

North Minneapolis is up for grabs.

Written by Al McFarlane
Friday, 09 March 2012 13:06

The confluence of Census-driven redistricting, the announced resignation of Hennepin County 2nd District Commissioner, Mark Stenglein, and the earlier announcement that State Sen. Linda Higgins would not seek reelection has set in motion what could be a historic domino effect scenario for Black political empowerment unrivaled in Minnesota history.

Minnesota has long discussed the possibility and eventuality of increasing the number of Black people and other people of color in city, county and state elective office. But despite the theoretical opportunity, on the street, those who would be candidates, whether spoken or not, measured their gait by the internal cycles of DFL leadership entrenchment, particularly in North Minneapolis, but likewise in South Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Meaning, though certain geographic areas were identified and discussed as likely districts, or wards, for electing an African American, or person of color, based on the demographic of the districts, in all cases the seats presently were owned by well heeled DFLers, who, relatively speaking, have sufficiently served Black interests.

The taking of a political seat generally meant fighting for space being vacated by an incumbent for whatever reason.

In the case of the current sea-change opportunity, two big events have unfolded.

First, multi-term incumbent Linda Higgins announced she would not seek re-election this fall. Speculation was that she was looking for a management position in county government or with a metropolitan level governmental agency.

Within minutes of her announcement, District 58B State Rep. Bobby Joe Champion announced he would seek the Senate seat being vacated by Higgins.

A lawyer and businessman, Champion long envisioned the possibility of a Higgins departure, and with planful encouragement of his inner circle, within hours launched the campaign that will likely lift Champion to the rank of state senator, where he will join South Minneapolis' Sen. Jeff Hayden, and St. Paul's Sen. John Harrington.

Champions' bid for the Senate seat creates an opportunity where he presently serves which becomes 59B by dint of redistricting. Terra Cole, a long time Northside resident, but relative new comer to DFL politics announced she would seek the open seat being vacated by Champion.

Her announcement, however, was a little tentative, because when she first announced, it was unclear whether her address would remain in the current B side of the district, or, whether the new redistricted lines would place her residence in the A side.

District 58A, renamed to 59A, is the property of State Rep. Joe Mullery, who over the years created lots of enemies, but who always maintained a core support organization that ensured

North Minneapolis is up for grabs.

Written by Al McFarlane
Friday, 09 March 2012 13:06

his reelection. The question was, would and could Cole fight Mullery for the A side seat, if she were redistricted into his domain?

The late February announcement by state courts of new district boundaries did in fact place Cole in the new 59A.

Cole, however, following rules of the court and the DFL party, declared she would continue to run in the new 59B District, and that she would move from her current residence to take up residence in 59B.

Real Game Changer

Mark Stenglein's announcement that he was hired to run Minneapolis Downtown Council elevated the Northside music chairs game to epic proportion.

In the Black community, Natonia Johnson, who is a district boss and former DFL Chair for District 58, and who is also a former Stenglein staffer, dispatched announcements that she would run for the County Commissioner seat. But just as quickly, and with the overpowering reach of incumbency, Higgins declared she, too, would run for the County Board seat. Shortly thereafter Minneapolis 5th Ward City Councilmember Don Samuels announced he would also run for the County job.

Water cooler conversations centered on three questions:

- Was there already a deal cut between Stenglein and Higgins that is now simply playing out according to script?
- Would Samuel's declaration of interest be seen as a lack of interest in his present job representing the predominantly Black 5th Ward? Would it make it virtually impossible for him to seek reelection to 5th Ward, should he not win the County Board job?
- And finally, could Natonia Johnson be the one who would make history in Hennepin County by becoming the first African American and first African American woman to win a seat on Hennepin County Board of Commissioners?

Interestingly, Johnson is saying she will run straight to the DFL Primary that will precede the special election being set to fill the County Commission board.

DFL endorsements take place on March 31 at Patrick Henry High School at the Senate District Convention. Presumably, Higgins and Samuels will vie for the party's endorsement and seek to enter the Primary as the endorsed candidate.

Besides incumbent Joe Mullery, candidates seeking party endorsement for State House 59A include: David Boyd, Marcus Marcus, Jon Olson, and David Younk.

The State House 59B candidate roster includes: Ian Alexander, Terra Cole, Raymond Dehn, Willie Dominguez, Ken Lawrence, and Nancy Pomplun.

Champion faces a challenge from Troy Parker for the Senate District 59 endorsement.