
Afterword

Bill Bradley

IT WOULD BE EASY, recalling Paul Wellstone, to think only of endings. The plane crash that killed Paul, his wife Sheila, his daughter Marcia, and his staff members Will McLaughlin, Tom Lopic, and Mary McEvoy, ended six remarkable lives and Paul's booming political career. The end seemed especially unfair not just because they were all too young, but because Paul looked to be on the cusp of winning another term in the Senate, where he was becoming steadily more effective even as he remained the institution's conscience. Paul had achieved much; greater things awaited him.

Paul and Sheila were close friends to me and my wife Ernestine. Like so many of their friends, and so many citizens who felt as if they knew the Wellstones personally, I miss them. Paul was an incredibly courageous man. He was a tremendous fighter for what he believed in, and he displayed the courage of his convictions every day. He was extremely

bright, and his heart was as big as his mind. Sheila was smart, compassionate, very funny, and saturated with common sense. It can be tempting to remember only their loss.

Paul was indeed one of a kind, and he can't be replaced. But it would be wrong to think his work—or his effectiveness—ended with his life. On the contrary, now that he is gone, we can see more clearly how effective he really was. Paul was best known, I think, for taking principled but sometimes unpopular decisions, such as his votes against welfare reform and the Iraq war. But he was not quixotic. He didn't want to be a noble loser; he wanted to make a real, practical difference. In the end, he did. And the reason he did was because of two particularly crucial talents: he *inspired*, and he *organized*.

Let me speak first about his ability to inspire. Anyone who heard Paul deliver a speech recognized it instantly. He was more than a terrific speaker; he was a real orator. This is an age when many people disrespect old-fashioned oratory, but those who heard Paul understood that great speeches still matter. I learned that lesson well when I ran for president in 2000. Paul often introduced me at campaign stops, and I'd stand off-stage watching as he gave incredibly powerful speeches. He stormed the stage, waving his arms, stirring the crowd with crescendo after crescendo after crescendo, talking passionately about me, about the campaign, and about Americans' highest ideals.

Now, I am not an orator but I could do a fair impersonation of Paul. When I came on stage I would wave my arms and jump up and down in imitation. Beneath the joking, however, I felt deep admiration for his ability. He had a natural gift for public speaking, which he'd developed through relentless practice, and it was through this astounding oratory that he was most inspiring.

Afterword

Yet his fiery stage presence would have been no more than just a performance if it weren't absolutely authentic. History is cluttered with charismatic leaders who, when viewed up close, disillusion and disappoint. Not Paul. What you saw of him was what he was. If his speeches were inspiring his integrity was even more so.

Paul was driven by and faithful to his principles. He believed deeply in the democratic process, and he was confident that he could make the world a better place. When Paul roared about justice, opportunity, and his hopes for ordinary people, he was voicing his deepest convictions. He learned that in the Senate you never get 100 percent of what you want. He learned how to compromise when he had to, and his ability to compromise made him more effective. But if he sometimes compromised, he never capitulated. He never lost his ability to make a stand. He would vote alone or with just a handful of colleagues—his courageous, prescient opposition to the Iraq war is the best example—because there were certain principles he simply would not compromise. His devotion to his ideals was a challenge and inspiration to the rest of us. In his determination to make the world a better place, he made the Senate a better place.

Paul moved people both through what he said and who he was. He challenged people to work for a better world, and to strive to improve themselves. The legacy of this inspiration is immeasurable. Literally thousands of people have followed Paul's lead by joining the fight for what they believe. The author of this book is one of those people. Bill Lofy began working for Paul during Paul's first term in the Senate. That experience led him to involvement in other political campaigns, to a two-year stint in the Peace Corps, to a graduate degree in public policy, and most recently to a position with Wellstone Action, the nonprofit organization

that carries Paul's agenda forward. Paul inspired more than his share of such stories.

Sometimes, during his speeches, when Paul had worked the crowd into a whirl of passion, thrilling them with his descriptions of the work he hoped to do and the people he hoped to help, he would ask, "How are we going to achieve these things?" He supplied the answer with the crescendo: "We're going to organize! We're going to organize! We're going to organize!" His audience would cheer wildly. Leave it to Paul to get hundreds of people wild about the idea of stuffing envelopes, knocking on doors, hosting meetings in their living rooms, and phoning potential supporters. But he did it, and it worked. Those low budget, grassroots Senate campaigns showed that in a world dominated by big money and big media, you can still win by doing what they did 200 years ago—organizing.

This was the second of Paul's most important talents. He knew how to organize. Organizing is much less glamorous than giving speeches, but few people recognize how critical it was to Paul's success. Without an organization to build on, Paul's inspiring speeches would have led nowhere. Imagine rallying an audience as Paul could, but then failing to show them what they can do next. All that energy would be squandered. Or worse, people could end up feeling helpless because there seems to be no way for them to join the process.

But Paul knew how to turn inspiration into action. He built one of the strongest grassroots political movements in the country in the run-up to his first campaign. What's more, Paul built an "organization" strong enough to outlast him. Many movements with charismatic, energetic founders disintegrate once the leader is gone. But the one Paul built remains sturdy even after his death.

After his death, Paul's sons David and Mark, along with

Afterword

some of Paul's closest friends and advisors, established Wellstone Action. Wellstone Action's mission is to spread Paul's lessons about political leadership. In the process, it has sustained and expanded the grassroots organization Paul established. The core activity of Wellstone Action is called Camp Wellstone, a three-day training program that gives participants practical political skills. It shows them how to build a message and an organization, and how to get elected. Business is thriving. 100,000 people have joined Wellstone Action as members. Some 7,500 people have graduated from Camp Wellstone workshops. A few of them have gone on to run for office themselves—in the 2004 election, 22 Wellstone grads won elections. There are also Campus Camp Wellstones for college students, and a sister organization, the Sheila Wellstone Institute, which advocates for the prevention of domestic violence.

Paul's ongoing presence can be felt at these camps right from the first lesson, which is that a candidate's message must arise from his or her deepest values. All the tricks of the organizing trade—the fundraising, the volunteer efforts, the advertising, and all the rest—mean nothing if they don't flow from the kind of conviction, integrity, and courage that made Paul the leader he was. This is the kind of organizing that would have made Paul proud. It's also the kind of organizing that works.

I am writing this afterword in the spring of 2005, at a time when Democrats have lost the House, the Senate, and the White House. There is much talk, these days, about how to invigorate the Democratic Party and how to win major elections. Whether the party experiences success or more frustration in the short term, we would do well in the long term to look to Paul Wellstone's courageous stands and from-the-ground-up organizing for guidance.

Paul was a great speaker, but his passionate integrity was even more inspiring. Most of all, he did something with all that energy and faith. He did the hard work of organizing voters so that they really could participate in democracy and change the world. Now his protégés have picked up the torch, and they're organizing and inspiring people themselves.

The fact that Paul Wellstone, a short, feisty political science professor from a small Minnesota town, would seriously consider running for U.S. Senate speaks volumes about his deep faith in America and the democratic process. That he won is a testament to his awesome talents. The persistence of Paul's vision even after his death is his great gift to our nation, and his legacy for those of us who counted him as a friend.