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## W.Va. gov says he'll run for Byrd's US Senate seat

By LAWRENCE MESSINA (AP) – 40 minutes ago

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Gov. Joe Manchin, a centrist Democrat who received national attention earlier this year for his handling of a coal mine disaster that killed 29 workers, announced Tuesday that he will run for the late Robert C. Byrd's U.S. Senate seat.

Manchin's announcement ended speculation on whether the popular Democratic governor would swap the 26 months that would remain in his second term for a chance to serve a similar amount of time left in Byrd's term.

The 62-year-old Manchin's national profile has steadily increased since the former state lawmaker captured the governor's office in 2004 after a term as secretary of state. News audiences around the country saw him comfort victims' families and rally for improved safety and rescue measures following West Virginia coal mining disasters in 2006 and again this year at the Upper Big Branch mine.

"If I am so fortunate and honored to have the support of the people of West Virginia, I can't fill his shoes," Manchin said of Byrd. "I can only hope to follow his footsteps and serve the people of West Virginia as best I can."

The governor's announcement came after he and legislative leaders resolved their differences over the succession process. The legislation, approved late Monday, calls for an Aug. 28 primary and Nov. 2 general election for the seat. It also calls for a four-day candidate filing period, which started Tuesday.

Republicans view their top prospect as Rep. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va. State GOP lawmakers won an amendment in the legislation that allows her to seek Byrd's seat without abandoning her bid for a sixth U.S. House term.

The Nov. 2 winner would take that month over from Carte Goodwin, Manchin's temporary appointee to the seat. The 36-year-old former chief counsel takes his oath of office Tuesday.

Manchin briefed his cabinet and staff during a closed-door meeting in advance of his morning announcement.

Manchin has won praise from such groups as the Cato Institute for his conservative approach to state finances and his push for gradual tax cuts benefiting both businesses and consumers.

West Virginia has so far avoided the painful state layoffs, tax hikes and reduced government services suffered in many other states amid the recession and recovery.

Manchin carried all 55 counties in 2008 when he was elected to a second term as governor, winning nearly 70 percent of the vote.

Earlier this month, Manchin became the chairman of the National Governors Association for a one-year term.

Groups ranging from the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce to the state AFL-CIO had urged Manchin to appoint himself to the seat in the wake of Byrd's death.

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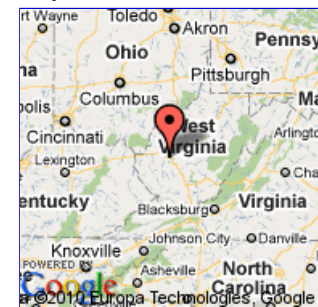
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