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Walz won't seek third term citing state program fraud focus

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz announced Monday that he will not seek a third term in office, stepping aside from the 2026 gubernatorial race and saying he wants to focus fully on governing amid ongoing concerns about fraud in state programs and heightened political tensions.

In a lengthy statement released at the start of the new year, Walz said the challenges facing Minnesota require his "full, undivided attention," and that running a political campaign would distract from efforts to protect public trust and deliver services effectively.

"Every minute I spend defending my own political interests would be a minute I can't spend defending the people of Minnesota," Walz said. "So I've decided to step out of the race and let others worry about the election while I focus on the work."

Walz, a Democrat from Mankato and former U.S. congressman, was first elected governor in 2018 and reelected in 2022. In September, he had announced plans to pursue what would have been a historic third term. Minnesota governors are not subject to term limits.

His announcement comes after what Walz described as a difficult year for the state, marked by investigations into fraud involving state-funded programs, particularly in areas such as child care and social services. Walz acknowledged concerns about misuse of taxpayer dollars and outlined steps his administration has taken, including firing state employees, cutting off funding streams, cooperating with federal authorities, and appointing new leadership focused on program integrity.

"We cannot effectively deliver programs and services if we can't earn the public's trust," Walz said. "That's why, over the past few years, we've made systemic changes to the way we do business."

At the same time, the governor sharply criticized Republicans and President Donald Trump, accusing them of politicizing the issue and targeting immigrant communities, particularly Minnesotans of Somali descent. Walz said actions by national and state Republicans have undermined efforts to address fraud and harmed families who rely on public programs. "It is disgusting. And it

is dangerous," Walz said of what he called political gamesmanship.

"A single taxpayer dollar wasted on fraud is a dollar too much to tolerate," Walz said. "And while there's a role to play for everyone—the buck stops with me."

Walz said he remains confident his administration can "win the fight against the fraudsters," but argued that the intensity of election-year politics would make that work more difficult. He framed his decision as an act of "servant leadership," saying Minnesota must come before personal political ambition.

"I'm passing on the race with zero sadness and zero regret," he said. "I didn't run for this job so I could have this job. I ran for this job so I could do this job."

Despite stepping aside, Walz expressed confidence that a fellow Democrat-Farmer-Labor Party candidate will retain the governor's office in November 2026. He also said he expects to remain involved in public service after leaving office in January 2027, though he did not specify how.

In his statement, Walz highlighted accomplishments from his tenure, including

paid family and medical leave, a child tax credit, and free school meals, and praised state employees and his staff for their work.

"Most of all," Walz said, "I want Minnesotans to know that I'm on the job, 24/7, focused on making sure we stay America's best place to live and raise kids."

The announcement immediately reshapes the 2026 governor's race, opening the door to a wide field of potential candidates from both parties in a state that has leaned Democratic in recent statewide elections but remains politically competitive.

Calls for Walz to resign as governor

State Sen. Keri Heintzeman said Gov. Tim Walz's decision not to seek reelection is "good news for Minnesota," but warned that the announcement does not absolve the governor or his administration of responsibility for problems that have emerged under his leadership.

Heintzeman said she had called on Walz to step aside last week. The letter, dated January 2 and signed by 38 GOP lawmakers, accuses Walz of failing to address

fraud that may have cost more than \$9 billion in Medicaid funds, ignoring warnings and retaliating against whistleblowers at the Department of Human Services. It also criticizes the governor for overseeing the loss of an \$18 billion state surplus, now replaced by a looming multibillion-dollar deficit, and for allowing student test scores to stagnate or decline despite record education spending.

"Stepping aside does not erase the damage done, and

it does not end the need for accountability," she said. "Governor Walz and his administration still owe Minnesota taxpayers clear answers about the years of failed leadership, unchecked fraud, and a culture where too few people were held responsible."

Heintzeman said Minnesotans have borne the cost of those failures, pointing to families, seniors, students, and taxpayers affected by the misuse of public funds. She

Continued on Page 2

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COMMUNITY EVENTS

January
10th - Ice Fest Pancake Breakfast supporting the Lakes Area Food Shelf, 7:30-11a.m. \$8 for breakfast. Pelican Lakes Conservation Club at 8922 Thrane Dr, Pequot Lakes.
10th - Deerwood Winter Market, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. Deerwood Auditorium
12th - Prayer Quilting Group, 8 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Full size quilts are made for individuals with medical issues. If you like to cut out fabric squares, match colors, pin quilts, hand tie, or sew on a machine while praying for the recipient your help is greatly needed. You can also support this great group with financial donations to cover postage and supplies. Located on the third floor Conference Room at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.
12th - Cribbage players wanted, 1 -2:30 p.m. at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.
15th - Prayer Quilting Group, 8 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Full size quilts are made for individuals with medical issues. If you like to cut out fabric squares, match colors, pin quilts, hand tie, or sew on a machine while praying for the recipient your help is greatly needed. You can also support this great group with financial donations to cover postage and supplies. Located on the third floor Conference Room at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.
17th - Northern Lights Needle Felting at Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort, 11a.m. - 1 p.m. Join artist Lisa Ackerman of Lil Fish Studios for a creative exploration of needle-felting. This class is perfect for beginners and equally enjoyable for those with prior felting experience. For more information call 800-450-4545
19th - Prayer Quilting Group, 8 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Full size quilts are made for individuals with medical issues. If you like to cut out fabric squares, match colors, pin quilts, hand tie, or sew on a machine while praying for the recipient your help is greatly needed. You can also support this great group with financial donations to cover postage and supplies. Located on the third floor Conference Room at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.
19th - Cribbage players wanted, 1 -2:30 p.m. at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.
21st - Hot Dish Cook Off at Trinity Lutheran Church at 1420 S 6th St in Brainerd, starting at 4:45 p.m.

Send your community events to hopper@crosbyironton.net or send us a message via www.NewsHopper.net/contact/

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Calls for Walz to resign as governor | Continued from Page 1

called for concrete actions, including consequences for wrongdoing, recovery of mis-used funds where possible, and reforms to prevent future abuses.

"This is a chance for our state to turn the page and restore trust in government," Heintzeman said. "But trust will not be restored until accountability is real."

She concluded by calling for leadership that takes responsibility seriously and a state government that can demonstrate it is capable of protecting taxpayer dollars.

Republican Rep. Ben Davis of Merrifield criticized Walz of deflecting blame and failing to take responsibility for fraud within state government.

In a written statement, Davis said Walz's remarks fit what he described as a "fam-

iliar pattern" of blaming Washington rather than accepting accountability at the state level.

"That is the Democrat playbook—point elsewhere, distract, and avoid accountability," Davis said.

Davis took particular issue with Walz's characterization of fraud as a byproduct of Minnesota's generosity, arguing that the real problem lies in oversight and leadership failures. "That framing ignores the core issue: a failure of oversight and leadership," Davis said.

The Republican lawmaker went further, saying that if Walz believes he is unable to continue leading effectively, he should step down before the end of his term.

"If the governor recognizes he's not fit to continue leading, the appropriate step is to

resign immediately," Davis said.

Looking ahead to the 2026 election, Davis warned voters against expecting change from another Democratic administration, arguing that the party bears responsibility for the problems Walz outlined.

"Simply swapping out one Democrat for another will not fix these problems," Davis said. "The same party that presided over this failure cannot credibly claim to be suddenly tough on fraud."

Davis said he plans to continue focusing on government oversight and legislation aimed at protecting taxpayer dollars.

Walz's replied to calls for his resignation by stating, "I'm not going anywhere. And you can make all your requests for me to resign. Over my dead body will that happen."

LEGAL NOTICE

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Jan. 3 & 10, 2026)

WEALTHWOOD TOWNSHIP BOARD OF AUDIT

The Board of Audit for Wealthwood Township will be held on Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at the town hall at 7:00 p.m. with the regular meeting to follow.

Dated: November 14, 2025
LINDA WENDLANDT, Clerk
Wealthwood Township 2.1

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Jan. 10, 17, & 24, 2026)

LIBBY TOWNSHIP BOARD MEETING

The Libby Township Board will meet at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 27, 2026 at the Palisade Community Center. Township supervisor Tom Anderson may attend remotely via phone or Zoom. The purpose of this meeting shall be to discuss and decide matters that may come before the board.

Dated this 30th day of December, 2025
Jane Grimsbo Jewett, clerk
Libby Township 2.91

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Jan. 3 & 10, 2026)

WEALTHWOOD TOWNSHIP NOTICE OF CANDIDATE FILING FOR TOWNSHIP OFFICE

Notice is hereby given for the time of filing affidavits of candidacy for the Township officers to be elected at the Wealthwood Township Annual Meeting and Election which will be held Tuesday, March 10, 2026.

Filings will be open Tuesday, December 30, 2025 and will close January 13, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

Filing hours from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the office of the Clerk Office will be closed on legal holidays.

Call for an appointment 218-678-2880.

Offices to be filled are one Supervisor B for a three year term and one Special Election to fill Supervisor A for a one year term.

Filing fee is \$2.00.
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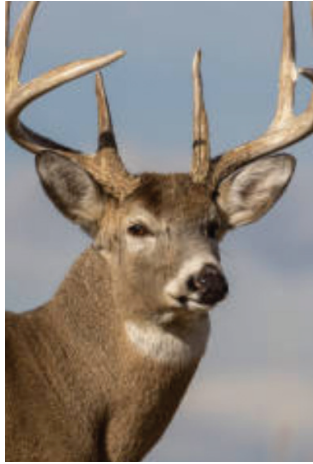
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Deer harvest increased with nearly 14,000 CWD samples contributed



Hunters harvested 186,203 deer during the 2025 hunting season, which is a statewide 9% increase from the 2024 hunting season, according to preliminary figures from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The statewide harvest was 5% higher than the five-year average.

“We had a great deer harvest in most areas of the state this year,” said David Trauba, DNR wildlife section manager. “Hunters are critical to managing deer populations, so it’s positive news for conservation when we see hunters having more success out in the fields and forests.”

Roughly half of all deer harvest occurs over the first two weekends of the firearms season, so weather during those two weekends has a particularly important influence on hunter success and overall harvest.

“Hunting conditions were favorable for hunters getting out and harvesting deer. We had cooling temperatures and limited precipitation,” said Paul Burr, acting big

game program coordinator. “It also helped that deer populations have continued to rise over the past couple years thanks in part to mild winters.”

Deer activity associated with the breeding season also coincided with the firearms season, aiding hunter success.

Breakdown by region for firearms and archery

One of the areas with the largest increase in deer harvest was the northeast, where harvest was up 14% compared to 2024, and up 4% compared to the five-year average. Due to the ecology of the region, deer populations are significantly affected by winter conditions, particularly deep snow. The mild winters of 2023-24 as well as 2024-25 helped bolster local populations. However, wildlife managers are maintaining conservative bag limits and caution it will take more than two mild winters to help northern deer populations recover after the severe winters in 2021-2022 and 2022-23.

Northwest Minnesota also saw a jump in harvest with a 9% increase from 2024, and a 5% increase from the five-year average, with the recent mild winters helping deer in this region as well.

The region comprising the central and southeast areas of the state also saw success, with an 8% increase in harvest from 2024 and an 11% increase compared to the five-year average. Hunting opportunities remain robust in this region of the state, with

bag limits as high as three to five deer.

The southwest saw a 6% increase in harvest compared to 2024 and also a 6% increase from the five-year average. This area has had very consistent harvest the last few years.

This past season again showed an increased harvest for archery hunters, with archery harvest up 8% compared to 2024. Crossbow harvest in 2025 was 50% of total archery harvest, compared to 48% of total archery harvest in 2024. Minnesota legalized crossbows for archery hunters in 2023.

CWD results from hunting seasons

The preliminary total for CWD sample collection is at nearly 14,000 samples in 2025, with most samples taken during the firearms deer season’s opening weekend.

“Thank you, hunters, for participating in the effort to monitor CWD,” said Erik Hildebrand, Minnesota DNR wildlife health supervisor. “Hunters play an important

role in protecting deer populations by providing samples. Their participation allows us to monitor the spread and prevalence of the disease, which is critical information for managing CWD.”

CWD has been detected in samples from a total of 117 deer statewide in 2025, with most of the detections coming from southeast Minnesota. Of all the positive results so far in 2025, one has been a positive detection outside an existing CWD management zone.

The positive detection outside a CWD management zone was a buck harvested by a hunter in deer permit area 285 between Glencoe and Hutchinson in McLeod County. This detection is 33 miles away from where, prior to the season, a deer was detected with CWD in the adjacent DPA 601, and 34 miles to a deer that was positive for CWD in DPA 605. Both DPAs 601 and 605 were CWD management zones for the 2025 hunting season.

Hunters can check the DNR’s CWD results webpage (mndnr.gov/cwdcheck) for CWD test results. The site also shows statewide CWD test results, summary statistics and mapped locations of deer that have tested positive statewide. All test results from deer sampled this fall are being reported on the CWD results webpage. The DNR also directly notifies any hunter who harvests a deer that tests positive.

Feedback on deer from hunters and non-hunters needed

The DNR is inviting Minnesotans to submit feedback about their experiences with deer and deer hunting in 2025 via an online questionnaire. The questionnaire contains open-ended questions about people’s experiences regarding deer populations in the areas where they live, hunt and recreate. The questionnaire is open through Monday, Feb. 23 and is available on the deer hunting webpage (mndnr.gov/hunting/deer).

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