

## TRIBUTE TO PAUL WELLSTONE

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*Governor Mark Dayton speech (text)*

I had crossed paths with Paul Wellstone before; but the first time I really encountered him was at the DFL State Convention in June of 1982. For the previous year-and-a-half, I had been campaigning for the party's endorsement for the US Senate seat held by incumbent Republican Senator Dave Durenberger.

I was basically unopposed for that endorsement at the convention.

For the last six of those months, DFL events were also attended by a very earnest young man, who wanted the endorsement to run against a well-entrenched Republican State Auditor, Arne Carlson.

He, too, was unopposed for endorsement -- until the first morning of that three-day convention -- when, a young activist, named Paul Wellstone, announced his candidacy for State Auditor.

By the last morning, after two days of long endorsement battles and two nights of very late parties, delegates were exhausted, hung over, and ready to either head home or find the nearest bar.

At last, only the endorsement for State Auditor stood between the delegates and the doors. The two candidates addressed the convention. The very earnest young man spoke first and gave a very earnest description of the Auditor's responsibilities. He reminded everyone that the definition of an auditor is a bank teller without the charisma.

Then Paul spoke. AHHHH! Nuclear Disarmament! AHHH! Save the Rain Forest! AHHHH! Social and Economic Justice!

The convention went wild. The fact that Paul's issues had nothing to do with the job of State Auditor meant nothing to DFLers, who had just heard the most electrifying speech in their lives. A motion was made for a voice vote on the endorsement, and Paul won overwhelmingly.

So, Paul and I spent a lot of time together on the campaign trail for the next five months. Unfortunately, Minnesota voters were not quite as taken with our candidacies as were the DFL delegates.

Fortunately, however, Rudy Perpich was elected Governor that year, avenging his defeat four years before. He appointed me Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Energy and Economic Development.

And, a few months later, he asked Paul to become his Senior Advisor on energy policy.

Paul worked out of our DEED headquarters, in an office we created for him next to my terrific Deputy, Connie Lewis, and myself. Late afternoons, we put our feet up on somebody's desk and solved the problems of the world.

That's where Paul and I became real friends. We discovered that, despite our different backgrounds, we agreed on most issues. And we both wanted another chance to be elected and make a difference.

In 1990, we switched strategies. Paul ran for the US Senate, and I ran for State Auditor.

Paul proceeded, as you know, to pull off the most extraordinary, unbelievable upset anywhere in my political lifetime.

He defeated a very well-funded Republican incumbent, Rudy Boschwitz. Trailing by over 40 points in polls less than two months before the election, Paul steadily won the hearts, minds, and votes of more and more and more Minnesotans.

Yet, despite a terrific campaign with a phenomenal candidate, he entered the final weekend before the election trailing by several points in published polls.

And Boschwitz had just launched a vicious, very personal attack on Paul and his family.

The faces of Paul, Sheila, and their daughter, Marsha, were grim, as our DFL ticket boarded a bus for our final statewide tour. Now I should say this was not the green bus –this was a bus that got more than five miles a gallon and didn't break down every hour. It was a tense time. Paul was

outraged at Boschwitz's despicable attack and frustrated that his campaign had no money to match his opponent's closing media blitz.

What followed was a most amazing ending to this most incredible campaign. At our bus stops, Paul began receiving reports that Boschwitz's despicable tactics were backfiring. Minnesotans were deeply offended. Then Vice President Mondale stepped forward and condemned the attack as "Un-Minnesotan." Two days later, the voters agreed, and Paul won election to the United States Senate in the most unlikely, unbelievable, and unforgettable upset anyone could remember.

Something else important happened on that election night. Minnesotans' decisive rejection of his opponents' tactics, and their enthusiastic embrace of Paul, gave him faith in voters' sound values and good judgment that he would rely upon throughout his Senate career.

This faith enabled him to take principled positions, because he knew they were right, not because he thought they might be popular.

That special bond between Paul and the people he represented was unbreakable through the end of his career, and his life. It continues to this day and beyond.

For the next ten years, I knew . . . as did everyone who shared Paul's vision for a new and better world . . . that he was an outstanding United States Senator and a rising national leader. But it was not until Paul and I shared his last two years in the Senate, that I fully appreciated his importance and his influence.

Paul was known as the conscience of the Senate -- when most of the Senate preferred to act without one. He was always principled, always courageous, always eloquent, and therefore usually in the minority.

That minority, however, defined what the Senate wasn't, just as it also defined who Paul was.

He was, hands down, the Senate's best orator, probably one of the greatest of all time.

Despite his seniority, he had chosen a desk located in the back row of the Chamber and right next to an aisle. Its microphone had an unusually long cord, which had been installed by the Senate's previous oratorical star, Dale Bumpers.

That combination gave Paul the freedom to move around and fully express himself, when he spoke.

Much of a Senator's effectiveness depends upon his or her powers of persuasion.

The words spoken in the Senate Chamber, before colleagues and, on average, over one million C-SPAN viewers, are a principal means of that persuasion. No one was more persuasive on the Senate floor than Paul.

In addition, he was well-liked and respected by his fellow Senators, even the ones who usually disagreed with him – of whom, there were a few.

In Minnesota, Paul's political stature grew ever taller, and his light shone brighter and brighter. Someone once said of an abrasive Minnesota politician, "Before you meet him, you instinctively dislike him. But after you really get to know him . . . you detest him."

With Paul, the opposite occurred. The more Minnesotans got to know him, the better they liked him. Who else could have said, "I'm here to represent the little fellers, not the Rockefellers;" yet receive steadfast support from Minnesota's only member of that family – and several of her relatives around the country?

Who else could have persuaded my Father and my Uncle, two staunch Republican businessmen, to vote for Paul in 1996 instead of a fellow Republican businessman? I don't even know if they ever voted for me!

Both said, in essence, "I don't always agree with him; but I trust that he is always standing up for what he believes is right."

Possessed with such unusual political courage, Paul was often frustrated with other politicians, who lacked it.

One afternoon, I found him on the Senate floor -- fuming. Now, when Paul was fuming, it was visible from a distance of about a mile. Which, at least, gave you time to brace yourself.

One of our Democratic colleagues had just informed him that she would not support his latest amendment.

She had reportedly said, "I'd like to help you, Paul; but that's a tough vote for me."

Paul was livid. "Is that supposed to make me feel better?" he asked me rhetorically. "To say: 'I'll be with you on the easy votes but not on the tough ones.'" There was no place for political cowardice with Paul.

From his courageous battles, Paul's reputation, as a remarkable progressive leader, grew nationwide. People throughout the country were urging him to run for President. Had he lived, who knows.

I personally believe, without any evidence, that he would have felt duty-bound to try. And I have no doubt that he would have been a far better presidential candidate in 2004, than the Democratic Senator who won the nomination – and lost only narrowly to President Bush.

But Paul did not achieve and sustain this stratospheric success by himself. He had terrific support from a very talented and dedicated staff, led in Minnesota first by Jeff Blodgett, who had also masterminded his winning campaign, then by Connie Lewis. In Washington, Kari Moe, another former student at Carleton, was his Chief of Staff.

I used to kid Paul that his real purpose in being a Carleton College professor was not imparting knowledge to his students, but rather identifying the best of them to recruit for his future campaigns and staffs.

Kari is now the Washington Chief of Staff for Representative Keith Ellison. Jeff is now running the Obama campaign in Minnesota. Connie is a senior officer with Planned Parenthood, Minnesota. As evident, the people Paul inspired were deeply committed -- not only to him, but also to the beliefs that they shared with him. And they have carried on, remarkably well.

His most important support was his family. At a time when every conservative politician talked incessantly about “family values,” Paul and his family lived them. Sheila and he were married for 33 years, before passing on.

He adored his three children: Dave, Marsha, and Mark. He was enormously proud of them and their accomplishments. Any contact with one of them, even a brief phone call, noticeably buoyed his spirits.

Then, of course, there was Sheila. The family’s Rock of Gibraltar. Paul’s best friend and closest confidant. The person everyone turned to in a crisis, be it personal or political.

Paul and Sheila’s devotion to each other, to their children, and to their entire family was exceptional for anyone . . . and exceptionally rare for a political couple.

Amazingly, the trials and tribulations of three intense Senate campaigns and twelve years in the cauldron of Washington, D.C., brought them closer together, not farther apart.

The ultimate test of Paul’s political courage and the final measure of his special standing with Minnesotans, occurred just days before his death, during the Senate’s vote on President Bush’s Iraq War Resolution.

The President was demanding that Congress surrender to him its exclusive authority, under the Constitution, to commit our nation to war. The Resolution gave him carte blanche to do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted to do it.

The political pressures were intense. Polls showed that large majorities of Minnesotans and other Americans supported the President, because they believed- mistakenly as it turned out- that they could trust him.

Those pressures fell especially hard on the Senators running for re-election, and facing their Election Day just two weeks after the vote.

Washington wisdom said that any Senator, who voted against the War Resolution, was assured of defeat.

At the time, polls showed Paul running neck and neck with his opponent, who, of course, had promised to support the President.

Just days before the climactic vote, which Senator Robert Byrd later said was the most important of the 17,000 votes he cast in the Senate, a harsh news story appeared. It quoted anonymous sources, who claimed that the Senate's Democratic leaders were trying to shelter Paul from a very hard, and possibly even fatal, decision.

We happened to have a Democratic caucus meeting that afternoon. Paul was as angry I had ever seen him. He was furious that unnamed political enemies were questioning his honesty and his integrity.

“If the people of Minnesota know anything about me,” he told our Caucus, “It’s that I don’t duck the tough issues; that always stand up for what I believe in; that I always do what I think is right; regardless of whether it’s popular in the moment or not.”

With that, he walked onto the Senate floor and gave one of his greatest speeches, explaining to Minnesotans and other Americans why he would vote against the Iraq War Resolution. He was one of 23 Senators who did so.

Shortly after that vote, I saw Paul for the last time. The Senate had just adjourned until after the upcoming elections. Paul, of course, was headed home to campaign in Minnesota. I was leaving on a week-long trip to visit NATO bases in Europe.

I assured him, however, that I would return to Minnesota in time to join him and his family on the final weekend’s bus tour, which had become a shared tradition in our campaigns.

Paul looked more upbeat and relaxed, than I had seen him in a very long time. He told me that he had just received the results of his first poll taken after the Iraq War vote. He had jumped ahead by 6 points.

He was ecstatic. Not only was he then confident he would win re-election, but also his faith in Minnesotans was reaffirmed. He had their support. The bond was unbroken.

There is no consolation for me in what followed, except for my belief that Paul boarded the plane that fateful morning knowing he would be re-elected to the United States Senate.

I'd like to close with a story, which took place just a few weeks before that terrible disaster. It was a Monday afternoon in September, 2002.

The Senate was not in session that day; so the Chamber was empty, except for a few staff, when I happened to walk into it. There I came upon Paul and Marsha's young son, Josh. They were on a Grandpa-Grandson outing.

Because the Senate was adjourned, Paul could take Josh onto the floor, where I joined them. "Here's Grandpa's desk," Paul said to Josh. "And here's where Ted Kennedy sits."

Josh interrupted. Plaintively, he asked, "Grandpa, I thought you said we were going somewhere."

His Grandfather looked at him even more plaintively. "Well, this IS somewhere."

Josh was too young to understand, but the United States Senate surely IS somewhere; and his Grandfather was there, a greatly respected, highly effective United States Senator, and a rising national leader.

I don't know whether Paul, when he was young, ever imagined he might attain such a pinnacle of political success. I doubt that anyone else did.

To reach this Somewhere, he overcame odds as monumental as winning a national lottery. He succeeded, however, not by luck, but rather through his own political brilliance, his tireless determination, and his ability to make very special connections with many, many people.

Paul stood out in the Senate. He was more like Senators from earlier eras, who attained their offices by the scope of their accomplishments, not the size of their campaign accounts.

He was more talented, eloquent, politically astute, and principled than most of his colleagues.

Too many of whom wanted to be in the Senate for what it could do for them. Paul wanted to be in the Senate for what he could do for others.

And people got it. They came to understand that profound difference, to appreciate what a difference it made in their lives, and to realize how extraordinary it was that, by some miracle, someone had been elected to the United States Senate ---

Who was using that office . . . . . for them.

You were right, Paul. You sure did get somewhere. Somewhere extraordinary. And you did so much there – to better your state, your country, and you world. And you would have done so much more – if only you had been given the chance. But life can be truly unfair. To you, it was. Terribly, terribly, unfair.

A decade later, we still mourn your loss. For you are irreplaceable: as a politician, as a parent, and as a friend.

We also mourn the losses of Sheila, Marsha, Mary, Tom, and Will, such wonderful people, so cruelly taken away. We mourn all of you tonight and every night.

Rest in peace, Paul. No . . . come to think of it, cause a ruckus up there. Start a protest - stage a march, or maybe a boycott. Tell the supreme powers that we need some reinforcements down here. You taught us well, and we are doing our best to carry on the torch that you carried so far, and so well. But, unfortunately, none of us are you.

