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## Minnesota Crash Kills Wellstone, Clouding Fight Over Senate

By JODI WILGOREN

**S**T. PAUL, Oct. 25 — Senator Paul Wellstone, a two-term Democrat locked in one of the tightest campaigns in the nation, was killed this morning when his campaign plane crashed in freezing rain near Eveleth, Minn., a small town in the northeastern part of the state.

Mr. Wellstone's high school sweetheart and wife of 39 years, Sheila, 58; their 33-year-old daughter, Marcia Markuson; three campaign aides; and two pilots also died in the fiery crash, which obliterated their 11-seat turboprop among the pine trees.

Senator Wellstone, 58, a former political science professor, was an unabashed liberal who often landed on the short end of 99-1 votes. He remained a vigorous spokesman for the traditional brand of Democratic New Deal liberalism at a time when his party's mainstream was moving to the right, putting him at the center of a complicated political year.

Mr. Wellstone was one of just 23 senators — the only one in a close re-election fight — to vote this month against a resolution authorizing President Bush to take unilateral action against Iraq.

While Mr. Wellstone's death was mourned across the political spectrum, it produced an immediate partisan reaction, here and in Washington, because his race is seen as so critical to the balance of power in the Senate, where the Democrats hold a 50-to-49 edge.

With the election only 11 days away, Democrats realized they needed a strong, recognizable candidate to take his spot on the ballot. Many in the party were pushing former Vice President Walter F. Mondale, 74, who represented Minnesota in the Senate from 1964 to 1976, to take over if Senator Wellstone's sons agreed.

The plane crash was a shocking echo of the crash that killed Gov. Mel Carnahan of Missouri, the Democratic Senate nominee, shortly before Election Day in 2000. In that race Mr. Carnahan's name remained on the ballot. He was elected posthumously, and his wife, Jean, was appointed to the seat.

Mr. Wellstone's Republican opponent, Norm Coleman, the former mayor of St. Paul, as well as the three candidates for governor immediately suspended campaign activities, while Gov. Jesse Ventura, an independent, ordered flags to half-staff through Election Day.

The cause of the crash was unknown. Officials said they lost track of the plane, which was supposed to land at 10 a.m. at the Eveleth-Virginia airport, at around 10:50. Ten minutes later they confirmed that the plane, a King Air A100 manufactured by Raytheon, had crashed a few miles from the runway there.

Mr. Wellstone and the others were flying from St. Paul to Eveleth to attend the funeral of Martin Rukavina, a longtime steelworker whose son, Tom, is in the Minnesota House of Representatives. He had decided to skip a rally and fundraiser with Mr. Mondale and Senator Edward M. Kennedy here in the Twin Cities this morning so he could be there. He was scheduled to meet Mr. Coleman tonight for a debate in Duluth.

"He was a man of principle and conviction, in a world that has too little of either," Mr. Wellstone's campaign manager, Jeff Blodgett, said as he stood outside campaign headquarters here, where scores of weeping supporters gathered as the news spread. "He was dedicated to helping the little guy, in a business dominated by the big guys."

Unlike the situation in Missouri two years ago, where Governor Carnahan's name remained on the

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Associated Press

Senator Paul Wellstone in Eveleth, Minn., on Jan. 31, 2002.

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ballot, Minnesota law demands that Mr. Wellstone's name be removed, according to State Attorney General Mike Hatch. It gives the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party until Thursday to nominate a replacement. The death gives Mr. Coleman an advantage, since absentee ballots already cast count.

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In addition to Mr. Mondale, Democrats were discussing as possible replacements Alan Page, a state Supreme Court justice and former Minnesota Vikings player; Mr. Hatch; Ted Mondale, the son of the former vice president; and Hubert H. Humphrey III, known as Skip, a former state attorney general and also the son of a former vice president.

Mike Erlandson, the state Democratic chairman, refused today to discuss possible candidates or whether he would try to assemble the party's 500-member central committee or let the 40-member executive committee choose a replacement.

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The New York Times  
The plane went down in freezing rain and light snow near the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport, about 175 miles north of Minneapolis.



Reuters  
A somber group gathered Friday outside the campaign headquarters of Senator Paul Wellstone in St. Paul, Minn.

