
Selected Speeches

Auditor's Race: Endorsement Speech
at DFL Convention
June 5, 1982

Wellstone ran for State Auditor in 1982. It was an office for which he later admitted he was unqualified, but his nominating speech to the DFL convention was a rousing success and solidified Wellstone's reputation as a powerful orator.

I SEEK YOUR endorsement to run as the Democratic Farmer Labor candidate for State Auditor, one of Minnesota's six elected state offices, because I love my country and I love my state and I am worried about our survival—our economic survival in the face of the threat of nuclear war.

Many of the people I have worked with in Minnesota over the years—low and moderate income people, farmers, workers, senior citizens, teachers, students—are now fighting for their economic survival. What the Republican Party wants people to believe is that the most pressing issues of

their lives, the economic pain they feel, has nothing to do with politics. That their problems are beyond the reach of government, that there is nothing that the government can or should do. This is a fine philosophy if you own your own big corporation or if you happen to be wealthy

In our campaign in this year of 1982 we are going to speak directly to the issue of fairness. We are going to ask the question: Who Sacrifices, Who Benefits, Who Decides in America today, in Minnesota today?

Who decides to raise the interest rates and whose farm goes under the auctioneer's hammer?

Who decides to subsidize giant corporations while small businesses fold?

Who decides to fight inflation with unemployment, and who is out of work?

Who decides that a safe workplace is too expensive, and who has to risk working there?

Who decides to abandon our central city neighborhoods, and where do these decision makers live?

Who decides to cut job training, housing, and health care programs, and which families suffer?

Who decides to cut taxes for corporations and the wealthy, and what happens to small businesses and the rest of us?

The many should not have to suffer so that a few can prosper. The Republican Party, which ran on the bread and butter issue in 1980, has taken away the bread and butter. Some people are very generous with other people's suffering.

In the 1930's and the 1960's our grandparents, our parents, many of us struggled to make this a better country for the people. Through democracy we gained protection against strike-breaking, through democracy we gained protection against an unsafe workplace, through democracy we gained protection against the ravaging of our air and water,

through democracy we gained protection against discrimination by race and sex, through democracy we gained some protection against the terror of unemployment which made people have to take any job under any conditions.

It is democracy itself which is under attack by the Republican Party today. Overnight they are trying to take away fifty years of people's history and they will take more this year, and more the next year, unless we, as the Party of the people, make it clear that this is our history, our country, our state, and we will reassert democratic control.

We believe in democracy. We believe that government can respond to people's needs. We believe that public policy can be based on the policy of fairness. We believe that full employment is the key to social and economic justice, the key to a successful economy and a successful society. But, we do not believe that any of this can be accomplished unless we are involved in the goal-setting that is the essence of democracy.

I am running for state auditor because as a member of the DFL team I will be able to put into effect policies that reflect these democratic values.

As state auditor, I will support productive investment of Minnesota's pension fund. We can and we should, and we must invest some of our pension money, our hard earned capital back into critical sectors of our economy—small farms, businesses, alternative energy and housing programs. This is a small investment that will give us a high rate of return and will help rebuild the economy of our communities and our state. And, this investment must be based on a democratic decision making structure. Our state and local employees must have representation on the state board of investment. It is their money we invest and they have the democratic right to fair representation.

As state auditor I also support ethical divestment.

As state auditor I will support strong labor and strong farm programs that help build our communities. I support a state run workers compensation program because it will assure solid compensation to workers and help bring down costs for small businesses. I support plant closings legislation. Our communities and working people have given many concessions to corporations over the years. This is a question of responsibility. Corporations cannot just leave our communities high and dry without adequate advance notice and some fair compensation.

As state auditor, in these times of rock bottom parity prices for farmers and record high unemployment I will support immediate moratorium on all foreclosures, farm and non-farm. Farmers who have worked hard all their lives should not be thrown off their land and workers who are out of work, no fault of their own, must not be thrown off of their homes. Their loss will be our common loss and we must act now.

As state auditor, I will make assistance to local governments a top priority and will be a strong advocate of citizen participation, and make every effort possible to demystify the financial situation. I believe the auditor can play a key role in helping to bring together local government concerns with state legislative and executive priorities.

As state auditor, I will speak out to provide leadership on critical national issues. The Republicans say that you as a state official have no business talking about the nuclear arms race—it is a national issue. I say that letting Washington make decisions is the prescription for a continued arms race, which is leading to nuclear war. *The survival of Minnesotans is a Minnesota issue.* What the nuclear freeze cam-

paign is showing is that people at the local level can make a difference on this supposedly national issue and as a state official I will support and be a part of this movement for survival.

We must redefine national security to make the security of local communities a priority national goal. National security has little meaning if we have communities without jobs, if food, housing, heat or transportation are not available or affordable, if we cannot provide a good education for our children.

I've traveled around Minnesota and met hundreds of people who are struggling—struggling to keep their jobs, struggling to keep their small businesses, struggling to keep their family farms. They are telling us something. There has never been as great a need for a strong democratic farmer labor party. We have a historical role to play.

We are going to endorse the strongest candidates, we are going to sweep into office in this election year of 1982, we are going to change the politics of Minnesota and in changing the politics of Minnesota we are going to lead the way into changing the way of politics in America: Reclaim low interest rates, reclaim jobs for the unemployed, reclaim affordable housing, reclaim senior rights, reclaim affordable energy, reclaim farms for our family farmers, reclaim education for our children, reclaim a vision of a good society, reclaim the government for the people, less victimization by race, less victimization by sex, less victimization by age, less victimization by income, less victimization by region. Not a heaven on earth but a better earth on earth.

I'd be proud to have your support tonight. I'd be proud to have your support this summer and fall. I'd be proud to have your support in the years to come. Thank you.

U.S. Senate Campaign Stump Speech
Early 1990

Wellstone handwrote his stump speeches in 1990, including this speech delivered to DFL delegates.

I LOVE TO campaign and I can't wait to get started on this campaign against Rudy Boschwitz. I am not worried about his money, or his image-makers and pollsters. We'll raise the money we need to win and we also have some powerful weapons Boschwitz can't begin to match. We have the people working with us, we have the organization, we have the energy, excitement and integrity, we have the issues and conviction to fight for what we care about.

I promise you a fighting, progressive-populist, grassroots campaign in the Hubert Humphrey—Harry Truman tradition. A campaign that will offer the people of Minnesota a clear alternative to Rudy Boschwitz. A campaign that will be rooted in the participation of people in every city, town, county and district in Minnesota, a campaign that will restore people's faith in politics, a campaign that will light a prairie fire that will sweep Rudy Boschwitz and all his money and wealthy benefactors out of Washington like a pack of grasshoppers. We will win this race!

We must win for health care. My mother Minnie Wellstone is 89 years old, a cafeteria worker, she never made much money. Now she has Alzheimers' disease and is in a nursing home in Northfield. All her resources will have to be depleted until she is eligible for any financial assistance. There is no dignity to such a system. We can do better than that. With your endorsement I'll beat Rudy Boschwitz and lead the fight in the U.S. Senate for universal health care coverage. It is an idea whose time has come. We must pro-

vide humane, dignified and affordable health care for all the people in our country.

We must win for our children. One-quarter of our children are poor; one-half of children of color are poor. Every day 100,000 children are homeless. A society that abandons its children with inadequate health care, child-care, education and nutrition is a society that has failed in its mission. We can do better than that. When I am in the United States Senate I will be a strong voice for children, not my children, not your children, but for all the children. We need a New Deal for the children in America.

We must win for the working people. This decade of the 80's—a decade of plants closed, strikes defeated, higher taxes for working people, unions busted, wages depressed, health care and pension benefits cut, broken dreams, broken lives, broken families. It has to stop. When elected to the Senate I'll lead the fight for legislation banning companies from hiring permanent replacements during a strike. It is time to put the government back on the side of the people, not on the side of union busting corporations.

We must win to save the environment. We cannot continue to poison our air, land and water. We must make peace with the planet Earth. Rudy is an election year environmentalist. He is the Senator from Exxon. He takes money from almost every major polluter in the country. We've got to get him out of there and elect a Senator who really cares about the environment. Rudy Boschwitz is the Senator from Exxon; I am going to be the environmentalist Senator from Minnesota, from now on.

Boschwitz says we don't have the money to deal with education, child-care, health care, the environment. He is willing to spend \$500 billion to bail out the S and L's and \$300 billion dollars a year for the Pentagon. I say we will

have no real national security unless we invest in our people, our communities, our economy. I say we will have no real national security unless we invest in the skills, intellect, health and character of our children.

You know where I stand on the issues the vast majority of Minnesotans believe in. I am pro-choice. I am an advocate for children. I stand with working people. I am passionate about fighting for family farmers and rural people. I want my own children to have a future as family farmers and stewards of the land. I believe in businesses that make productive investments in our communities and our economy. I support civil rights and human rights in our country and abroad. I am opposed to discrimination against any group of people. I've struggled with and been inspired by people with disabilities

With the kind of campaign we can wage, I know that Rudy Boschwitz can be beaten this year. But to do it I must have your strong endorsement today. If you believe in what I stand for, and I know that you do, then this time, work for what you believe in and stand with me.

I am a teacher, fighter for children, an environmentalist, a husband and a father. And I am proud to be a Democratic-Farmer-Laborite. What I've stood for, what I have acted on is the heart and soul of our party and the very essence of what Minnesotans believe in.

If Not Now, When? America's Unfinished Agenda

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

May 31, 1998

Wellstone regularly visited high schools and colleges, and frequently delivered commencement addresses. The following speech was delivered at Swarthmore College's 1998 commencement ceremony.

I THOUGHT I would start out on a personal note. My father was born in the Ukraine, and his family tried to stay one step ahead of the Pogroms, and they moved. He lived in Russia and he fled the country when he was seventeen. When my Dad passed away, my wife, Sheila, and I and our family gave a contribution to an organization called Jewish Fund For Justice and we received a poster that I have both in our home and in my office with a quote from Albert Einstein in which Einstein says, “the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the almost passionate love for justice, the strong desire for personal independence, these are features of the Jewish tradition that make me thank my lucky stars I belong to it.” I think that there’s a little bit of plagiarism in that quote and when the American Friends Service talks about God’s spirit implanted in the soul of each person and the dignity and the worth of each person and I think about Swarthmore’s mission and this college’s commitment to peace and justice in our world and in our country, it makes me especially proud to be here.

On that note, I want to talk very briefly about James Hormel, who graduated from Swarthmore, and is a member of the Board of Governors, Board of Regents. His career has been distinguished by public service, law, philanthropy, business, and community service. He is now up to be ambassador to Luxembourg, but his nomination is blocked in the United States Senate. I have come to the floor several times to say that there has to be a vote. I have looked at his qualifications. I have looked at his record of distinguished service to our country. I’ve looked at someone who’s been a caring father and grandpa, brother and sister, a member of our country, a member of our community. And I cannot see any reason why he’s being blocked except maybe for the fact that he is gay. So, in the spirit of the history of Swarthmore

College, in your tradition of justice, of the dignity of each and every person, I'm going to be remembering this college when we have a debate on James Hormel's nomination to be ambassador to Luxembourg because we have to confront this poison politics and we have to end this kind of discrimination in this nation.

To the students, I've been thinking about the kind of advice, since you've given me this chance, that I'd like to give to you. I think that the best thing that I ever said to students at Carleton—and I taught over twenty year—was this: you will be more credible to yourselves and therefore more credible to others if you do not separate the lives that you live from the words that you speak. I do not come here today to tell you what to think, you'd probably run me out of here if I tried to. But I do believe that it is really important to think about not just how to make a living, but, as Ella Baker, who was a great civil rights activist, used to say, about how to make a life. And I would say to you that if you can take some time away from loved ones and away from family—and I would never want you to make your loved ones casualties of your community activism—but if you can take some time away from loved ones, some time away from family, and give it to the community, give it to our country, give it to our world, I think you will make a huge difference, an enormous difference, and I hope you will do that. I think that is so much a part of Swarthmore College's tradition.

At a lot of gatherings like this I worry because, as students are about to graduate, people will come and they will speak and they will say, "now that you've graduated from Swarthmore or Carleton or the University of Minnesota or any school you have the tools to go out there and compete in the economy and do well." I don't come here today to tell you not to do well, but I think that if you were to think for

a moment about how you got to this point of enormous accomplishment, I don't think that the word would be independence, I think the key word would be interdependence. Think of parents, think of family, think of relationships with other students, think of friendships, think of the bond that so many of you have with one another. And so I raise this question, why not in our country? Why not the same focus on the ways that we are interdependent? Why not the same focus on relationships? On how to treat one another. Why not define a community where we all do better—when we all do better? I think that that's the direction our country needs to go.

I bring a reading here today, to Swarthmore. It was taken from a book that was just published. The title, "*Make Gentle the Life of this World: The Vision of Robert F. Kennedy.*" It was sent to me by one of his sons, Max Kennedy, who now lives in Boston. I quote from Robert Kennedy. This was a speech that Bobby Kennedy gave March 18, 1968 to students at Kansas University. And I quote, "The gross national product does not allow for the health of our children; the quality of their education; or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate, or the intelligence or integrity of our public officials. It measures neither wit nor courage. Neither our vision, our wisdom, or our learning. Neither our compassion nor devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans."

We can do much better as a country. We should not focus just on how to grow our economy, but we should focus on how we can grow the quality of our lives, and how we can grow the quality of our life as a nation. We must foster a new

atmosphere where values become sensitive to public policy. And we must build a nation, a community where no person, no neighborhood, and no community feels left behind.

I come here today to pose a question for you at this baccalaureate, and this is my question. How can it be that in the United States of America, today, at the peak of our economic performance, we are still being told that we cannot provide a good education for every child? We are still being told that we cannot provide good health care for every citizen. We are still being told that people can't look forward to jobs that they can support themselves and their children on. We're still being told that we cannot achieve the goal of having every five-year old come to kindergarten ready to learn, knowing the alphabet, knowing how to spell her name, knowing colors, shapes, and sizes, having been read to widely with that wonderful readiness to learn. How can it be that we are being told that we cannot do this at the peak of our economic performance? I say to you today that it is not right. It is not acceptable. We can do much better, and if not now, when? If we don't do this now, when will we do it as a nation?

On Friday, on my way back from Minnesota, I went down to the Mississippi Delta. I had been there a year earlier, and I had promised to come back. I was at a community gathering with an African-American teacher, Robert Hall, who probably makes twenty-two to twenty-three thousand dollars a year. Incredibly dedicated teacher. He stood up at a community meeting, and he said, "Senator"—this was June, a year ago—"It's hard to give the students hope. Only half our students graduate. Would you come back for graduation?" And then, their graduation, as it turns out, is the same day, Sunday, today. So I asked him if I could come Friday, to teach. I was a teacher, and so I came to speak at the

high school. I got off the plane and I was met at the airport, and as we were driving to Tunica, Mississippi, a man said to me, "First we're going to go to the elementary school and you will address the third and fourth graders on the last day of class."

I said, "Address? On the last day of school?" But I said okay, and we went there. I'll address them, I'm a teacher. I said, do you like school? Do you like education? What's important about it? And one young girl said, "It's important because I can be what I want to be." And I said, well what do you want to be? And there were forty hands up, and the rest of the hour was students talking about what they want to be. One of them wanted to be a psychiatrist. I thought that was interesting. Or a doctor. Or a professional wrestler. Or a professional basketball player. Or a teacher. Or an artist. Or a business person, on and on and on. Those children had hope.

I will tell you here today at Swarthmore,—because of how much I think of the college, and because I was a teacher and I'll be a teacher again—I saw at Carleton College how, if you take that spark of learning that those children have, and you ignite it, you can take a child from any background to a lifetime of creativity and accomplishment. But if you pour cold water on that spark of learning, it is the cruelest and most short sighted thing we can do as a nation. We pour cold water on that spark of learning for too many children. Another question I pose, and I'm going to keep asking this question and asking this question, keep pressing this with this question. How can it be in a country I love so much, and a country that's doing so well economically, a country at the peak of its economic performance, that one out of every four children under the age of three is growing up poor in America? One out of every two children of color under

the age of three is growing up poor in America. We have a set of social arrangements in our country that allow children to be the most poverty stricken group.

That is a betrayal of our heritage. The impoverishment of so many children is our national disgrace. Carol mentioned that I traveled some last year. I started out in the Mississippi Delta, not to come in to tell people what to do, not to be presumptuous, not to be pretentious. I know better than that. But I wanted to go there because I had read a book by Nick Kotz, who had won a Pulitzer prize for his book, *Let Them Eat Promises*. I used to assign it to students. And he described the visit where Bobby Kennedy came and some of you will probably remember this. And he was focused on hunger, and there was a little African-American boy, and Bobby Kennedy was trying to play with him, but the little boy couldn't respond. He just had a vacant look. He was so severely malnourished. And Bobby Kennedy kept trying to play with him like we do with our children and grandchildren, but the little boy didn't respond. And then Bobby Kennedy broke down crying.

I wanted to start our trip in a neighborhood in the Mississippi Delta. And then we went to East L.A., and then we went to Chicago in the Pilsen neighborhood, a Latino community, and then public housing projects—the Robert Taylor Homes and Ida Wells. And then we went to inner-city Baltimore, and then we went to Appalachia. I can tell you that we met a lot of heroines and heroes who give lie to the argument that nothing can be done. If I had the hours, I would celebrate their worth. We can do so much at the community level if people have the resources. But I also want to tell you that everywhere we went, what people were saying, citizens in our country, what they were saying was, “what happened to our national vow, our vow as a nation,

that there should be equal opportunity for every child? Not in our community. And where are the jobs or the business opportunities so that we can do well economically and we can give our children the care we know they need and deserve?" That's what we heard. And then we traveled to other parts of our country, and when we did, it was the same kind of issues.

And I will summarize, in a different voice, "Senator, my daughter is twenty-four. She graduated from college. She's a diabetic. She now will be off our health insurance plan. I know that the insurance companies are no longer allowed to deny her coverage, but it's going to cost her ten thousand dollars a year, and she won't be able to afford it."

"Senator, I want you to meet my husband Joe. You met him a year ago. I told you he only had two months to live, but he's a fighter. Joe's now in a wheelchair. He's a fighter. Please come over and say hello." And so I did. And then she takes me aside and she says, "Every day it's a nightmare. I'm on the phone battling with some of these insurance companies because I don't know what they'll cover."

I don't think any American, with a loved one struggling with an illness, cancer, or otherwise, should have to worry about whether or not there'll be decent care, should have to be battling for coverage every day.

Or, "Senator, I'm a student at Moorhead State University in Minnesota. It's taken me six years to graduate. I've been working for forty hours a week for the last six years."

Or, "Senator, I sell plasma at the beginning of the semester in order to be able to buy textbooks."

Or, "Senator, I'm a single parent. I'm one of the welfare mothers you hear about, but I'm in the community college. I want to be independent, but now I'm being told, in the name of welfare reform, that I have to leave school and take

a job, but the job pays six dollars and fifty cents an hour and I won't have health care in a year and I'll be worse off. Please let me finish my schooling, my education, so I can support my children."

Or, "Senator, we're both thirty, our combined income is thirty-five thousand dollars a year, but it costs us twelve thousand dollars in child care for our two children."

Can't we do better?

Or, "Senator, my dad is a Vietnam vet. He took a shower last week, but when he came out of the shower he wouldn't talk to anybody any longer. We're told that he suffers from post traumatic stress syndrome. But we don't have any compensation, how do we get him the care?"

I don't think politics has anything to do with the left, right, or center. It has to do with trying to do well for people. And the other thing, and I get to say this to you, the graduating seniors that are here, and I'm sure parents and family may very well agree with this sentiment. "Senator, we're disillusioned by politics, we think both parties are run by the same investors, we don't have any faith any longer, we think the special interests dominate the process, we have so little confidence in politics, and we don't think politics is very important." A friend who teaches at the Kennedy at Harvard said he had a seminar with students last week and he was talking about electoral politics and he was talking about a campaign in which he was involved in New Hampshire, in 1966 with Eugene McCarthy, from Minnesota. The students said, "Yeah, but that's when politics were important."

I want to say today, to the students that I know how many of you have been involved in community service—that is so important. My worry is when people say community service is good but involvement in politics is unsavory. We need you. We need you involved in community service,

we need you to be the really great teachers of the future, we need you involved in community service, we need you to be mentors and tutors—and many of you have been—and to help children and families battle the odds. We need you to volunteer at community health care clinics, and above and beyond whatever you do during your work days, we need you as business people and lawyers to do community work. But we also need you to care about public policy, to be the citizens speaking out for better public policy and more integrity in politics, and for you to believe that government and public policy can make a difference. That politics is not just about power and money games, politics can be about the improvement of people's lives, about lessening human suffering in our world and bringing about more peace and more justice.

And I say to you students at Swarthmore, as a political scientist and a United States Senator, that in the last analysis, politics is what we create, by what we do, by what we hope for, by what we dare to imagine.

Here's what I dare to imagine. I think this is very much in the American Friends Service tradition. As a United States Senator from Minnesota, I dare to imagine, as a father and now a grandfather of three, I dare to imagine a country, where I travel, and meet children, and I pick up an infant and hold her in my arms, I want to be able to believe, that in the United States of America, I dare to imagine a country where every child I hold in my hands, are all God's children, regardless of the color of their skin, regardless of whether they're boy or girl, regardless of religion, regardless of rich or poor, regardless of urban or rural, that every child I hold in my hands, will have the same chance to reach her full potential or his full potential. That is the goodness of our country. That is the American dream.

SELECTED SPEECHES

In closing, to the graduating seniors, I say this with all sincerity. I do not believe the future will belong to those who are content with the present, I do not believe the future will belong to the cynics, or to those who stand on the sideline. The future will belong to those who have passion, and to those who are willing to make the personal commitment to make our country better. The future will belong to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.