



## **Evan Bayh is running for Senate, significantly boosting Democrats' odds of retaking it**

*He's a throwback to a much more conservative Democratic Party*

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In news that could have big implications for Democrats' efforts to regain the Senate, former two-term Indiana senator and two-term Indiana governor Evan Bayh will run to take back the seat in the chamber he gave up six years ago, CNN reports.

Bayh will replace the current Democratic nominee, former Rep, Baron Hill, who will reportedly drop out of the race to clear the way for Bayh to face the Republican nominee, Rep. Todd Young, in the general election. The current occupant of the seat, Sen. Dan Coats (R), is retiring.

Since Bayh is widely considered a much stronger candidate than Hill, his announcement could turn this race from a long shot for Democrats into a seriously competitive contest. And that could significantly improve the party's odds of retaking the chamber.

Bayh, who was the runner-up to become Barack Obama's vice presidential nominee in 2008, shocked Democrats by dropping out of his 2010 Senate reelection at the last minute. He then had to be replaced on the ballot by another candidate, but Coats, who had held Bayh's seat before him, won easily in that Republican landslide year.

And Bayh's choices post-retirement attracted considerable criticism, as he became a partner at the lobbying firm McGuire Woods — his current profile brags he helps companies "whose business goals are impacted by the actions of Congress" — and joined the private equity firm Apollo Global Management.

While that could hurt his comeback bid, Bayh has always been a hugely effective fundraiser, and he still has \$9.2 million left in his Senate campaign account from 2010. That's all immediately available for him to use, and it could free up national Democratic money to be spent on other races.

## The rise and fall of Evan Bayh

Bayh, at age 60, has been a major national figure in Democratic politics for decades. His father, Birch Bayh, held this same Senate seat for three terms and was one of the most influential senators of his generation, authoring the 25th and 26th amendments to the Constitution (making him the only non-Founding Father to write multiple amendments), shepherding the Equal Rights Amendment through Congress, writing Title IX to expand women's access to higher education, and running in the 1976 Democratic presidential primaries as a more liberal alternative to Jimmy Carter.

After Birch Bayh lost the 1980 election to a conservative upstart named Dan Quayle, his son Evan opted to style himself as a more centrist New Democrat. After a short stint as Indiana's secretary of state, he was elected governor in 1988 at age 33. In office, he became known for passing massive tax cuts, gaining considerable praise from conservative commentators. The Cato Institute's Stephen Moore and Dean Stansel praised him in 1996 as "far more pro-business and pro-taxpayer than the national Democratic Party" and "a fiscally conservative Democrat in his record, not just his rhetoric."

Bayh's moderate record and massive popularity made him a rising star nationally, and he keynoted the 1996 Democratic National Convention.

Two years after retiring as governor he joined the Senate by winning his father's old seat in 1998 in a landslide, and he easily won reelection six years later. He distinguished himself as one of the most conservative Democrats in the Senate, and was one of only three to vote for the 2003 round of Bush tax cuts for investment income.

He was particularly right-wing on national security issues. He not only voted for the Iraq War but co-sponsored the resolution authorizing it, and served as an honorary co-chair of the neoconservative Committee to Liberate Iraq alongside John McCain and Joe Lieberman. As late as 2007, he voted against the Feingold Amendment to effect a speedy withdrawal from Iraq, which both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton voted for.

Bayh nearly ran for president in 2008, starting an exploratory committee and hiring future key Obama staffers like Anita Dunn and Dan Pfeiffer, before dropping out and endorsing Clinton. And after Clinton lost the primaries, Bayh was extensively vetted to be Obama's running mate. In his memoirs, campaign manager David Plouffe quotes Obama as saying, "It's a coin toss now between Bayh and Biden."

But the Obama campaign ultimately decided Bayh was too dull. "He presented himself more like an MBA interviewing for a senior management position at Whirlpool," David Axelrod later wrote.

In his final two years in the Senate, Bayh was a cautious supporter of Obama's agenda. He ultimately voted for the stimulus, Obamacare, and Dodd-Frank, though he occasionally threatened to filibuster Obamacare if his demands weren't met and was very lukewarm, at best, about cap-and-trade legislation.

For a brief moment after he announced his retirement, Bayh became a compelling, incisive commentator on the state of Congress, calling for comprehensive campaign finance reform and a reduction in the filibuster threshold from 60 to 55, among other reforms. "We've got good people trapped in a dysfunctional system," he said in an interview. "I think checks and balances are important, but we need to reform the system to make action more possible than it currently is."

But his decision to immediately cash out destroyed much of that goodwill. As Ezra Klein wrote at the time, "It's as if he's systematically ticking off every poison he identified in the body politic and rushing to dump more of it into the water supply."

The last time Democrats were in the majority in the Senate, the kind of filibuster reforms Bayh championed late in his tenure started to gain traction. If he returns to the chamber, he could have a chance to restore the goodwill he squandered by pushing for even deeper reforms to make Congress run smoothly.