

The late Sen. Hubert Humphrey once quipped that contrary to what the rest of the country may believe, there is no provision in the state constitution requiring that a Minnesotan run for president.

Humphrey was making a small joke, of course, but the one-liner spoke volumes about the place government holds in the minds of many Minnesotans.

State government programs such as the highly touted open enrollment education initiative and the Minnesota Clean Indoor Air Act have consistently led the way for the rest of the nation.

But the state is perhaps more widely known for the steady stream of national leaders it has produced, from Harold Stassen, the “boy wonder” governor and one-time serious presidential candidate, to the quartet of Minnesota senators who also ran for president: Humphrey, Eugene McCarthy, Walter Mondale and Amy Klobuchar.

From the beginning, the Minnesota tradition has largely been a liberal one. One of the first acts of the Minnesota Legislature was to authorize the sale of \$5 million in railroad bonds to stimulate business in the wake of the economic panic of 1857.

And when business is perceived as posing a threat to the people, Minnesota hasn’t shied away from imposing government regulations.

In 1871, when big railroads were commonly looked upon as the enemy, Minnesota created its own railroad commission — years before the federal Interstate Commerce Commission was formed.

At the turn of the century, conservative Gov. Samuel VanSant began a lawsuit against the Northern Securities Company, a massive

railroad conglomerate. Its later breakup was the first step toward making then President Theodore Roosevelt’s reputation as a trustbuster.

That strong tradition of government regulation of business, borne from the Populist roots of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL) in 1944, continues to this day. And it’s a constant point of friction at the State Capitol between the DFL and the Republican Party (R), whose traditional roots are also very strong in the state.

There have been long stretches of Republican domination — despite Minnesota’s reputation as a liberal state. In 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the first Democratic presidential candidate to win Minnesota’s electoral votes. And it wasn’t until 1972 that the DFL gained a majority in both the state House and Senate.

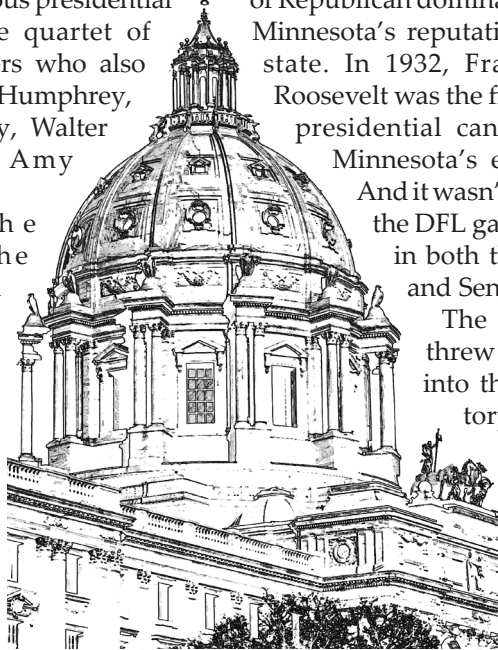
The 1998 elections threw a new wrinkle into the political history of the state.

One-time professional wrestler Jesse Ventura was elected governor, giving the Reform

Party, later changed to the Independence Party, its first significant victory. And voters elected a majority of Republicans to the House for the first time in 12 years. With the DFL holding a majority in the Senate, Minnesota began an experiment with tripartisan government.

The House returned to DFL control after the 2006 election, setting up showdowns between the Legislature and Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

Those political battles continued in the years that followed as both parties had successes and failures.



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State Profile

DFLer Mark Dayton won the governor’s race in 2010, but Republicans regained control of the House and took the Senate for the first time since 1972.

The governor’s office remained in DFL hands for the rest of the decade, with Tim Walz succeeding Dayton in 2019. But control of the House and Senate went back and forth with Republicans holding the majority in both bodies twice (2011-12 and 2017-18) and the DFL in charge in 2013-14. The two parties otherwise split control of the House and Senate until after the 2022 election when the DFL won majorities in both bodies. ▼

Legend

The popular slogan on Minnesota license plates boasts that the state is the “Land of 10,000 Lakes.” Actually, there are 11,842 lakes of more than 10 acres each, giving the state more shoreline than California, Florida and Hawaii combined.

The creation myth of the Ojibwe Indians of northern Minnesota holds that the earth was created when Winabijou, a legendary trickster, finds himself at the top of a pine tree surrounded by water. He asks a muskrat to retrieve mud from the bottom. The muskrat does, and Winabijou makes an island which grows to the size of the earth.

Minnesota pioneers turned to Paul

Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox for their creation story. Legend has it that Paul and Babe, headed west from Maine to Washington, and are responsible for creating “the Land of 10,000 Lakes” with their deep footprints.

But the textbook explanation is that four large glacier systems melted as they receded north and created Lake Agassiz, which at one time was larger than all the Great Lakes combined. As the lake level receded, the many depressions on Minnesota’s landscape were filled in. The 10,000 lakes slogan, although inaccurate, is a holdover from 19th century promotion brochures designed to lure immigrants to the state. ▼

History

The abundance of water in Minnesota is also reflected in the very name chosen for the state. “Minnesota” is the Dakota word for “cloudy” or “sky-tinted water” that was applied to the river of that name because of its color.

The two main groups of American Indians in Minnesota are the Ojibwe and the Dakota. Their presence is most visible in the place names of many Minnesota towns and counties. Fifteen of Minnesota’s 87 counties took their names from the Dakota language, either directly or through translation; 12 came from the Ojibwe language.

The French were the first Europeans to explore the area that is now known as Minnesota. So extensive was their contact with the Indians that the French greeting, “bonjour,” is still used by the Ojibwe. The greeting, however, is pronounced “boozhoo.”

Minnesota became a territory in 1849 and the nation’s 32nd state in 1858. The first U.S. Census, conducted in 1850, listed the state’s population at 6,077 — a fraction of the 5.66 million people who live here today.

Although Germans comprised the

largest group of settlers, Minnesota is said to be the only state in the country where Smith isn’t the most common name in the telephone book; it’s Peterson, an indication of the state’s deep Scandinavian roots.

Minnesota also played a role in the annals of African-American history: Dred Scott came to Fort Snelling in 1836 as the property of a military surgeon — even though slavery was outlawed in the territory. Scott later appealed for his freedom in the federal courts, but was turned down by the Supreme Court in 1857. The final disposition of the slavery question raised by Dred Scott came only after four years of the tragic Civil War. ▼

Economy

Minnesota’s early economy was dominated by the lumber, agriculture and mining industries. Each continues to play a large role in the state’s economy, but they are no longer alone.

The dynamic economy has resulted in more than a dozen Fortune 500 companies calling the state home. Minnesota ranks third nationwide in Fortune 500 companies per capita.

According to the Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Mayo Clinic in Rochester was the state’s top employer in 2023 with nearly 50,000 employees and was one of nine health care companies among the top 20 employers in Minnesota.

The state does remain a national

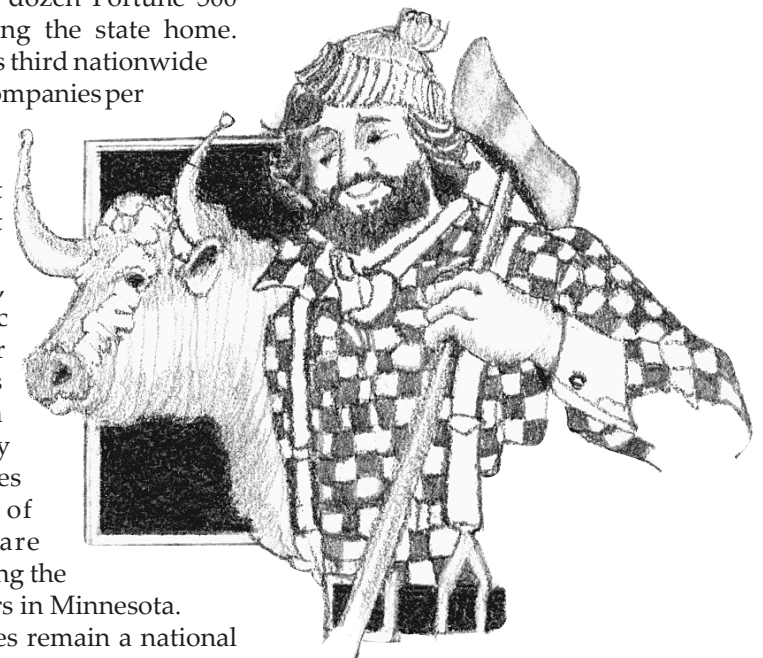
leader in agriculture with \$21 billion in total agricultural sales and was fourth in the nation for exports of food and agricultural goods. Minnesota received \$2.2 billion in venture capital investments in 2022, ranking 14th nationally.

Companies bring high-paying quality jobs to the state, in part, because of a dedicated and highly educated workforce. Minnesota ranks fourth in the nation with 94% of adults having at least a high school diploma, while 39.1% have a bachelor’s degree or higher, ranking 13th in the country.

More than 68% of Minnesotans participated in the state’s labor force in 2022, the eighth highest rate in the nation, with the per capita personal income ranking 14th in the country. The state also ranked 13th in median household income in 2021 at \$77,720.

Minnesota exported \$27.3 billion in goods to over 200 countries in 2022, with Canada (\$9 billion), Mexico (\$2.8 billion) and China (\$2.7 billion) the state’s largest trading partners.

More than 95% of Minnesotans have health insurance, and our life expectancy of 79.1 years is third-best in the United States. ▼



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