

Who are these men and women in the Legislature? Where do they come from, and how did they become representatives? The easiest answer to that question is that they are us.

The 134 members of the House of Representatives are from all walks of life and from all regions of the state. They are farmers, teachers, attorneys and homemakers. And each has his or her reason for getting involved in the political process.

Perhaps it was a problem encountered on the job or in the community that sparked an interest to get a law changed. Maybe it was the belief that the representative from his or her area hadn't done a good job.

For whatever reason, the 134 representatives who serve in the House are elected to represent the people. And each year, they meet in the State Capitol in St. Paul to discuss ideas for new laws and changes to old ones.

Remember not to confuse your representatives in the Legislature with members of Congress. Your state representatives focus on more local issues that are of importance to the state as it relates to your community. In Congress, members are concerned with national issues as they relate to the state of Minnesota.

The Legislature is divided into 67 legislative districts, with about 85,172 people in each district. Voters elect one senator from each district.

Each Senate district is divided into two sections. Voters elect one House member, or representative, from each section, making a total of 134 representatives. These districts, which are made up of about 42,586 people each, are identified on the accompanying map with an "A" or a "B."

Every 10 years, after the federal government completes its census, the Legislature must reapportion and redistrict the state's legislative and congressional districts to reflect shifts in population. Reapportion means to redistribute the

district so that each member represents the same number of people. Redistrict means to redraw the boundaries for each district to reflect that population.

The state constitution requires that each district reflect approximately the same number of people. Redistricting occurs in the odd-numbered year following a census. For example, the 2010 census population determined

redistricting efforts in 2011, and the 2020 census determined current districts. Most legislators consider their governmental duties a part-time job; however, their occupations reflect a change in the state.

In 2021, 29 members listed business as their primary occupation, the most in recent history; 11 listed themselves as educators, the fewest since 2003.

Many more women now serve in the Legislature than in the past. In the 2023-24 biennium, a record 55 women served in the House, six more than in 2019-20. In biennia beginning in 2007 and 2009, there were 43 women serving; an increase



of six from 2005.

Legislators also represent a wide variety of ages and educational backgrounds.

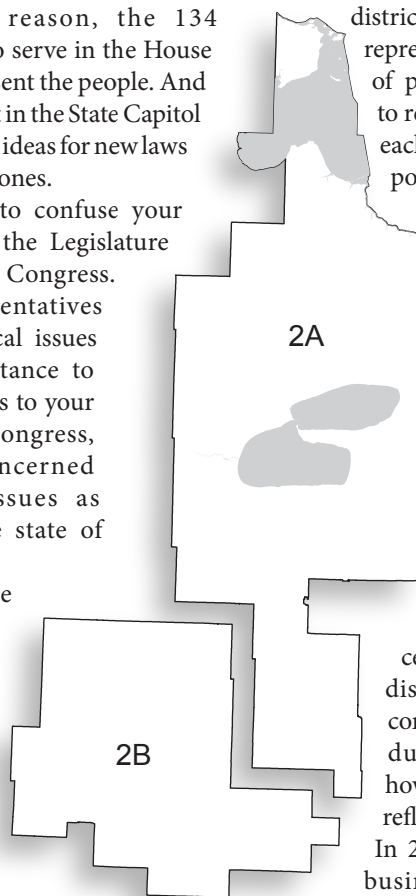
In 2021, the average age of a House member was 51.5 years, a drop from 54 in 2018. And the overwhelming majority had some educational training past high school, including 52 members with a graduate degree and 47 having an undergraduate degree.

You only have to be 21 years old to run for the Legislature. You have to have lived in Minnesota for one year and in the district you will represent for at least six months prior to the election.

Why do people want the job of being a representative? Some have an interest in particular topics, such as health care or children's issues, and want to change state law. Others are intrigued by the political process. Still others are recruited by leaders of the state's two major political parties — Republican, Democratic-Farmer-Labor — to run for election.

But more and more people are pursuing a seat in the Legislature from other political parties, as well. Though the overwhelming majority of members represent major parties, you don't have to belong to a major party to be elected to the House.

People elect members, also known as representatives, to the House every two years. And if the people don't like the way their representatives vote on issues, they have the power to vote them out of office.



Your legislator

Members of the House of Representatives are elected to represent us. But don't be confused between the state Legislature and Congress. We have representatives in both, but they are responsible for very different duties.

Members of Congress represent a much larger

group of people than legislators do.

Each of Minnesota's eight members in the U.S.

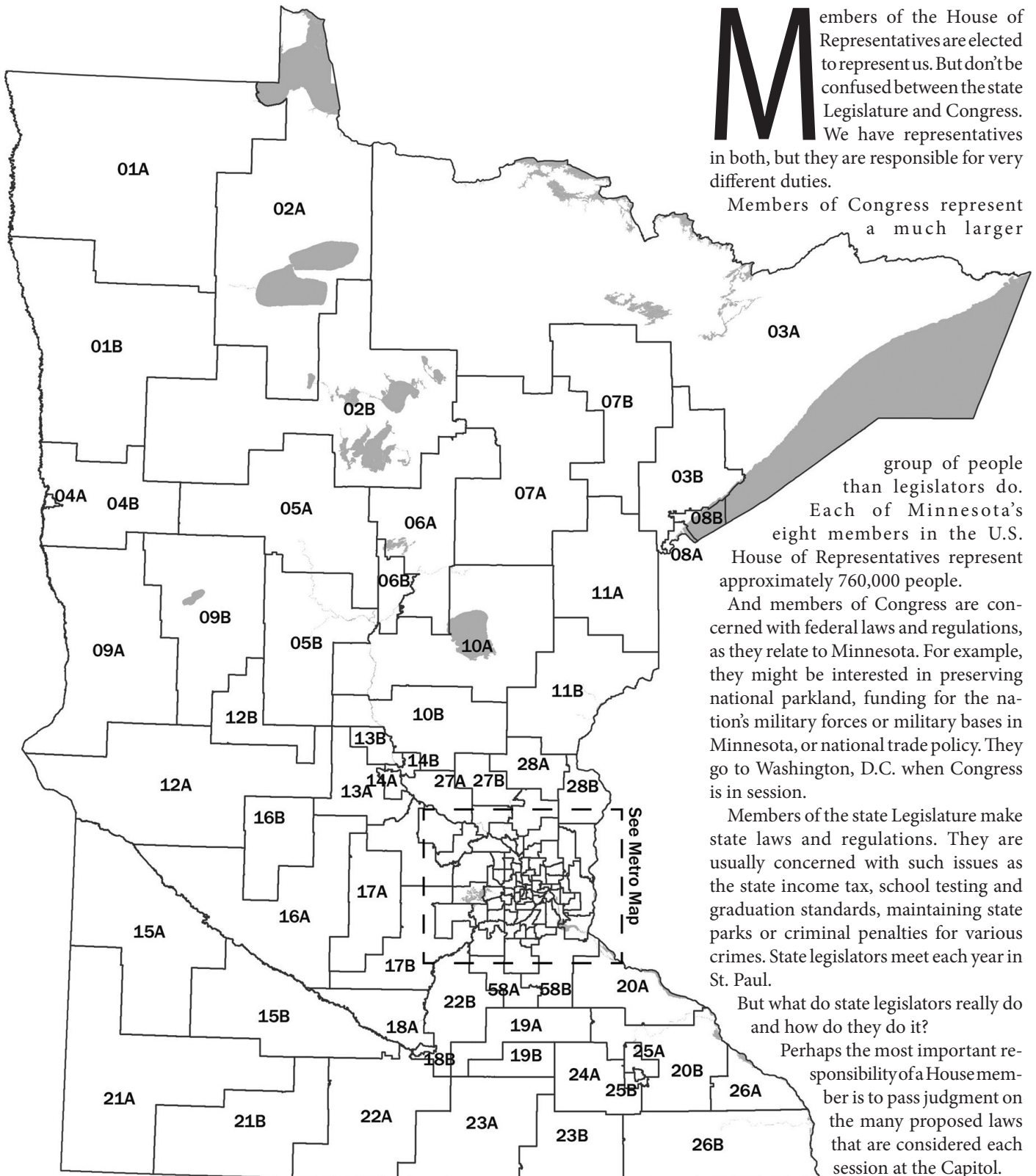
House of Representatives represent approximately 760,000 people.

And members of Congress are concerned with federal laws and regulations, as they relate to Minnesota. For example, they might be interested in preserving national parkland, funding for the nation's military forces or military bases in Minnesota, or national trade policy. They go to Washington, D.C. when Congress is in session.

Members of the state Legislature make state laws and regulations. They are usually concerned with such issues as the state income tax, school testing and graduation standards, maintaining state parks or criminal penalties for various crimes. State legislators meet each year in St. Paul.

But what do state legislators really do and how do they do it?

Perhaps the most important responsibility of a House member is to pass judgment on the many proposed laws that are considered each session at the Capitol.



Minnesota State Legislative Districts

Based on 2020 census figures

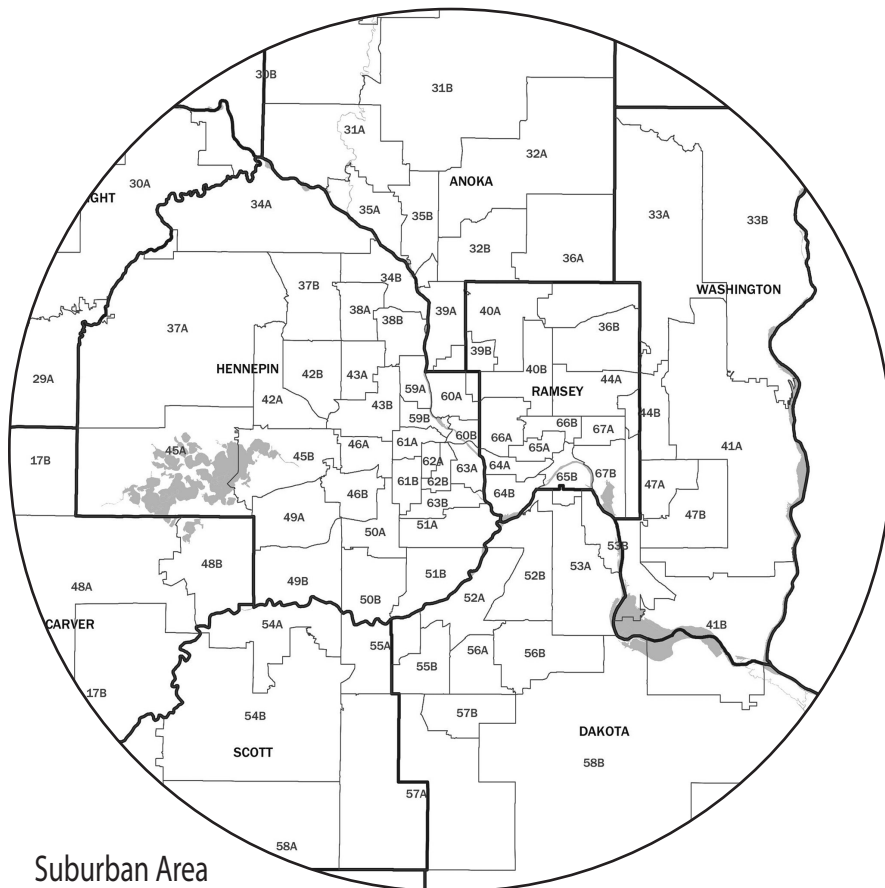
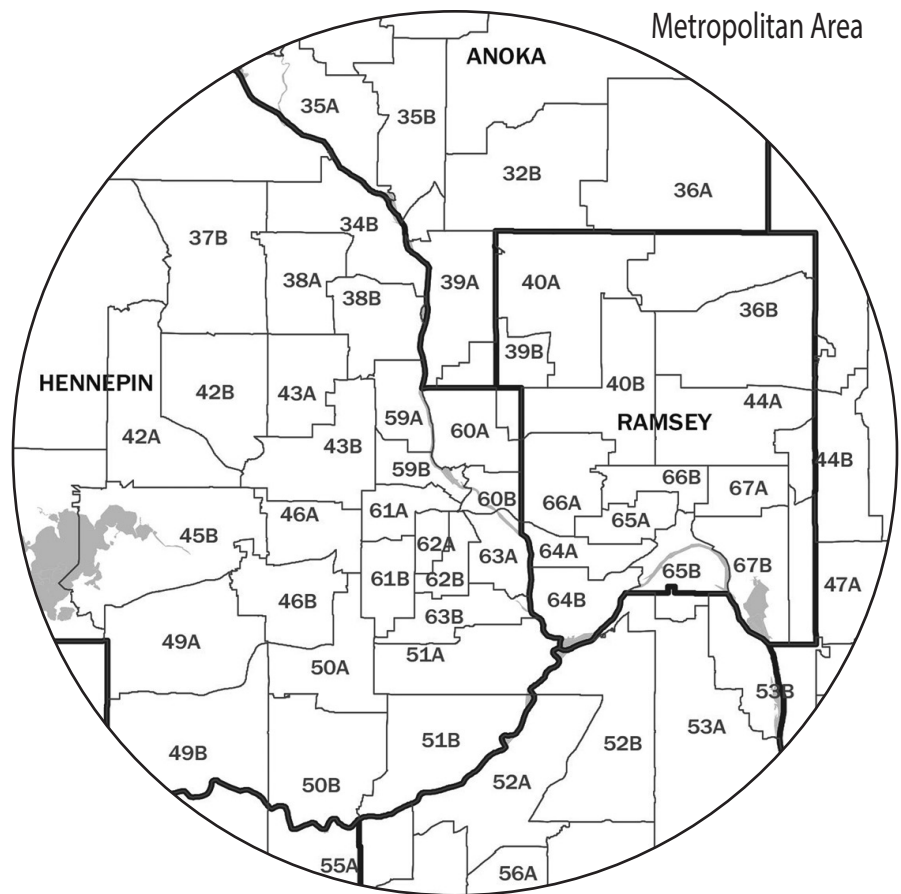
Typically, more than 2,000 House bills are introduced each year, but only a hundred or so typically become law. The proposed laws touch just about every facet of human experience.

Would a bill, or proposal, to limit the draining of the state's wetlands, for example, unfairly restrict the ability of farmers to make a living?

Would a proposal calling for the state to pay for the spraying of hordes of grasshoppers kill off too many honeybees and possibly harm the food chain?

It's hundreds of topics like these that House members wrestle with each legislative session. Sometimes they vote the way they believe the majority of people in their district would. But other times, members vote their conscience — particularly when it's unclear how the people in their districts would feel about an idea.

That's the principle behind representative government. We elect representatives because of what they stand for and rely on them to make decisions in the best



interests of the people in the districts they represent, as well as the state as a whole.

And sometimes legislators look to representatives of a specific group — nurses or small-business owners, for example — to explain important details of a bill on a specific topic. Because there are literally hundreds of bills considered each year, it's hard for representatives to keep abreast of all of them.

For example, there are about 1,400 registered lobbyists in Minnesota, representing a wide variety of different groups and organizations. And thousands of other citizen lobbyists travel to the State Capitol every year to let legislators know what issues are important to them and why.

In addition to voting on proposed legislation, House members also introduce bills, which generally come from one of four sources: themselves, interest groups, one of their constituents or the governor's office and various state departments and agencies.

The number of bills introduced continues to increase.

In the 2015-16 biennium, House members introduced 4,016 bills and senators introduced 3,641 bills. The number becoming law was 184.

Eight years later, in the 2023-24 biennium, the number of bill introductions jumped to record highs of 5,488 in the House and 5,535 in the Senate. Just 127 were signed into law.

Although many people believe most legislative action occurs in the House or Senate chambers, that's hardly the case. The real shaping of legislation occurs in any of the dozens of House and Senate committees and divisions.

The committees are divided by subject area. On most days when the Legislature is in session, you'll likely find your representative sitting in three or four committees on which they serve.

House members specify their committee preferences, and the Speaker of the House tries to honor the requests. A representative from rural Minnesota, for example, might want to serve on the House Agriculture Policy Committee because of the importance of farming to their area.

However, House leaders try to make sure members representing a number of geographic areas and other characteristics

are on each committee to create a diverse viewpoint.

Before a bill can become law, it often times must pass through three or four different committees before it is sent to the full House for consideration. A bill calling for regulations on pesticides, for example, may be heard in both the House Agriculture Policy Committee and the House Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee because of its potential impact in both areas.

It can take weeks or months for a bill to advance through several committees. And because the sponsor of a bill must appear before the committees to answer questions, it takes a lot of their time, as well. Your representative generally spends a little less than one-half of each year at the State Capitol on a full-time basis.

The state constitution specifies that the Legislature cannot remain in session for more than 120 legislative days during a biennium. During the first, or odd, year of the two-year cycle, the Legislature typically meets from the beginning of January to mid-May. During the second, or even year of the cycle, the Legislature usually meets for about three months. The second year of the cycle is often called the "short year."

Aside from their legislative duties at the Capitol, representatives also meet with people and groups from their districts to

hear their concerns, and often serve on various commissions between legislative sessions.

They also hold local town meetings to glean information and determine the concerns of their constituents.

In addition, representatives sometimes work as "caseworkers" to solve problems encountered by people living within their districts. Oftentimes, your representative, who understands the ins and outs of government and carries some clout as a legislator, can help sort things out.

And sometimes these problems give rise to an idea for a new law.

But don't take our word for it; get to know the representative and senator for your district. Come to the Capitol and attend a House committee or floor session, or just come to take a tour of the historic building.

Read informational publications that are available from the Legislature at no cost.

To find more information about these, contact the House Public Information Services Office at 651-296-2146 or 800-657-3550 or visit our website at www.house.mn.gov.



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