

# Post-Bulletin

## Democrats woo voters at speed-dating event

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By [Heather J. Carlson](#)  
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Ten Democrats with their eyes on the governor's mansion traveled to Rochester Wednesday night eager to woo potential voters.

As the courting started, it soon became clear that voters have high expectations when it comes to picking a candidate. Rochester resident Dennis Siemsen summed up a question on the minds of many local DFLers -- "What is it going to take to elect a Democrat?"

It has been nearly 19 years since the last DFL Gov. Rudy Perpich left the office. As such, voters peppered the candidates with questions about how they would appeal to voters and fend off Republican attacks. They also sought detailed answers to questions on a wide range of topics, including health care, education, taxes and job creation.

The Democrats chose an unusual format for the event, basing it on the idea of "speed dating." Groups of roughly 10 voters rotated among the candidates, spending 13 minutes at each station. Prizes were handed out to those with the most "dates."

Olmsted County DFL Chair Lynn Wilson said she wanted to give voters a chance to really talk with the candidates -- something that is hard to do at traditional forums and debates.

"I wanted to introduce it in a way that would not only be informative but fun," Wilson said.

The candidates joining in were House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher of Minneapolis, state Sen. Tom Bakk of Cook, former U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton of Minneapolis, former Minority Leader Matt Entenza of St. Paul, Ramsey County Attorney Susan Gaertner of St. Paul, former state Sen. Steve Kelley of Hopkins, Sen. John Marty of Roseville, state Rep. Tom Rukavina of Virginia, Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak and state Rep. Paul Thissen of Minneapolis.

Speaking to a group of voters seated in a circle, Kelliher touted her efforts to help develop a renewable energy standard and get more funding for transportation. She also talked about investing in health care and education. That led Siemsen to ask how she planned to pay for it. Anderson said she supports raising taxes on higher income Minnesotans. She said proposal last session would have raised taxes on a family with a joint income of \$300,000 about \$9 a month.

"I think Minnesota is worth it," she said.

A group of voters clustered around Rybak fired off questions about mass transit. The Minneapolis mayor said he has been a "tireless supporter" of mass transit and said he was concerned when he heard about proposed high-speed rail routes that did not include Rochester.

"Rochester must be connected to the rail," he said.

Rukavina focused on talking about jobs. He said he supports manufacturing and wants to see more of the material mined in Minnesota used to manufacture other products in the state.

Gaertner told voters she would be willing to raise taxes to help fund the state's priorities. That drew a question from voter Jim Dahling about how she would avoid being labeled by the GOP as "a St. Paulite who wants to come out and raise taxes."

She responded saying that she has roots in greater Minnesota through her family and that her background as a prosecutor makes her appealing to swing voters.

**"People trust prosecutors. Just look at Amy Klobuchar," she said.**

**After four rounds, voters were given "ladies and gentlemen's' choice" as to which candidate they wanted to hear from. Big crowds migrated to Dayton and Rybak with Kelliher and Thissen coming in close behind.**

**Ultimately, Wilson said the event had one key goal.**

**"This is about making the best DFL gubernatorial candidate possible."**

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