

A Successful Second Term

Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective.

BY THE END of 1996, Wellstone had established a level of credibility that seemed unattainable six years earlier. He had matured as a lawmaker during his first term and proved his durability as a politician by winning reelection decisively. He had built strong friendships among his colleagues and learned to pick his legislative battles wisely, to compromise when necessary, and to respect the institution of the Senate. He also came to recognize that he often appeared shrill and self-righteous, and he had made a conscious effort to tone down in style. By outward appearance, he seemed a different person from the abrasive outsider he had been when he first came to the Senate.

But Wellstone demonstrated on the first day of his second term in office that, while he had adjusted his style, some-

thing remained of his old confrontational style. It was a day of ceremony—the only items on the Senate’s agenda were the swearing-in ceremonies of newly and reelected senators. By previous agreement, the Senate was set to recess until after the presidential inauguration two weeks later, but when Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott called for an adjournment at the end of the day’s ceremonies, Wellstone rose to object. “Mr. President,” he said, addressing the presiding officer of the Senate, “I feel very strongly, and I think that an overwhelming majority of people in the country feel, that there is no more important thing we can do than to pass a reform bill and get a lot of this big money out of politics. . . . I feel like we should not go into recess and we ought to get started on this. I wonder if the majority leader can make a commitment that within the first 100 days, we will at least have such a bill on the floor of the Senate.”

It was a classic Wellstone maneuver. Once again, he had defied decorum and annoyed the leaders of both parties. Lott told Wellstone it was impossible for him to make a certain time commitment to consider campaign reform, and Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle gently admonished him for raising the issue at a time when the leadership had agreed not to consider legislative business. But Wellstone was undeterred: “What about within the first four months as opposed to the first three months? Can the majority leader make a commitment that he will do everything possible to try to have a bill on the floor of the Senate within a four-month period? That is reasonable, and that is all I am asking for.” After a long and tense exchange, Wellstone eventually dropped his objection, and the Senate adjourned.¹

Not a day into his second term, Wellstone made it clear that his capacity for annoying his colleagues was undiminished.

Improbable Partnerships

If Wellstone excelled at irritating other senators, he also had a knack for getting them to like him. On the one hand, he employed the Senate's complex and often arcane rules to obstruct objectionable legislation and to promote his agenda, often to the chagrin of his colleagues. But he also reached out to his colleagues on a personal level and became a loyal friend to Republicans and Democrats alike. Unstintingly decent, he disarmed even his harshest critics with self-deprecation and used his charm to develop partnerships with even the most conservative Republicans.

Nothing was more unlikely than his friendship with Senator Jesse Helms. In 1990, Wellstone called Helms a racist and stated publicly that he "despised" the deeply conservative North Carolinian. But as Wellstone softened his partisan edge, he gradually took a liking to Helms. He noticed the way Helms interacted with the elevator operators, custodians, and other support staff at the Capitol. While many senators ignored these workers, Helms took time to acknowledge them with a greeting or complimentary remark. "One of the ways you judge a person," Wellstone said in praising Helms, "is just the way you watch them treat people. . . . I don't think there is anybody in the Senate who treats them with more grace and is kinder and more appreciative."²

Although the two senators were on opposing sides of the great majority of issues, they found a few issues on which they were in agreement. They coauthored legislation to sanction the Chinese government for human rights abuses and collaborated on issues of trade and globalization. In the process, they became friends. When Helms retired from the Senate, Wellstone paid him tribute on the floor of the Sen-

ate. To thank him, Helms sent Wellstone a handwritten letter addressed to “My dear Paul.” After noting his appreciation for Wellstone’s remarks, he wrote, “You’re a principled senator who is willing to take a stand (as much as I may occasionally disagree with you)—and that’s something seldom found in Washington these days.”³

Helms was not the only Republican with whom Wellstone worked well. He coauthored with Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas legislation aimed at curtailing international sex trafficking. When it passed in 2000, it was hailed as a major victory in the effort to combat the growing practice of human trafficking—particularly of girls and women into forced prostitution. He also introduced legislation with Ohio Republican Mike DeWine called the Workforce Investment Act, a major overhaul of the federal government’s job training program. It was signed into law by President Clinton and described by the Department of Labor as “the most exhaustive reform ever of the nation’s employment and training delivery system.”⁴

And then there was the Republican senator who was so deeply emotional when he was asked to comment on Wellstone’s death—Pete Domenici of New Mexico. In politics and style, Domenici was as close to a polar opposite as Wellstone had in the U.S. Senate. Described by one journalist as “a gray, pragmatic fiscal and social conservative,” Domenici is known as a savvy political deal maker and respected Senate insider who played an instrumental role in winning passage of President Ronald Reagan’s 1986 landmark tax reform legislation.⁵ In nearly every respect, the well-dressed and taciturn Domenici represented everything about the Washington establishment that Wellstone had spent a career fighting against.

Despite their differences, the two senators liked each other and shared common experiences that had transformed their lives. Domenici and his wife, Nancy, have a grown daughter who has struggled with mental illness for most of her life; Wellstone's brother, Stephen, has battled schizophrenia since the age of nineteen. Both senators had experienced the anguish of mental illness and the devastation the disease can have on families and loved ones. When their daughter was diagnosed, the Domenicis became immersed in the issue. "You get into the world of these dread diseases—you hear stories—they're terrible from the standpoint of what's happening to these people and what's happening to their families," Pete Domenici said. "Society was just ignoring them, denying them resources."⁶ For Wellstone, that denial of resources amounted to discrimination against people with diseases that are no more avoidable—and no less treatable—than physical diseases like cancer.

Domenici and Wellstone quickly agreed that the most serious problem facing sufferers of mental illness is that insurance companies are not required by law to cover costs associated with the treatment of mental illness. As a result, sufferers of mental illness and their families are often left with impossible choices when confronted by the high costs of treatment: either pay for the services out of pocket or allow the disease to go untreated. The first choice can lead to financial ruin, as it did in the case of Wellstone's parents (who spent twenty years repaying the costs of Stephen's two-year hospitalization); the consequences of the second can be lethal.

Two years after Wellstone's election, the two senators teamed up to introduce legislation that would require insurance companies to offer the same coverage for mental illness

as they do for other diseases, a concept known as parity. In 1996, after four years of pushing the bill, they succeeded in passing the Mental Health Parity Act, which was signed into law by President Clinton. The bill's passage was a major victory, but Wellstone and Domenici were disappointed that the final version allowed employers to shift the costs to employees by raising co-payments and deductibles on insurance policies. They immediately began crafting new, broader legislation that would apply what they termed "full parity" to the treatment of illnesses. Although it passed both houses of Congress in 2001, it was gutted in conference committee in favor of a one-year extension of the original bill. In 2002, the two senators reintroduced the bill, but it languished in Congress until the end of the year, when yet another one-year extension passed. In the wake of Wellstone's death, Domenici reintroduced the bill in the current Congress as the Paul Wellstone Mental Health Parity Act.

Despite the fact that the legislation has not yet been passed into law, Wellstone's alliance with Domenici is perhaps the most illuminating example of his personal growth in the Senate. Working with Domenici, Wellstone was at his best. He was passionate—he spoke emotionally and eloquently about his brother's experiences—but not sentimental. He was persistent and insisted on pushing forward in the face of repeated setbacks. He was persuasive, both in his advocacy of the legislation and in his efforts to push Domenici to take a more aggressive approach. And he was playful—when Domenici's assistant once asked Wellstone why he was calling for the senator, he responded, "Mental health! What the hell else do we agree on?"⁷ Above all, what stood out in this unlikely alliance was Wellstone's love of politics and mastery of his vocation.

Wellstone's Rules

By the middle of Wellstone's second term, he was riding high. He was able to list a series of legislative accomplishments, and not just things that he blocked from making it through the Senate. He helped pass important elements of the Violence Against Women Act, passed the legislation with Senators Brownback and DeWine that was mentioned previously, passed dozens of amendments to farm bills, had a major impact on passing reform legislation, and won several awards for passing bills supporting veterans and veterans health services. But Wellstone did not limit his definition of effectiveness to passing legislation. "Paul genuinely believed that effectiveness could be measured in a variety of ways," said former chief of staff Colin McGinnis. "To be effective, you had to do a whole bunch of things at the same time: shock the place from outside, work on the inside to get things done, and hold up the work of people across the country who were doing great things—highlight what they were doing and draw attention to them."

McGinnis points to Wellstone's relationship to foreign policy as an example of how he became a more effective advocate of his positions, even if they were the same positions he held when first arriving in the Senate. "Early on, he did these hysterical, thrashing speeches on foreign policy, including his maiden speech in 1990 on Iraq," McGinnis said. But over time, Wellstone became far more deliberate when considering foreign policy decisions and began consulting with the wide range of experts available to him. "When he came to what was he going to do about the Serbs in Kosovo, for example, by that point he was talking to the CIA, the State Department, and other experts, thinking

through the different implications of each option,” McGinnis said. “He talked to a lot of people, a lot of really smart people.”⁸

Wellstone’s success was due, in part, to his ability to abide by a set of four principles about how to accomplish his goal of delivering results without compromising principles.

1. *Personalize the issues.* Wellstone understood the power of narrative and was adept at using real-life stories to inform his political platform. In some cases, that meant using his personal experiences (e.g., understanding his brother’s mental illness, working with welfare mothers, and taking care of his parents at the end of their lives) as a way to frame an issue. In other cases, it meant using the experience of others (e.g., veterans, victims of domestic violence, and family farmers) to demonstrate his understanding of the circumstances of his constituents’ lives.

2. *Be relentless.* The tenaciousness that Wellstone displayed on the Senate floor sometimes grated on his colleagues, but it often produced results. His major victories in the Senate—the gift ban, sex trafficking, job training reform, veterans’ health care, and others—all resulted from his willingness to persevere against unlikely odds. Of course, it was this same drive that propelled him to succeed as a young man and later to win his improbable Senate victory in 1990.

3. *Look for unlikely allies.* Critics often pointed to Wellstone’s unrepentant liberalism as evidence that he let ideology stand in the way of getting things done. But Wellstone was always more of a populist than an ideologue. When he found opportunities to work with Republicans and conservative Democrats on issues that fit his populist agenda, he took advantage. His alliances with Domenici and other

unlikely allies produced some of his most lasting accomplishments as a senator.

4. *Advocate for those who do not have advocates.* Wellstone knew what it was like to be an outsider, and he was determined to give the various types of advocates and organizers the kind of access to Congress that he never had himself. That meant having an aggressive constituent outreach organization back in Minnesota that worked with underrepresented communities. He was such a constant presence in those communities that he was typically told by their leaders, “You’re one of us.” And indeed he was—Wellstone felt most at home with people who lacked political clout and representation in Washington.

Wellstone used various methods to put his principles of effective legislating into action, but one of his trademark techniques was to apply a community organizing approach to political advocacy. He believed that grassroots organizing, applied to electoral and legislative politics, was the most effective tool for progressives to contest for power at all levels. While this hardly seems like a radical idea, it represents a significant departure from the conventional wisdom of political strategists and community organizers. Political strategists often eschew grassroots organizing and focus instead on message and media tactics, while community activists frequently dismiss electoral and legislative politics as an ineffective way to build broad-based social movement. Wellstone was unique in that he pursued both goals: he relied on the power of grassroots organizing to win elections and advocate for a legislative agenda, and he used his position as a political leader to encourage the growth of a broad and diverse movement. “There are,” Wellstone said frequently, “three critical ingredients to democratic renewal

and progressive change in America: good public policy, grassroots organizing, and electoral politics.”

Wellstone heavily emphasized grassroots organizing not only in his political campaigns but also in his legislative work. He maintained deep ties to his political base in Minnesota and engaged them in his work in Washington. He regularly brought people from Minnesota and elsewhere to Washington to testify before Senate committees or to personally lobby senators, and he organized what he called “Accountability Days,” when busloads of citizens would come to Washington to hold senators accountable. “This,” Wellstone said, “is the essence of participatory democracy.”

After Wellstone’s death, two senators recalled examples of this technique. “Senator Wellstone chaired a hearing in the Labor Committee on an issue of great concern to American workers,” Senator Ted Kennedy said. “A group of low-wage men and women were so excited by the prospect of the hearing that they took a day off from work, boarded buses, and headed for the hearing. When they arrived, they found the room full and the door barred. But Senator Wellstone heard about the workers who were waiting in the hallway, unable to get in. He invited them in and seated them on the dais among the senators attending the hearing.”⁹

But it was not enough for Wellstone to simply make Congress more accessible to his constituents; he was interested in delivering results for those constituents. In a floor tribute to Wellstone, Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota recalled a story that captured the essence of Wellstone’s style of leadership:

In the last couple months, Paul came up to me while we were in the well of the Senate, and he said: “I was cam-

paigning in Minnesota and I went to an independent auto repair shop, and the major automobile manufacturers would not give the computer codes to these independent auto repair shops. These small independents are telling me that they cannot work on the new cars. They do not have the computer cards for the carburetors, and all those things they have to have to work on these cars. . . . That is unfair, and it is going to drive those folks out of business. This is going to kill the little guy.”

He asked if I would hold a hearing on this in my Consumer Subcommittee. I said of course I will. We put together some information on it. The day of the hearing came and Senator Wellstone was to be the lead-off witness. That was not enough for Senator Wellstone. As was his want, in the way he did politics, the hearing room was packed. It was full of mechanics and independent repair shop owners from all across this country. I guess that hearing room holds probably 100 people, and there were 150 people there. Paul had brought his people, the independent repair shop folks, to that hearing as a demonstration of this problem, to say that this problem ought to be fixed.

Paul was the lead-off witness and as was typical with him, with great passion he made the case about the unfairness to the little guy, about the independent repair shops trying to make a living, and how what is happening is unfair to them.

About three weeks ago, right before we completed our work and left for the election, Paul came up to me on the floor of the Senate during a vote. He was holding a sheet of paper. He was flashing this paper and saying, “We won!” His point was that the automobile manufacturers had reached an agreement with the independent repair shops, and that problem had gotten solved.

For Paul, it was about the little guy versus the big guy, about those who did not have the power and those who did.¹⁰

Although Wellstone's commitment to solving problems is often overlooked by political observers, it was no less real. His principles worked: during his second term, when *Congressional Quarterly* ranked the 535 members of Congress in terms of their effectiveness, he made the top 50.

Sheila's Ascent

As Wellstone settled in as a legislator, Sheila was coming into her own as an advocate and public speaker. It was a transformation that was every bit as dramatic as her husband's maturation as a senator. When Paul won election to the Senate in 1990, Sheila had spent most of her lifetime supporting her husband and caring for their three children, David, Marcia, and Mark. She worked part-time as an aide at the Northfield High School library. She was shy, unassuming, and nervous as a public speaker. Yet she had always had a profound influence on her husband and served as a key behind-the-scenes adviser throughout his career. She had encouraged him to run for auditor in 1982, and she played a pivotal role in the 1990 Senate campaign. "Paul rarely made a decision that Sheila wasn't consulted on or behind," said her longtime friend Dianne Stimson.¹¹

After Paul's election, Sheila began playing a more public role in politics and public policy. Early in the first term, she took notice of an alarming state and national crisis. Each year, approximately 1.5 million women were victims of domestic violence. As someone who spent much of her life dedicated to providing a safe and loving home for her family, she was outraged and determined to educate herself on this issue. For a year, she read and listened to people's stories. At shelters in Minnesota and in Washington, she listened to victims of domestic violence recount in horrifying detail the

abuse they had suffered. Women sat in circles in shelter living rooms across the state and told her stories so private that they had sometimes never told them before. She listened, learned, and began crafting policy responses to the problem. By the middle of Paul's first term, she was serving as an unpaid member of his legislative staff in Washington.

Over the course of Wellstone's tenure in office, Sheila established herself as one of the nation's leading experts on the problem of domestic violence. Working with her husband, she played a key role in the drafting and passage of the Violence Against Women Act. She had an instrumental role in crafting and passing other pieces of legislation aimed at protecting women and children from the ravages of domestic violence. She was actively involved in raising awareness of international human rights abuses, including the issue of sex trafficking of young women and girls.

Wellstone's Senate colleagues praised Sheila for her unique and influential work in raising their awareness of domestic violence issues. In addition to serving on many national and Minnesota advisory committees in this issue area, she was also appointed by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the Violence Against Women Advisory Council in 1995.

In addition to her domestic violence work, Sheila played an increasingly visible role in Paul's campaigns. She was a shrewd observer of politics and a valuable asset on the campaign trail. Despite her dislike of public speaking, she became a polished and persuasive public speaker. By the end of Paul's second term, political observers in Minnesota began speculating that Sheila would be a formidable political candidate herself.

Going National

As Wellstone's stature as a senator grew, so did his interest in taking on a higher national profile. By the beginning of 1998, he began seriously considering something that he had privately discussed with aides for several years. "Let's win this first," he said privately in 1996 as his reelection campaign drew to a close, "and then we need to start thinking about doing a presidential race." He was eager to emerge not only as a leader on issues like government reform and health care but also as a key player in Democratic politics. He had watched, with growing disappointment, as President Clinton capitulated to Republicans as Clinton's reelection drew closer. He was dismayed by the Democrats' support for the welfare reform bill that passed Congress in the fall of 1996 and believed that his party had retreated from its commitment to the poor.

During the welfare reform debate, which took place in the final months of his reelection campaign, Wellstone argued that supporters of the bill did not understand the severity of poverty in America and that the plight of the nation's poor was far worse—and more complex—than most Americans realized. As one of the few members of the Senate who had actually worked closely with welfare recipients, he was incensed at what he saw as the scapegoating of the poor. He vowed to raise awareness of the plight of the poor in America by taking a poverty tour of the country. He promised to visit both urban and rural areas and to raise the country's awareness of the persistent problem of poverty in the country. It was an idea borrowed from Robert Kennedy, whose tour in the 1960s of poor areas in the South gave poverty a public face.

The idea of a poverty tour had been met with derision

by Wellstone's opponents and was opposed by many of his own aides, who worried about the political consequences of seeming more concerned with the nation's poor than with his middle-class constituents in Minnesota. But the issue had little impact on the campaign, and after Wellstone was reelected he delivered on his promise. In the summer of 1997, he began what would be a seven-month tour of the nation's most impoverished communities. He traveled to Mississippi, Louisiana, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Harlan County in Kentucky, where Sheila's grandparents had lived. The tour was a success. A group of cameras accompanied him to his stops, and Wellstone received considerable, mostly positive, attention from the national media.

His travels convinced Wellstone that he could play an important role in the 2000 presidential election, and he became increasingly interested in making a run. Wellstone wanted to run for president because he saw it as an extraordinary organizing opportunity. In an unpublished draft of *The Conscience of a Liberal*, he describes in detail several successful local organizing initiatives, but then adds:

The only cautionary note I would sound about the organizing I've observed throughout the country is the danger of "dead-end localism". It makes sense that the victories are won by people where they live. The big victories are those won by people themselves—that is empowerment—and ordinary citizens make a difference in a local context. They don't fly around the world in a jet.

But if the victories, no matter how dramatic and important, never affect national or international centers of decision-making power, which can crucially define the quality, or lack of quality of the lives of people, then we are still not seriously contesting for power.

This is the central challenge for progressive politics: How to build the local victories into a strong national and international presence. Right now the whole does not equal the sum of the parts. As a United States Senator, I am excited by all the good work. I love to recount these local organizing victories, all of the amazing people I've met who have done so much to make their communities better. But I am also painfully aware of how little power progressives have at the national level. The goal is how to make local grassroots organizing, where citizens make a real difference, a key factor in determining the future of national politics.¹²

This idea was a critical component of Wellstone's political philosophy. It was not sufficient to win small, local victories. Contesting for power meant going national.

On April 8, 1998, Wellstone became the first candidate to declare his presidential ambitions when he formally announced the creation of a presidential exploratory committee, a move that allowed him to raise money to pay for travel and campaign staff. Although he did not expect to get the Democratic nomination, much less wind up residing at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, he understood the symbolic power of a presidential campaign. Running for president, Wellstone said, would allow him to take advantage of his unique ability to organize, galvanize, and build support for an "energized, effective citizen politics."

At his campaign stops, Wellstone was unambiguous about his desire to go through with the campaign. He visited Iowa and New Hampshire several times and spoke at local Democratic Party gatherings. Democratic activists in both states received him warmly. In his speeches, he delivered a message focused on reform and economic opportunity. The question Democrats should be asking in the campaign,

Wellstone said, is “Why is the United States, at the peak of its economic performance, still being told we can’t provide a good education for each child, health care for every family and a living wage for every worker?” It was a message that liberal Democrats—which constitute a large majority of the party’s primary voters and caucus goers—had not heard from a presidential candidate in years. It was during one of his many trips to Iowa that Wellstone stumbled onto what would become his trademark line. He tells the story in an unpublished manuscript draft:

I was speaking to 300 Johnson County Democrats when Tom Vilsak, one of the Democratic candidates for Governor (he went on to win big upset primary and general election victories) kiddingly yelled out, “Paul, why are you coming to Iowa all the time?”

I responded, “I come to Iowa to represent the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party.”

The place went nuts. I knew this was a winner. That these Democrats knew exactly what I meant and many were in agreement! In New Hampshire when I spoke to Central Committee Democrats (these were the party regulars), I said the same thing—and there was the same reaction. Even Al Gore supporters . . . were laughing when they knew they shouldn’t.¹³

From that point on, Wellstone repeatedly used that line to describe his politics. By December, the decision seemed to have already been made. “Things really crystallized for me in Iowa,” he told a reporter at the time. “I got up early and said, ‘This is inside me because I want to drive big money out of politics and drive people in.’”¹⁴

But the campaign was not to be. As he deliberated his

decision back home in Minnesota, Wellstone went to the Mayo Clinic for a routine checkup of his chronic back pain that had been plaguing him for years. Doctors told him that the condition of his back had worsened and that a presidential campaign, with its demanding schedule and hours of traveling in small planes and in automobiles, could seriously damage his long-term health. In early January 1999, he announced that he would not run for the presidency. Wellstone's disappointment was clear. He badly wanted to run and told associates that he knew how difficult it would be to stand on the sidelines as other candidates got into the race. "I apologize for all the cabinet positions I promised," he joked.¹⁵

Living in Pain

If Wellstone felt frustrated by his inability to take on the rigors of a presidential campaign, he was also discouraged by the fact that his chronic back injury had still not been diagnosed. Throughout much of his adult life, he was in constant and often excruciating back pain. An accomplished long-distance runner, he was forced early in his first term to give up running and was confined to working out on the Stairmaster in his condominiums in St. Paul and Washington. He walked with a marked limp, wearing down the toe of his right shoe because it dragged behind him when he walked. On long car drives, he was forced to recline the passenger seat and lie down on his stomach. On his biweekly flights from Minnesota to Washington, he stood whenever possible because of his back pain and used the opportunity to introduce himself to all the passengers on the plane.

Doctors did not definitively know what was causing the pain. Wellstone blamed it on an old wrestling injury, and various doctors diagnosed it as sciatica or vertebrae injury.

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After his visit to the Mayo Clinic, Wellstone finally decided to have surgery even though it was against his own long-standing wishes. The surgery failed to solve the problem, adding to his frustration and general mistrust of doctors. Three years later, he would be diagnosed as having a mild form of multiple sclerosis.

Despite being in constant pain, Wellstone rarely took any form of medication to treat it, and he maintained an almost fanatical workout schedule. He insisted that his staff incorporate time in his schedule for his daily workout, which consisted of weight training and a sixty-minute Stairmaster workout on the most difficult setting. He exercised six days a week and claimed that the last time he went two days in a row without working out was when he was in high school. He was proud of his commitment to his physical health and relished the fact that he was in better shape than most people half his age.

When Wellstone first arrived in the Senate, he refused to use the gym and workout facilities reserved for senators and instead asked the capitol police if he could use their facilities. They skeptically agreed, and Wellstone became a daily fixture in the police gym. When the officers held their annual pull-up competition, Wellstone entered and bragged that he would win. Despite their doubts, he made good on his prediction and won the competition. He once joked that it was his proudest accomplishment in the Senate.

A Surrogate for Bradley

After Wellstone dropped out of the presidential race, he quickly endorsed a colleague who shared his passion for athletics—former senator and NBA basketball star Bill Bradley. Wellstone immediately immersed himself in Bradley's cam-

paign. Throughout the summer and into the fall, he traveled across the country on Bradley's behalf, dedicating at least three days a month to the campaign. By the end of the year, he had become Bradley's leading surrogate, and he and Sheila had formed a deep personal friendship with Bradley and his wife, Josephine. In his speeches and campaign appearances, Wellstone's dedication to Bradley was evident. He spoke passionately about Bradley's commitment to ending poverty and to addressing the deteriorating race relations.

But campaigning for Bradley was bittersweet. As usual, Wellstone loved being on the campaign trail and firing up enthusiastic crowds. As one newspaper columnist put it after seeing him speak, "Wellstone in front of a crowd is plainly a man who enjoys his work."¹⁶ But privately, the overwhelmingly positive response he received on the campaign trail made Wellstone think of the campaign that might have been. His fire-and-brimstone speeches often overshadowed Bradley's and left some members of the audience wondering aloud if they would have supported a Wellstone candidacy. A typical response came from one Bradley supporter after seeing Wellstone speak at a January rally in New Hampshire: "If he were running for president this year, no question—I'd be with him."¹⁷ Another supporter told him excitedly, "You must melt the snow in Minnesota every time you talk!"¹⁸ Wellstone wondered aloud to friends and aides about the impact his candidacy would have had on the race.

After Bradley suffered decisive defeats in Iowa and New Hampshire, he withdrew from the race in March 2000. Although Wellstone quickly endorsed Al Gore for president, he spent little time campaigning for him. Instead, he returned his focus to a full agenda in Washington and to the increasingly pressing question of what he was going to do with his political future.

Breaking a Promise

When Wellstone announced in 1990 that he would only seek two terms, twelve years in the U.S. Senate seemed like an eternity. "I want to give this all that I have," he said at his first press conference as senator-elect. "I'm tired of grading papers and I wanted to get out of it, but eventually I'll go back to teaching."¹⁹ But by the middle of his second term in office, Wellstone's reality had changed profoundly. He had grown into the job of senator and had learned how to use his leverage to get things done. "I just don't see how I can walk away from this," he often said in private as his second term drew to a close. But breaking his promise was a big political risk. Whether or not they agreed with him on all issues, Minnesotans believed he was a person of integrity who kept his word. The broken pledge had the potential to undermine the foundation on which Wellstone's reputation had been built.

But running for a third Senate term was not Wellstone's only option for staying in public office. As his second term drew to a close, he grew increasingly interested in running for governor. While he enjoyed being a legislator, serving as Minnesota's chief executive would give him far-ranging influence over the state's budget priorities. As governor, he could have a more direct impact on issues like health care and education than he could as senator.

And a run for governor would give Wellstone a chance to unseat Jesse Ventura, the former professional wrestler who stunned political observers by winning a three-way election in 1998. Despite their surface similarities—both were former wrestlers known for their from-the-hip straightforwardness and willingness to buck convention—Wellstone and Ventura disliked one another. Wellstone blanched at what

he perceived to be Ventura's bashing of public service and his "buddy, you're on your own" political philosophy. Ventura viewed Wellstone as an out-of-touch ideologue. "We have very different views of public service," Wellstone said publicly. In private he said Ventura was a charlatan who used his populist persona to self-satisfying aims. The difference between the two, Wellstone said, was like the difference between "real wrestling and fake wrestling."

But a race between Ventura and Wellstone would not materialize. Despite his dislike for the governor—and a firm conviction that he would defeat Ventura if he ran against him—by the fall of 2000 Wellstone was leaning against a run. He had listened to friends and advisors tell him that the job of governor was not one for which he was well suited. As the chief executive of the state, he would be forced to deal with issues that held little interest for him—particularly the intricacies of the state budgeting process. In the Senate, he was free to do the advocating and legislating that fit his personal style.

After the extraordinary elections of 2000, Wellstone made his decision final. With the presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush being decided by the Supreme Court and the balance of power in the Senate being equally shared—there was now an even fifty-fifty split of Democrats and Republicans—he said he could not walk away from the fight in Washington. In January 2001, he sat with Sheila in front of a crowded room of reporters in a neighborhood St. Paul restaurant and announced his intention to seek a third term to the Senate. He spoke for several minutes and ended by saying, "I feel great about the chemistry I have with Minnesotans, and . . . I will give this campaign my all."