

African-American Muslim Aims to Lead Democratic Party

President-elect Donald Trump's victory last week all but fractured the Democratic Party, leaving it in chaos as it prepares to select a new national party chair.

As of Monday afternoon, more than one man wants the job.

U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) announced Monday afternoon he was officially running for party chairman. He now joins former DNC chair Howard Dean, who announced his intention to run last week.

Ellison would be the convergence of many firsts for the party. For starters, while he is deeply tied to the far-left wing of the party, he is also an African-American Muslim. And, he also has very deep ties to the Nation of Islam, the militant Islamic group led by Louis Farrakhan.

He's already received the backing of a number of key Democrats: U.S. Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) have all declared their support. Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.), co-chairman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, has also endorsed his candidacy.

"This election cycle, we did not motivate enough people to the ballot box," he said in his announcement. "We must champion the challenges of working families and give voters a reason to show up at the polls in 2018 and beyond."

"I love the donors and we thank them, but it has to be that the guys in the barber shop, the lady at the diner, the folks who are worried about whether that plant is going to close, they've got to be our focus," he told ABC News' "This Week" program on Sunday.

Dean, the former governor of Vermont, was DNC chairman from 2005 to 2009, when he was succeeded by Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.). He said he's not going to "push people out of the way" to get the job, though, in an interview with MSNBC's "Morning Joe" program.

"When I started, when my team started, we didn't have the House, the Senate or the presidency," he said. "When we left four years later, we had the House, the Senate and the presidency.

"So you know, I think I know how to do this. But you know, this is not something—I've already done this once. This is not something I have to do. This is not something I'm going to push people out of the way for."

Dean has argued since offering to make a return to the DNC that being party chairman is not a part-time job anymore.

"The House and Senate leadership are going to have to deliver the economic message," he said Monday. "The DNC chair can do that. I think that's important. But it's important for the policy leaders to do that.

"What the DNC is about is mechanics. It is about being everywhere. It's about training people up. It's about having an adequate tech system, which we no longer apparently have. And it's about enfranchising people in the states to make their own decisions about who runs instead of having the DCCC or the DSCC pick candidates who can fund their own campaigns and then can't win because they can't get the message across. That is the problem with the Democratic Party."

Former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley—whose 2016 presidential campaign fizzled out nearly from the start—has also said he's considering a run for party chair.