

For Minnesota Democrats, Keillor a worthy companion

AUSTIN, Minn. (AP) – Garrison Keillor has turned into an above-average fund-raiser for Democrats.

DFL officials said Keillor has raised more than \$250,000 through personal appearances on behalf of candidates, along with generating plenty of excitement and enthusiasm for the party.

“This election is for the soul of our country,” Keillor told an Austin audience of 350 during a recent fundraiser for DFLer Leigh Pomeroy, who is in an uphill battle to unseat 1st District Rep. Gil Gutknecht in southern Minnesota.

Pomeroy has taken plenty of dusty road trips in the family minivan, spent hot afternoons working small-town parades and long hours on the phone drumming up support. But last week at Austin’s Paramount Theater, Pomeroy played to a packed house, pulled in \$13,000 in contributions and basked in the media spotlight, all thanks to Keillor and his “Prairie Home Companion” radio fame. The fund-raising is a followup to the release of Keillor’s defiantly partisan book “Homegrown Democrat.”



Garrison Keillor

“Obviously, it helps. A lot,” said Pomeroy, who’s been a Keillor fan for years but had never met him. “It’s amazing that he’s doing this.”

Republicans are not amazed, or amused. “His tone has become very vitriolic and very partisan,” said Randy Wanke, spokesman for the Republican Party of Minnesota.

“Minnesotans don’t react well to that, especially coming from someone they’ve always perceived to be this homespun, folksy Minnesotan.”

Although many celebrities are politically active, including Minnesota humorist and talk show host Al Franken, it’s unusual to see one of

Keillor’s stature involved so intensely in so many individual campaigns, said Carleton College political science Professor Steven Schier.

“I really do think it’s a unique situation, though the political impact remains to be identified,” he said.

So far, the man from Lake Wobegon has taken his homespun wit on the road for Pomeroy, Rep. Betty McCollum and a handful of Minnesota legislative candidates, and the DFL Party itself.