

Candidates are worlds apart;  
Wellstone and Coleman take opposite sides on most foreign policy-issues

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The two leading Minnesota candidates for the U.S. Senate have deep and abiding differences on foreign policy issues that go far beyond their well-known disagreement over Iraq.

The differences start with Sen. Paul Wellstone's strong preference for multilateralism. While former St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman rejects the word "unilateralism" to describe his position, he, like President Bush, is less insistent that the United States act through international agreements or organizations.

Republican Coleman also says he and Wellstone are at odds on the role of military might. Coleman describes himself as an advocate of "peace through strength," borrowing a phrase often associated with Ronald Reagan.

Democrat Wellstone insists Coleman is mischaracterizing some of his votes on defense spending, but he is clearly at the dovish end of the political spectrum.

These differences were well-reflected in Coleman's support for and Wellstone's opposition to the resolution authorizing Bush to use force against Iraq with or without U.N. backing. But the same philosophical clashes lead Wellstone and Coleman to opposite conclusions on almost every foreign policy controversy. Here are a few specific disagreements:

- The Kyoto Protocol to combat global warming and the treaty establishing a permanent International Criminal Court: Wellstone says the United States should join these and other multilateral agreements. Coleman opposes them.

- Construction of a missile defense system and U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia: Coleman favors building the system and backs Bush's decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. Wellstone takes the opposite position.

- NATO expansion: Wellstone opposed the last round of expansion, in 1999, when Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO. Coleman said he would have supported the expansion.

- NAFTA, GATT, fast-track presidential trade authority, permanent normalized trade with China: Wellstone voted against these trade agreements. Coleman would have voted for them.

World has shrunk

Wellstone comes from the camp that emphasizes international cooperation. The world has shrunk to the point where "in some ways, every country is our neighbor," he said in a recent interview. The success of the war on terrorism depends, to a high degree, on the willingness of countries to cooperate with

Washington on international police work, freezing bank assets and sharing intelligence. Bush's goal of restraining the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction likewise depends on widespread international cooperation, Wellstone said.

A U.S. go-it-alone policy on Iraq, and the U.S. unwillingness to join international agreements on the environment (Kyoto) and war crimes (International Criminal Court) sends the message to the world that we are not committed to working together, which decreases their willingness to cooperate in areas where cooperation is vital, Wellstone said.

"I'm afraid we've gone from a situation right after 9/11, where every other country in the world expressed such sympathy and love for us, to a situation where in too many cases we seem to be alone," Wellstone said.

Critics who worry about Bush's unilateralism often cite a document, the National Security Strategy of the United States, released by the White House in September, which is an overview of Bush's foreign policy.

The document argues that the Cold War doctrine of deterrence doesn't apply to the war against terrorism and must be replaced by a strategy of preemptive actions. It explicitly reserves the right to act unilaterally and pledges that the United States will use its military superiority to "dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup."

Wellstone called it a "very troubling document." Moving from deterrence to preemption is "a radical doctrine, and I'm not at all sure it will make the world safer," he said. If the United States announces that it is legal and proper to attack anyone who you think might someday attack you, it might embolden such actions in the India-Pakistan, China-Taiwan or Arab-Israeli conflicts, he said.