

MPR News | Minnesota Now U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar has officially announced her run for Minnesota governor 01KG5P1DKE51BFXZ6GJRECXKSP

EMILY REESE: After much anticipation that she would run, US Senator Amy Klobuchar is now a candidate for Minnesota governor. The race was thrown up in the air after the sudden exit of Governor Tim Walz in early January. Klobuchar has a clear shot to the fall ballot on the DFL side while Republicans sort through a crowded field.

Here to tell us more about today's announcement is reporter Ellie Roth in studio. Hi, Ellie.

ELLIE ROTH: Hey, Emily.

EMILY REESE: So why was Amy Klobuchar's decision so closely watched?

ELLIE ROTH: So when Tim Walz abandoned his run, it left his party without an incumbency advantage and had the potential to create a pretty messy situation on the DFL side. Klobuchar puts that all to rest. She is known as a proven vote-getter and is a fundraising political powerhouse.

She's won all four of her re-election campaigns by double digits. Most recently, she was re-elected in 2024. Other Democrats with higher office ambitions actually avoided entering the race on the expectation that Klobuchar would make the leap. And even some Republicans acknowledge that her candidacy could complicate their chances of retaking an office they haven't held since 2010.

EMILY REESE: What issues is she leaning into?

ELLIE ROTH: In her announcement today, she didn't really get into specifics on policies but focused on themes of affordability, education, and the cost of health care. And like any person running for office in Minnesota this year, Emily, Klobuchar also talked about how she would combat fraud in the state. She also really leaned into the recent federal immigration operation in Minnesota that resulted in the killings of Renée Macklin Good and Alex Pretti. Here's what she had to say in that video.

AMY KLOBUCHAR: We cannot sugarcoat how hard this is. But in these moments of enormous difficulty, we find strength in our Minnesota values of hard work, freedom, and simple decency and goodwill. These times call for leaders who can stand up and not be rubber stamps of this administration but who are also willing to find common ground and fix things in our state.

ELLIE ROTH: So speaking directly to current events, Klobuchar says she, quote, "wants ICE and its abusive tactics out of the state we love."

EMILY REESE: What are Republicans saying about Klobuchar?

ELLIE ROTH: Republicans are trying to paint her as basically representing a Walz third term and also as a career politician. Some Republican candidates have called on her to resign from the Senate. Klobuchar is able to keep her job in the Senate while she campaigns for governor.

In a statement, Republican House Speaker Lisa Demuth, who is running for governor as well, said Amy Klobuchar did, quote, "nothing" when it came to combating fraud in the state. She and businessman Kendall Qualls-- excuse me-- another top GOP contender, say Klobuchar has been a rubber stamp-- there's that word again-- for Walz. Qualls went so far as to call Klobuchar Tim Walz 2.0.

EMILY REESE: It all brings up the question, who will Klobuchar be running against?

ELLIE ROTH: Like I said, other well-known Democrats did not enter the race for governor based on the assumption that Klobuchar would throw her hat in the ring. There are a few minor candidates that have filed as Democrats, but she's basically running unopposed.

On the other side, though, there is a pretty crowded field that includes House Speaker Lisa Demuth, State Representative Kristin Robbins, and CEO of My Pillow Mike Lindell. Klobuchar also wasn't the only governor's race shakeup news this week. On Monday, Attorney Chris Madel ended his Republican campaign, attributing it to the ongoing ICE crackdown in Minnesota that has led to the deaths of two civilian observers.

In a video, Madel said the operation had gone too far and people are living in fear. He called it, quote, an "unmitigated disaster." So topics of immigration and the role of the federal government will most likely be big themes in this year's race.

EMILY REESE: Oh, absolutely. So what's the next step?

ELLIE ROTH: Precinct caucuses. That's the first step in the party-endorsement process. Those are on February 3. And that starts the March to late-May party-endorsing conventions. As we've said, Klobuchar doesn't seem likely to face much opposition within her party.

But Republicans could be elbowing each other well into the summer and might need that August primary to determine their nominee. One more note, Emily. If Klobuchar wins, Minnesota would have two new US senators next year because of Tina Smith's retirement.

A big contest is shaping up there. Klobuchar could have a role in deciding who would fill her own seat, but that's a ways down the road.

EMILY REESE: Thank you, Ellie.

ELLIE ROTH: You're welcome.

EMILY REESE: Reporter Ellie Roth.