

[CLOSE WINDOW](#) 

## Star Tribune poll: Senate rivals in tight race

Republican U.S. Senate candidate Norm Coleman and his Democratic opponent of less than a week, Walter Mondale, are locked in a tight race in the final days of the campaign, according to a new Star Tribune Minnesota Poll.

The poll, conducted Wednesday through Friday, shows Mondale at 46 percent and Coleman at 41 percent, but that falls within the margins of sampling error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

The Independence Party's Jim Moore and the Green Party's Ray Tricomo are at 2 percent apiece, while 9 percent of likely voters remain undecided.

The numbers show little movement from an overnight poll taken early last week, as Mondale surfaced as the replacement for the late Sen. Paul Wellstone. That poll put Coleman at 39 percent and Mondale at 47 percent and differed little from previous Minnesota Poll results of the last Wellstone-Coleman matchup.

"I think this is a very close race," said Tina Smith, Mondale's campaign manager. "This state has been through an incredible amount. The people have been on an emotional roller coaster, so this is going to be a hard one to judge from polls."

Tom Mason, spokesman for the Coleman campaign, said the uniqueness of this race "defies polls."

Sometimes, he said, "as political strategists we have to sit back and consider nothing more sophisticated than our guts. And my gut tells me Coleman has lots and lots of political momentum."

Both campaigns have been going full bore since Wednesday, which marked the end of a four-day period in which every campaign in the state went dark after Wellstone's death.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press/ Minnesota Public Radio also polled 625 active voters at the same time as the Minnesota Poll. It found Coleman with 47 percent of the support and Mondale with 41 percent, with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4 points. The difference between the polls suggests an electorate in tremendous flux but also could be the result of different polling methods.

The latest Minnesota Poll surveyed what may wind up being one of the most unpredictable electorates in years. Voters first were rocked by news of Wellstone's death, then stunned by a widely broadcast memorial service that unexpectedly turned into a full-throated partisan rally.

Poll results show the backlash from the service, which was broadcast live on radio and TV, may make its mark on the election's outcome.

Nearly a quarter of the 929 likely voters said the service made them more likely to vote for Coleman, while 16 percent said it made them more likely to vote for Mondale. An additional 53 percent said the service will make no difference in how they vote.

The service, in which 20,000 people packed Williams Arena and the adjacent Sports Pavilion at the University of Minnesota, started out with a few missteps -- high-level Republican officials were booed upon entrance -- but focused mostly on tributes to Wellstone, his wife, Sheila, their daughter and the five others who died in the plane crash.

In the second half, however, eulogies became calls to arms, with promises of victory and pleas to Republicans to help win the election for Wellstone.

"I couldn't stand what I saw Tuesday night," said Adrian Franssen, 55, a liquor store owner in Forest Lake. He said he "didn't agree 100 percent with Wellstone," but had been planning to vote for him. Franssen said he didn't agree with Coleman, either, but liked the way he handled himself after Wellstone's death.

"He really backed off a lot when the tragedy happened," he said. "He seemed so sincere."

Jerome Pykoski, 82, a retired dairy farmer in Denmark Township, said he usually leans DFL, but said he is considering voting for Moore even though he knows little about his stand on the issues.

"I'm going to do anything except go for the Democrats because of the way they treated what was supposed to be a memorial for Paul Wellstone," Pykoski said. The booing, he said, "was completely disgusting and disgraceful." Mondale, he said, "might be all right, but I'm not going to vote for anything Democratic."

Jeff Foldenaur, 35, a small-business owner in Inver Grove Heights, said that his decision was "a tough call," but that he probably would vote for Mondale.

"All the stuff he's done for us in the past," he said. "It's important to keep a balance in Congress." Foldenaur said he likes Coleman but probably would have voted for Wellstone. "I'm more sure of Mondale," he said. "He's a little more conservative."

Mondale's crossover appeal shows up among conservatives, 20 percent of whom say they will vote for him. Coleman, a former DFLer, drew 11 percent of liberals. And Mondale's appeal also shows up in his overall perceptions: In general, likely voters have a better image of him than Coleman.

Support for both candidates is extremely partisan, with independents split or undecided.

The support Mondale and Coleman do have runs deep. For Mondale, 84 percent said they would not change their minds before election day. For Coleman, that figure was 85 percent.

Many of Mondale's numbers are similar to those for Wellstone in earlier polls. He does better among women -- 51 percent to Coleman's 37 percent -- and among the young and old. Those under age 25 support him strongly over Coleman, as do those 65 and older. Coleman does best among 25-to 44-year-olds, about half of whom prefer him over Mondale.

Both campaigns say they are seeing a momentum and level of emotion and intensity that polls have not captured.

"We've had gridlock at our campaign," Mason said. "Lines of cars going out the parking lot, waiting to pick up signs, stickers. We had 600 people at an event in Brainerd where you'd normally count yourself lucky to get 75 or 100. I've been in politics for years and I've never experienced anything like this in my life."

Mason would not say whether possible backlash from the Wellstone memorial had any effect.

"We've chosen not to politicize that event, during or after, and that's the extent to which I'm going to comment on that," he said. "All we know is that something has happened to give our campaign a momentum and enthusiasm like I've never seen. The whole environment changed when we got back to campaigning on Wednesday."

The Mondale campaign has seen a similar emotional surge of enthusiasm, spokesman Jim Farrell said.

"This really is like nothing I've ever seen," he said. "We went door-knocking and 1,500 volunteers showed up. We wanted to drop [literature] in the Twin Cities and got enough people to drop 250,000 pieces in one day. Mondale got 800 people in Mankato. Everywhere you go, everyone's talking about this Senate race."

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