

12 of 35 DOCUMENTS

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**Mark Dayton jumps into crowded DFL Senate race;
His challenge to Grams comes as a surprise; the former state auditor says he'll
probably stress agriculture, tax issues.**

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Mark Dayton, presumed by many in the DFL Party to be finished with politics, shook up the U.S. Senate race Monday with the announcement that he will join the crowded field for the DFL nomination.

Out of the public eye since his 1998 fourth-place finish in the DFL gubernatorial primary, Dayton surfaced suddenly Monday at the State Capitol and told reporters that he has formed an exploratory committee and is "definitely" going to run for the seat held by Republican Sen. Rod Grams.

Dayton may immediately become the best known of the candidates, and as an heir of the department store family, he has more than enough money to mount a credible campaign.

"I have far more statewide experience than any of the others," he said, citing his service as a department head under Gov. Rudy Perpich and a four-year term as state auditor. "I have devoted my entire adult life, 30 years, to public service."

Dayton, 53, said he probably will focus his campaign on agriculture issues, such as the proliferation of polluting feedlots in rural areas, and Grams' support of tax laws and other policies that favor the "rich and the powerful."

This is Dayton's second Senate race. He was the DFL nominee in 1982 and lost to Republican Sen. Dave Durenberger.

Divorce a factor

Dayton candidly attributed his decision in part to the breakup of his second marriage and the fact that both his sons _ ages 19 and 16 _ are almost grown.

"To be honest, for the last year I've been trying to save my marriage. I was unsuccessful. If I had been successful, I'd be living in Goodhue County [where he and his ex-wife had a farm], instead of Minneapolis, and certainly not campaigning for an office that would take me to Washington."

Dayton married Janice Haarstick in 1996, and their divorce recently became final.

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The state's political establishment was completely surprised and mystified by Dayton's arrival.

"This is getting weird," said Steve Schier, a political science professor at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn. "It just further crowds the field and muddies the prospects of all the candidates, and makes the whole race almost baffling in its complexity."

"It's kind of a shock to everybody" said Mark Sump, consultant to candidate Rebecca Yanisch, a former head of the Minneapolis Community Development Agency and the only woman in the DFL field. "He never made any noise about it, but we welcome it. One more man in the race works just fine."

Dayton's late entry was described as "bizarre" by Bob Decheine, campaign manager for Mike Ciresi, who until Dayton was the only candidate with a large personal fortune.

"He's been embarrassed rather badly" in two of his three statewide campaigns, Decheine said.

Dayton acknowledged that he was disappointed by his fourth-place finish in the 1998 DFL primary. However, he noted that he was closely bunched with two other candidates _ DFL endorsee Mike Freeman and state Sen. Doug Johnson _ all of whom finished far behind primary winner Hubert Humphrey III.

Humphrey prevailed because of his "platinum political name," Dayton said, something none of the other candidates have.

Bridges burned

Over the past two decades, Dayton has been one of the largest contributors to the DFL Party and its candidates, often giving hundreds of thousands of dollars in an election cycle.

He presumably has friends in the party and admirers in the electorate, but he also has burned bridges in recent years.

After initially seeking the DFL Party endorsement for the 1998 election, Dayton unexpectedly abandoned an endorsement strategy and upbraided the party and its interest groups for demanding purity on issues and policies.

He said he won't pursue an endorsement strategy this time and plans to run in the September primary.

His campaign in 1998 was marked by staff upheaval and complaints that he was too demanding a boss and unable to delegate responsibility.

No aides or supporters were present for Dayton's Monday announcement, but he said he has plenty of time to organize his campaign before the September primary.

Another of his opponents, University of Minnesota physician Steve Miles, said Dayton's presence won't affect the strategy of the candidates who are seeking and abiding by party endorsement.

"One of the things he's demonstrated is that you can spend vast amounts of money and lose," Miles said, observing that Dayton "spent \$1.3 million in 1998 to come up with 18 percent of the vote. . . . He has no political base and appears to be running because he has nothing else to do. He should get a hobby."

With Dayton's presence, there could be as many as three candidates challenging the DFL Party endorsee, which might have the effect of strengthening the endorsee. Typically, the party faithful and interest groups including labor unions coalesce around the endorsed candidate, and the more challengers there are, the stronger the endorsee becomes. Ciresi and Yanisch, although they will seek the endorsement, have said they will take their campaigns to a primary.

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Dayton said that he is comfortable running a maverick outsider's campaign and that lessons should be learned from Gov. Jesse Ventura's victory.

Other DFL candidates include state Sens. Jerry Janezich of Chisholm and Steve Kelley of Hopkins, and former U.S. Attorney David Lillehaug. Two frequent candidates for higher office, former Minneapolis City Council Member Dick Franson, and Ole Savior, a Minneapolis artist, also are running.

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