

Know Before You Go: MN-07 District Primer

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In the last election, Democrat Collin Peterson won this district by only 16,637 votes (5.0%). That's too close! With your help, we're going to keep this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

About the Incumbent

Introduction: Democrat Collin Peterson has served as MN-7's congressman since 1991. Part of the Blue Dog Coalition of conservative-leaning Democrats, he is ranked by Govtrack as one of the most bipartisan representatives in the House.

Issues: The single most important issue to voters in MN-7 is agriculture, and Peterson has pledged to support farmers by upholding and implementing the 2014 Farm Bill. Hunting is also a big issue in this rural district, and Peterson is a staunch advocate for gun-ownership rights.

Committees: Peterson is the ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee. He was also the chairman of the committee from 2007-2011.

Recent Elections: Peterson won in 2016 with 52.5% of the vote. This was his closest race since 1994, and he was only able to win by outrunning the Democratic presidential ticket in his district by 21.5%, by far the most of any current Democratic representative.

Strengths: Peterson's deep roots in his district, which he has represented for 26 years, and the moderate profile he has cultivated have allowed him to hold onto this seat despite the district's sharp Republican tilt at the presidential level. He has been endorsed by the AFL-CIO, Communication Workers of America, American Federation of Teachers, and the National Farmers Union.

About the Challenger

Introduction: Republican Dave Hughes is an Air Force veteran making his second consecutive attempt to dislodge incumbent Collin Peterson from the MN-07 seat. He is currently a drone instructor pilot for General Atomics, which includes flying operational missions supporting Air and Marine Operations at the US Customs & Border Protection.

Issues: Hughes supports President Trump's most controversial positions, including building a wall at the southern border and eliminating federal funding for sanctuary cities. His foreign policy stance is similarly nativist, favoring an "America First" posture that dangerously ignores present geopolitical realities and undermines longstanding ties with allies. He is a proponent of healthcare initiatives that would abolish employer mandates and reduce coverage requirements, leaving many underinsured or not insured at all. Hughes is alarmingly inconsistent on agricultural policy, which is of vital importance to the district: he says that he is in favor of free and fair trade and desires to expand into new markets but also supports Trump's regressive tariffs.

Strengths: Hughes is the Republican candidate in a district that is heavily pro-Trump. When he ran against Peterson in 2016, he only lost by 5 points.

Potential Weaknesses: Hughes lacks political experience apart from having lost to Peterson in the last election which is no bonus, either. He does not command respect for his positions on agriculture and healthcare, both of which are crucial in this district.



MN-07: Better Know the District

Geography

This district is the largest in Minnesota and covers most of the western part of the state. About one-third of the people in the district live in small cities, while the remaining two-thirds live in rural areas. The district has more than 26,000 acres of farmland, the most in the state. Because the district is so large and is mostly rural, canvassers and organizers will have to spread out.

Citizenry

The district is predominantly white (92%). However, 2.5% of the population is Native American, and there are several reservations throughout the district. With a median household income of \$55,000 and a poverty level of 6.7% (lower than the national average), MN-7 is predominantly middle class. While over 91% of citizens 25 or older have a high school diploma, only around 21% have a bachelor's degree, significantly lower than the national average.

Elections

The voters of District 7 have kept a Democratic incumbent in the House for more than 20 years, but every Republican presidential candidate since 2000 has carried the district. In the most recent election, Trump received almost two-thirds of the vote. Trump's margin of victory in 2016 was greater than that of any other Republican candidate since 2000.

Higher Education

There are 17 institutions of higher education located within the district, including universities, colleges, and community colleges. Among the largest are Minnesota State University Moorhead and Bemidji State University.

Industries

Agriculture remains very important to MN-7, which ranks among the top producing districts of crops like sugar beets, soybeans, corn, and wheat, as well as livestock such as pigs. However, other sectors are crucial in terms of employment: 23% of rural residents are employed by the educational services, healthcare, and social assistance industries, as are 27% of those living in large towns. Among the top employers in MN-7 are Shooting Star Casino, Minnesota State University Moorhead, Jennie-O, Digi-Key Electronics, and American Crystal Sugar Company.

Tourism

MN-7 encompasses many state parks and lakes which are popular for fishing, hiking, camping, and other outdoor activities. The district also encompasses many areas with hunting permits.

MN-07: Facts & Stats

Population Centers

- Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area, 200,000
- Willmar, 19,600
- Bemidji, 14,120
- Hutchinson, 14,040
- Marshall, 13,570
- Fergus Falls, 13,220

2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 105K (31%)
- Trump: 208K (62%)

2016 House Results

- Peterson (D): 174K (52%)
- Hughes (R): 157K (47%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 31K
- Eligible, not registered: 103K

2014 House Results

- Peterson (D): 131K (54%)
- Westrom (R): 110K (46%)