only 7,000 votes (2%).

That's close! With your help, we're going to win this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

About the Incumbent

Introduction: Republican Jason Lewis is in his first term, replacing John Kline (R), who retired after holding the seat for 14 years. Lewis is a former conservative talk radio host. Establishment Republicans initially rejected him for controversial statements and positions, but eventually embraced Lewis.

Issues: Lewis has a strong Libertarian leaning. The main issues Lewis ran on include repealing and replacing the ACA (he is a big proponent of high-risk insurance pools), cutting taxes, across-the-board rollbacks of regulations and cuts to federal spending, increased border security, and increased state autonomy.

Committees: Lewis serves on the House Committee on the Budget, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, and House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Strengths: Like Trump, Lewis ran as an anti-establishment candidate. If an anti-establishment mood continues among voters, this positioning could be a strength. Lewis' time as a conservative radio host gives him relatively high name recognition. He is a strong communicator and is well-liked by many on the right.

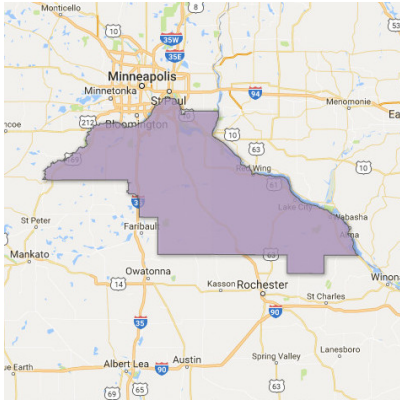
Potential Weaknesses: Lewis is famous for his racist and misogynistic comments during his time as a radio host, which earned him the nickname "mini-Trump." His controversial past turned off many establishment GOP donors during the campaign. However, much like Trump, Lewis won despite constant character attacks from his opponent. According to FiveThirtyEight, Lewis has voted with Trump 100% of the time, a high rate for someone who represents a swing district. If Trump's approval rating remains low or deteriorates further, this could be a liability for Lewis. Finally, Lewis received negative media coverage for declining to host a town hall in his district despite vocal calls from his constituents.

About the Challenger

Introduction: Democrat Angie Craig returns for a rematch with Republican talk show host Jason Lewis, after a narrow and unexpected loss (by a margin of 6,655 votes) in 2016. Craig is a former healthcare executive.

Issues: Health care, especially coverage of pre-existing conditions and the future of ACA, and economic inequality are the keystones of Craig's campaign. As always in MN-02, environmental concerns will play an important role. Student loan debt is important in this district, which is home to two colleges and a large community college.

Strengths: Craig's personal story — growing up in a trailer park, raised by a strong mother and grandmother — is compelling, as is the landmark legal struggle she and her wife fought to retain custody of their four adopted sons. Her background in health care gives her credibility and depth in defending coverage of pre-existing conditions and opposing Trump administration attacks on healthcare. She is a credible supporter of gun rights alongside sensible gun regulation, which has appeal in this partially-rural district. Craig's advocacy of strong teachers' unions and support for two years of free post-secondary education resonate well in this district, and her support of science-based approaches to climate change and to the opioid crisis appeal as well. Republican incumbent Jason Lewis's previous employment as a talk show host, especially his widely condemned misogynist and racist comments, may also work in Craig's favor. Craig has been endorsed by Emily's List, the DFL Veterans Caucus, End Citizens United, the AFL-CIO, Planned Parenthood, and an impressive list of local and state officials.



MN-02: Better Know the District

Geography

MN-02 is mostly flat farmable land, numerous lakes, bluff country near the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix Rivers. These waterways are historically important to the district and are of ongoing environmental concern due to proposed EPA deregulation, relaxation of pollution guidelines, and the blocking of Obama's Clean Water Rule.

Citizenry

Racially homogeneous, with about 93% of the population white. Culturally split; the northern half is affluent suburbs, the southern half is rural farmland and small towns. Unemployment is 3.7% or less throughout the district.

Tourism

The district contains six state parks & the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Other tourism assets are very limited.

Higher Education

There are seven colleges in the district: the highly-regarded St. Olaf College (3,200 students) and Carleton College (2,000 students), and five technical/vocational colleges.

Economy

A large portion of the district still revolves around agriculture, though suburban expansion south from Minneapolis/St. Paul has reduced the percentage of land devoted to it. The medical industry is very important as well. Top employers include Pine Bend Refinery (owned by Koch brothers), 3M, Thomson Reuters North American Legal, Blue Cross Blue Shield MN, and Northern Tool and Equipment.

Elections

MN-02 has long been considered a swing district but leans Republican, and the Republican incumbent, John Kline, who retired in 2016, had won 7 terms in Congress. Obama narrowly won the district in both 2008 and 2012.

Republican talk-show host Jason Lewis ran for Congress in 2016 and defeated his Democratic challenger, Angie Craig, with 47% of the vote to Craig's 45% (a margin of about 7,000 votes). Craig had been expected to win narrowly. Crucial to this contest was the candidacy of a transgender independent, Paula Overby, whose 8% would likely have made Craig the winner if Overby had not run. Her plans for 2018 are unknown. Lewis, a strong Trump supporter did best in the most rural areas: Scott, Goodhue and Wabasha counties. The Lewis campaign spent \$3.6 million, the Craig campaign about \$2.45 million. The NEA union and the Teamsters endorsed Craig, and Craig's largest donor base was environmental groups and healthcare companies.

Interestingly, even in the most Republican counties, Minnesota's Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar consistently wins by large margins. Klobuchar is clearly well-liked, and her support of and campaigning for the next Democratic candidate for the MN-02 congressional seat will be vitally important.

MN-02: Facts & Stats

Population Centers

- Eagan, 66,286
- Burnsville, 61,481
- Lakeville, 60,633
- Apple Valley, 51,221
- Shakopee, 39,981
- Cottage Grove, 35,918

2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 171K (45%)
- Trump: 176K (47%)

2016 House Results

- Craig (D): 167K (45%)
- Lewis (R): 174K (47%)
- Other: 29K (8%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 36K
- Eligible, not registered: 49K

2014 House Results

- Obermueller (D): 96K (39%)
- Kline (R): 138K (56%)
- Other: 12K (5%)