

DFL primary debate planned at MSU

By Mark Fischenich

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MANKATO — House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher, former U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton and former House Democratic leader Matt Entenza will be in Mankato Friday night, facing off in a debate just 11 days before voters will decide which of the three will advance to the general election.

Debate Minnesota, a nonpartisan organization that has sponsored debates since the 2006 election, typically doesn't do primary election debates, director Mary Underwood Heller said.

The closely contested three-way race for the DFL nomination changed that this year, and Minnesota State University is the beneficiary. The face-off begins at 7 p.m. at Ostrander Auditorium. It's free and open to the public.

Unlike many candidate forums where participants answer questions but often don't interact much, Debate Minnesota sponsors genuine debates. Rather than ending after an hour, the organization's debates go 90 minutes and give candidates the chance to respond to their opponents' answers.

The model was the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates, Heller said.

With one important exception.

"Ours don't go on for days like theirs did," Heller said.

The Debate Minnesota events have proven to be a draw in Mankato in previous elections. Debate Minnesota has twice sponsored 1st District congressional debates here — between Democrat Tim Walz and Republican

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DEBATE: Pete Steiner one of the moderators

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Gil Gutknecht in 2006 and between Walz and Republican challenger Brian Davis in 2008 — that each attracted crowds of about 400.

Those crowds, along with a new partnership with the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, played a role in bringing Friday's DFL primary debate to MSU.

"We've always felt welcomed in Mankato," she said. "It seems like the community there is very engaged." KTOE radio News Director Pete Steiner and veteran St. Paul Pioneer Press political reporter and columnist Jim Ragsdale will serve as moderators.

Volunteers from the Minnesota State University Student Association will be filling many other roles, including as greeters and time keepers.

Audience members will have an opportunity to submit questions for the candidates, as well.

The primary election is Aug. 10.

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