

October13 2004

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30980-2004Oct13_2.html

https://www.legistorm.com/member/31/Sen_Mark_Dayton.html

<http://www.inforum.com/news/3926703-dayton-says-rumors-hell-leave-office-early-are-just-insulting>

CORRECTION TO THIS ARTICLE

An Oct. 14 article incorrectly referred to Sen. Mark Dayton (D) as Minnesota's freshman senator and to Sen. Norm Coleman (R) as the state's senior senator. Dayton was elected in 2000; Coleman, in 2002.

Senator Defends Shutting Hill Office

"Since I assume Senator Dayton won't feel safe any time soon, I suggest that you find Senator Dayton permanent space off Capitol Hill and that you allocate his Russell Office Space to me," Sessions wrote to Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.).

Downstairs in the cafeteria, junior staff members working for Republicans wondered aloud whether Dayton was trying to come up with a work excuse that would pay for plane tickets home for his employees. There was snickering about the rest of Dayton's staff hiding in an "undisclosed location," somewhere in the city.

In the bathrooms and tunnels of the Capitol complex, cashiers and janitorial employees had heard about the lone senator who abandoned his offices.

"It's kind of scary to me that he might know something others don't," said Thomas Jordan, 45, a general laborer who has

worked on the Senate side for a year after 10 years on the House side. "We just had a general meeting today -- we're supposed to have one every other Wednesday. . . . One of the staffers happened to bring it up -- that one of the senators had gotten a little paranoid."

Democratic staff members dismissed the political speculation as ridiculous but acknowledged that they were equally baffled. "We don't have the same level of concern here," one staff member said. "If you're going to attack the Capitol complex, you'd pretty much want to do it when Congress is here."

Even the Senate sergeant-at-arms, William H. Pickle, joked to a reporter that the CIA called and "wondered what information we had that they didn't have."

At a meeting attended by more than 100 senior Hill staffers, Pickle addressed the concerns raised by Dayton's decision. He said he reassured those in attendance, telling them there was "no specific threat" even though the Capitol complex is known to be a potential target for terrorists.

Pickle said the presentation by the CIA-FBI joint agency provided "pretty sobering intelligence" of a possible terror attack on the United States before the Nov. 2 election. But he said intelligence officials last week provided a new report that "somewhat diminished the information that we previously received" while affirming the threat was "still serious."

Dayton "chose to use an abundance of caution, and that's within his prerogative," Pickle said.

Jack Danielson, Dayton's chief of staff, attended Pickle's session. He said he explained Dayton's reasoning and apologized for any "concern and anxiety."

But the apology did nothing to placate Norton, the District's nonvoting delegate to Congress and a member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security.

"He's damaged us. He's unnecessarily panicked people across the United States," said Norton, who has often questioned the federal government's security moves in the capital. "Now we have a member of Congress who steps out and says, 'I'm going to tell you something the rest of Congress won't tell you.' That's unfair to the entire security network that is in constant communication about this place."

The Minnesota delegation, like others, was deluged with phone calls.

"I can't tell you how many phone calls flooded our office, from people who were going to come to Washington, D.C., and are now worried about whether they should visit," said Erich Mische, chief of staff for Coleman. "It was a very reckless statement and action. There is no information available that suggests that people should do anything other than visit the nation's capital."

Staff writers Dan Eggen, Spencer S. Hsu, Sari Horwitz, John Mintz and Lori Montgomery contributed to this report.