

Sen. Omar Fateh to challenge Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey

The first Somali American to serve in the state Senate, Fateh now wants to become mayor of Minneapolis.

[By Deena Winter](#)

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Omar Fateh was the first Somali American elected to serve in the state Senate and is believed to be the first such state senator in the United States.

He also became one of the few self-identified democratic socialists in the state Legislature.

Now, he has set his sights on a new goal: Mayor of Minneapolis.

Fateh, 34, recently told the Minnesota Star Tribune he's running for mayor because he loves the city, and as an organizer and senator he's seen people work hard every day for change. But, he said, they're not getting the same effort, partnership and leadership from [Mayor Jacob Frey, who has said he plans to run for re-election](#).

"I've seen what we can accomplish when we have an executive that partners and works with the legislative body," Fateh said, referring to Gov. Tim Walz. "We've accomplished a lot of great things with the trifecta in the last biennium."

By contrast, he said, City Hall seems prone to "fighting and gridlock" that's more akin to "divided government, which is a shame."

The Minneapolis City Council has 13 Democrats or democratic socialists, with all but one endorsed by the city's Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, but the council's majority is often at odds with Frey.

"Everyone in City Hall is a Democrat; there's no reason why we can't be getting things done," Fateh said.

Frey has blamed some council members for taking hasty action without consulting or ignoring his administration's experts, resulting in numerous vetoes.

The mayor and all 13 council seats are up for election next year.

The Rev. DeWayne Davis, lead minister of Plymouth Congregational Church, is running for mayor and Council Member Emily Koski has said she's strongly considering a run.

Fateh touts bipartisan bills

Fateh is proud of legislation he spearheaded, including tuition-free college for some, higher wages for rideshare drivers, and a compromise that saved Minneapolis' 2040 comprehensive plan, which had been blocked by lawsuits.

Fateh is a progressive who said he built a coalition of working class people who care about environmental justice, housing justice and immigrants' rights, while working across the aisle on legislation while the DFL was in the minority in the Senate during his first term.

He worked with Republican Sen. Julie Rosen of Fairmont to legalize fentanyl testing strips, and about a year later, [over 100,000 fentanyl testing strips had been distributed to reduce opioid overdoses.](#)

He's most proud of bipartisan legislation: Last year, [Walz signed a bill making public college free for students whose families make less than \\$80,000 annually.](#)

Fateh introduced legislation to increase Uber and Lyft drivers' wages, and pressured DFL leaders to keep it alive during the waning days of the 2023 session. At the time, the DFL had a one-seat majority in the Senate, so every vote was crucial.

After the bill passed, drivers carried him around on their shoulders through the Capitol, setting the scene for an iconic photo. But Walz vetoed the bill. Instead, he created a task force to come up with legislation for the 2024 session.

Fateh was appointed to the task force but withdrew, never attending a meeting. In 2024, Fateh again leveraged the DFL's one-seat margin on the issue in the Legislature's final days — taking it so far as to [go missing from the Senate for a spell, shutting down the entire chamber](#) until an agreement was at hand. Lawmakers went on to pass — and Walz signed — [legislation setting pay minimums and giving drivers new insurance protections.](#)

Those minimum wages went into effect Sunday.

Fateh said he will resign his Senate seat if elected mayor.

Fateh got his start in politics by beating a powerful incumbent

Fateh is the son of Somali immigrants: His father immigrated to America in 1963, and ended up in Bozeman, Mont. His mother came in the 1970s. Fateh was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Virginia, spending summers in Minneapolis.

He ran unsuccessfully for a Virginia school board in 2015, and moved to Minnesota later that year.

Two years after an unsuccessful 2018 House race for District 62A, he announced plans to challenge powerful incumbent Sen. Jeff Hayden in the DFL primary in District 62 in south Minneapolis. He upset Hayden and nabbed the DFL endorsement, and he went on to handily defeat Hayden in the primary, making him a shoo-in for the general election in the DFL-dominated district.

Party endorsing conventions were held online that year due to the pandemic, and at the time, [Hayden raised the specter of voter fraud](#), questioning whether some voters lived in the district and calling the process “flawed.”

Two years later, Fateh’s brother-in-law and campaign volunteer was convicted of lying to a grand jury about returning absentee ballots for voters during the 2020 primary election. The charges sprang out of a wider federal investigation into misuse of the “agent delivery” process, which allows people to deliver ballots to election offices for voters with health problems or disabilities.

[Fateh said at the time that his campaign had always been committed to upholding election laws](#) and that he was “troubled” by the conviction.

A Senate ethics committee looked into that and other ethics complaints against Fateh in 2022 but voted to dismiss the complaint because it found no evidence Fateh knew about mishandled absentee ballots. His former legislative aide, Dawson Kimyon, declined to answer most of the committee’s questions, invoking his Fifth Amendment right not to incriminate himself.