

THE MINNESOTA COMPACT AND THE ELECTION OF 1996

A Report by Joseph N. Cappella and Mark Brewin
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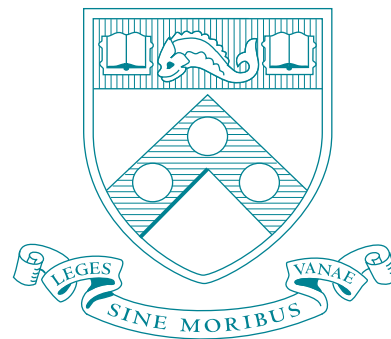


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FOREWORD

The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania which would address public policy issues at the local, state and federal levels. Consistent with the mission of the Annenberg School for Communication, the Center has four ongoing foci: Information and Society; Media and the Developing Mind; Media and the Dialogue of Democracy; and Health Communication. Each year, as well, a special area of scholarly and social interest is addressed. The Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas. This series of publications disseminates the work of the Center.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Minnesota Compact recognizes that improving the quality of public discourse requires a systemic solution involving the public, the press, and politicians. Each entity must take responsibility for the problem and its solution. This recognition is the single most important contribution of the Compact. By avoiding focusing on one or another institution, the Compact avoids the implicit blame and finger-pointing that one-dimensional solutions invite.

The Compact set forward standards against which the press, politicians, and the public could judge themselves and one another. Although the standards can be disputed or ignored, they do provide criteria for assessing accountability and in the process bring the issue of accountability — mutual accountability — to the forefront of public discussion. Griping and whining about the poor state of public discourse moves to second position behind what high quality discourse is and what can be done to achieve it.

The effectiveness of the Compact in improving the quality of public discourse cannot be assessed at this time. It is impossible to separate the effects of the Compact, for example, from innovations introduced by journalists at the *Star Tribune* and other newspapers. Without comparative or baseline data, the nature of public discourse in the election of 1996 in Minnesota can only be described in the context of the goals of the Compact. Attributions of its influence or lack are misdirected.

Despite the fact that 283 candidates signed on to the Compact and to Lee Lynch's Campaign Ad Code, Minnesotans felt that the election season produced a high level of negative campaigning, due most likely to the ad campaigns in the senate race.

The heavy expenditures on advertising, the negative character of the ads, and the extensive coverage of the ads by the news media may have primed voters in the senate race to use the quality of the ad campaign as a factor in their voting decisions.

Citizens in Minnesota made a clear distinction between the ad campaigns of senate candidates Rudy Boschwitz and Paul Wellstone. The fear that a negative campaign by one would lead to a rejection of both candidates' campaigns was not realized.

Polling data about the Wellstone and Boschwitz race are consistent with the claim that citizens rejected what that they perceived to be negative and unfair ads by the Boschwitz campaign and this rejection weighed in their voting decisions. Whether voters' reactions were due to a strong ad watch campaign by the news media (especially print), the high moral character of Minnesota voters, increased sensitivity resulting from the Compact and the Ad Code, attitudes and feelings about the candidates' leadership and positions, or some combination cannot be determined.

In general, newspaper coverage of the elections avoided excessive focus on strategy, provided in-depth treatment of issues, and conducted regular ad watches to guide the public's consumption of political advertising. The *Star Tribune's* election coverage was especially deserving of praise.

Politicians will not hesitate to use perceived violations of the Compact's (voluntary) tenets as weapons against their opponents. The Compact's directors and advisors must remain distant from active campaigns and party interests during the campaign periods.

Methods to increase public involvement in the political process must utilize the public's interests, and be realistic rather than artificial.

Debates among candidates should vary format and content so that they are not perceived to be interchangeable and so that depth of coverage of topics can be increased. To reach citizens of varying levels of sophistication requires different approaches.

Since most Americans get their news from television, the quality of television news about elections needs special attention.

THE MINNESOTA COMPACT

HISTORY OF THE COMPACT

In June of 1995, Tom Hamburger, Washington Bureau Chief of the *Star Tribune*, offered his readers a thought experiment. What if, he mused, “candidates declared a cease-fire on attack advertising on television;” “Minnesotans reinstated the tradition of debates and community discussions;” “news organizations committed to covering the substance of political campaigns;” and “citizens stopped complaining and took action to improve the state of our politics”? (MST, 6/23/95).¹

After a year of hard work and organizing, the Minnesota Compact was released to the press and the public in a laundromat in the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in the spring of 1996. This dramatic social experiment to improve the quality of public discourse captured the imagination of political leaders, journalists, social activists, and ordinary citizens.

TENETS OF THE COMPACT

The Compact is based on four planks – the first concerns debates; the second, campaign ads; the third, journalists; and the fourth, citizens. The planks are presented in Appendix A. Appendix A also presents Lee Lynch’s Campaign Advertising Code. The two worked independently but were in concert philosophically.

The Compact was designed to increase public debates among candidates; to increase responsibility in political advertising; to increase the depth and quality of news about the campaign, avoiding “horse race” coverage while reviewing ads for fairness and accuracy; to increase public involvement in dialogue about the campaigns. Each of these goals was accompanied by specific objectives. The Compact was not an abstraction but a directed and practical social innovation.

The Compact is also based – at least in theory – on some sound principles about democratic discourse.² First, debates inform those who view them. To ask politicians to engage one another face-to-face in state-wide telecasts, can inform the citizenry who take the time to view these exchanges. Second, attack advertising is widely cited by the public as part of what makes them cynical about politics. At the same time, political ads are the electronic placards that summarize a campaign’s central issues and essential disagreements between candidates. Less politically involved citizens use ads as a primary source of information about the election. As ads become more substantive, cynicism may be ameliorated while information is enhanced. Third, horse race coverage by the news media activates public cynicism about elections. Ad watches provide the public with information about fairness and accuracy of political ads, thereby, helping to inform citizens about ad-makers and their targets and minimizing the likelihood that deceptive ads will be created to begin with. Fourth, an informed and involved public is one that is less easily influenced by individual ads and misleading claims. At the same time, these citizens are more likely to be in a position to enforce a voluntary agreement such as the Compact.

1. References to newspapers will be by abbreviation and date. MST is the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, PP is the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. Infrequent citations will use the full names of the newspapers.

2. These principles are discussed and evaluated in the following: K.H. Jamieson & C. Adasiewicz, (1997), “Learning from Debates,” unpublished manuscript, Annenberg Public Policy Center; J.N. Cappella & K.H. Jamieson (1997), *Spiral of Cynicism*, Oxford University Press; J.N. Cappella & K.H. Jamieson (1997), “Broadcast Ad watch Effects: A Field Experiment,” *Communication Research*, 21(3), 342-365; K.H. Jamieson & J.N. Cappella (1996), “Ad watches Work but May Elevate Viewers’ Cynicism,” *Tracking the Quality of 1996 Campaign Discourse*, Annenberg Public Policy Center, report #1; J. Zaller (1992), *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Cambridge University Press.

In principle, the Compact is a simple, and theoretically sound, innovation. The move from principle to practice always involves slippage. In evaluating the political environment in Minnesota in 1996, we will focus on the behavior of politicians, the public, and news organizations in that order. We will end with a discussion of future evaluations and directions for change.

THE BEHAVIOR OF POLITICIANS: ADS AND DEBATES

ADS

The political ads in the Senate race between Paul Wellstone and Rudy Boschwitz will receive most of our attention. Although 93% of state Senate, House, and Congressional candidates signed on to Lee Lynch's Campaign Advertising Code (see Appendix A), neither Wellstone nor Boschwitz did (*MST*, 11/7/97). Voters in Minnesota were upset by the amount of negative campaigning during the election (Jeff Blodgett,³ personal interview). The most likely source of their concern was the highly visible, heavily covered, and long running advertising war waged between the senatorial candidates.

Well before the campaign began in earnest in September of 1996, a series of ads appeared attacking Paul Wellstone's stands on a variety of issues. We have located 13 ads sponsored by the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) that ran between early May 1996 and election day in November. The ads opposed Wellstone's positions on Minnesota Boundary Waters, welfare, "workfare," spending, crime, and taxes. Wellstone was described as a "liberal," "ultra liberal," and "embarrassingly liberal." He was identified as "liberal Paul Wellstone" so often that it began to sound as if Paul was his middle name.

This strategy was based on two premises. First, most Minnesotans consider themselves to be moderates (55%) while only 15% categorize themselves as liberals. Also, polling data from early September 1996 indicated that 47% of those surveyed agreed with the statement "Paul Wellstone is so liberal that he is out of step with the state" (*MST*, 9/30/96, p. A7). These ads – which remained unanswered by the Wellstone campaign (Blodgett, personal communication) until the campaign began in earnest — may have been part of the reason that Boschwitz and Wellstone began the September campaign even in the opinion polls.

The ads provoked controversy locally and at the national level. CNN ran ad watches about the NRSC ads directed at Wellstone (5/21/96 and 7/29/96). The *Bemidji Pioneer* (7/5/96), the *Winona Daily News* (8/5/96), the *Messabi Daily News* (7/30/96), the *Pioneer Press* (7/27/96), the *Fargo Forum* (7/30/96), and television station WCCO (the CBS affiliate in Minneapolis) (5/17/96), all carried ad watches or commentaries criticizing the NRSC ads and their style. Even Republican Senator Rod Grams (R. Minn.) who had disagreed with Wellstone about the Boundary Waters legislation asked that the ad concerning it be pulled from the air (*PP*, 6/26/96). It was. Minnesotans had multiple opportunities to become aware of these so-called issue-advocacy ads through exposure to the ads themselves and to commentary about them.

Perhaps the ad that produced the most visceral reactions in citizens and the strongest responses from journalists was the ad titled "Sides with Liberals." Snapshots of Wellstone alternate with scenes of gang members, stabbing victims

3. Jeff Blodgett was Paul Wellstone's campaign manager.

and supposed criminals being arrested. The Democratic candidate is identified as a liberal 4 times, is described as “Vot[ing] twice to let violent criminals out of jail early” and opposing “mandatory sentences for criminals who sell drugs to our children.” CNN’s ad watch pointed out that Wellstone had voted with Minnesota Republican Senator Durenburger three times on sentencing bills that the ad was attacking. Wellstone even voted with Senator Al D’Amato on one bill for which Wellstone was being vilified. D’Amato headed the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee that sponsored the ads. The ad appeared to be out of line and, as Brooks Jackson of CNN said, “misleading.”

These ads set the stage for the Wellstone-Boschwitz campaign of September and October. During this period, at least three other NRSC ads, as well as 11 Boschwitz, and 13 Wellstone ads were produced and aired (*MST*, 10/25/96; Wellstone campaign personal communication). One other ad by the Citizen’s Flag Alliance attacked Wellstone’s votes against a ban on flag-burning. We do not know whether it aired (Annenberg Public Policy Center, Campaign Discourse Report #9).

According to one national expert, political ads can be grouped into three categories: attack, advocacy, and contrast. Attack ads oppose the other candidate; advocacy ads make the case for the sponsor; contrastive ads both attack and advocate. Kathleen Hall Jamieson maintains that all of the NRSC ads were attacks on Wellstone. The Boschwitz ads were more balanced with 6 being simple attacks on Wellstone’s liberalism, three making the case for Boschwitz, and two comparative. The Wellstone ads were seen as mostly contrastive (6) and advocacy (7) with none falling into the attack category (Black & Hamburger, *MST*, 10/25/96).

On the basis of Jamieson’s evaluation, one would be led to conclude that Wellstone’s ad campaign came closer to meeting the spirit of the Minnesota Compact and the Campaign Ad Code, even though neither candidate signed on. However, the Wellstone campaign targeted female suburban voters who did not want to see unsubstantiated attack ads. Part of Wellstone’s campaign strategy, then, was to avoid attack ads. When one candidate goes negative, the other often retaliates. That did not happen in the senatorial campaign. Would the public see the differences between the two campaigns or would it simply treat both as equal contributors to the atmosphere of negativity? Would the news media conduct ad watches and, more importantly, would they make distinctions between the two campaigns? Or, in the interests of balance and fair play, would every critique of a Boschwitz ad have to be balanced with a critique of a Wellstone ad? If not, how can journalists maintain a semblance of fairness in the public’s eye? The concerns are real and important ones. Public cynicism can be magnified when, to appear balanced, journalists critique both sides, conflating small technical distortion with more blatant controversions of a record.

IMPACT OF ADS IN SENATE RACE

Several polls indicate that citizens rejected the Boschwitz and NRSC ad campaign as too negative and that this judgment figured in their voting decision. At the beginning of September, Boschwitz and Wellstone were even in the public opinion polls, 43% for Wellstone and 42% for Boschwitz (*MST*, 10/5/96, p. A17). Wellstone had not begun his own ad campaign but “issue” ads from the NRSC had been airing in Minnesota throughout the summer.

Two polls sponsored by WCCO-TV and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* on October 7-13 and October 29-November 1 yielded comparable results. More people felt that the ads directed at Wellstone mostly attacked him (65% and 52%) rather than explained his position and qualifications (13% and 15%). In contrast, ads directed at Boschwitz

showed a much smaller separation. Although more thought the ads attacked him (33% and 28%) than thought the ads explained his positions and qualifications (20% and 24%), most did not remember enough to say (41% and 34%). In contrast, less than a fifth of those polled did not remember ads directed at Wellstone (18% and 22%).

Consider first the percentage of people who do not remember well enough. Clearly, the public was more conscious of the Boschwitz ads attacking Wellstone, since it remembered them more. The ads “broke through” to the public. The ads were also read correctly by the public — primarily as attacks on Wellstone. But the attacks may have backfired. When asked if the ads they saw or heard about were more likely to make them vote for Boschwitz or Wellstone, 44% said Wellstone and about 29% said Boschwitz.

Can we conclude that the Boschwitz and RNSC ad campaign in Minnesota failed? This interpretation is certainly consistent with the polling results. And it is consistent with exit polling data. Twice as many voters considered Boschwitz’s ads to be attacks on Wellstone than the reverse. Of those who thought that Boschwitz’s ads attacked Wellstone, 70% voted for Wellstone. When asked directly if ads helped them decide how to vote, Wellstone came out ahead 46 to 20%.

Despite the consistency of these results, caution is required. The surveys tell us that people believed that Wellstone was attacked in his opponent’s ad campaign. They also said they were more likely to vote for Wellstone because of ads they had seen. But notice that the likelihood of voting question asks about ads they have seen or heard about the senate candidates. This could include ads not directed at opponents. In fact, several of Wellstone’s ads were not directed at Boschwitz at all but focused only on Wellstone’s positions. These ads may have had a positive effect on voters’ dispositions toward Wellstone without figuring in at all in their responses about ads “directed at” Wellstone or Boschwitz. In short, there was a mismatch between questions.

The questioning about ads explaining or attacking, oriented respondent’s attention to ads directed at opposing candidates, not ads focussed on presenting one’s own position. The question about likelihood of voting oriented the respondent toward all ads, not just ads against an opponent. Likelihood of voting for Wellstone may be partly due to Boschwitz’s attack ads and partly due to Wellstone’s self-directed ads. It is impossible to know how much of 44% — 29% difference between voting for Wellstone and for Boschwitz as a result of ads is due to the attack ads or to the self-promotional ads.

There is another area of uncertainty. Like many polling questions, these about ads ask people their perceptions about ads. A filter question asks if they had seen or heard any ads in the senate race. In the earlier survey, about 90% said yes; in the later, about 94% had. But saying and knowing could be different. People’s perceptions of the ads may not be based on knowledge about the ads but reconstructed from what they have read in the newspapers, what they heard on radio, or what they believe about Wellstone and Boschwitz. If so, then at least part of the negative reaction to the Boschwitz ads may be due to the media environment and Boschwitz’s positions. On the other hand, those with knowledge about the ads may have had even stronger reactions than those with hearsay.

Neither of the above observations is anything more than a caution. Results from surveys can often be interpreted in various ways. Causal direction is often difficult to untangle. Asking people the reasons for their actions requires a complex judgment that can as easily lead to a report of what is prominently on their minds at the moment as what really led to their votes. But one thing is certain from the survey data, the citizens of Minnesota judged the two ad campaigns run by the candidates for Senate differently – whatever the reasons.

What the voters did not do is as important as what they did. They did not reject both ad campaigns as equally flawed. These were qualitatively different ad campaigns and the public saw them as such. Instead of condemning both for the sins of one, the voters discriminated what was acceptable from what was not.

Can the public's rejection of the Boschwitz ad campaign be attributed to the atmosphere in the state stimulated by the Minnesota Compact? Ad watches were common in the print media. There was discussion of the Compact's planks on political ads and the need for cleaning up campaigns. These forces might have led some to be especially attentive to the quality of the ads generated by the Senate election and to be concerned by what were perceived to be attack ads. At the same time, the Wellstone campaign decided to adopt an ad campaign that was antithetical to that of Boschwitz both because of Wellstone's views about what is acceptable as a campaign strategy and what their internal polling indicated (Blodgett, personal communication). Their polling showed that Wellstone needed to gain the votes of suburban women and that this group did not want to see attack ads. Polling by Wellstone's campaign indeed found that voters were unhappy with Boschwitz' ads and were pulling away from him as a result. Exit polls indicated that Wellstone won the female vote 56 to 40% while breaking even among men (Baden, *MST*, 11/6/96). Importantly, even if Wellstone's ad campaign was carried out for strategic reasons, voters saw the difference between Boschwitz's and Wellstone's ads, punishing the former and rewarding the latter. Whether the Compact, news media watch dogs, the moral standards of Minnesota citizens, or some combination is the cause cannot be determined.

CONGRESSIONAL ADS

One of the most vigorously contested Minnesota congressional races paired freshman Republican Rep. Gil Gutknecht and Democratic challenger Mary Rieder. Rieder spent about \$1.2 million on campaign ads and Gutknecht almost \$1 million. The ads created a good deal of controversy. A Gutknecht ad portraying a little girl emptying a piggy bank into a till was denounced as "cynical" by the Citizens Campaign Advertising Code, since Gutknecht does not appear in it. Code director David Sharp says Gutknecht's violation was one of only about five or six found among the 283 Minnesota signatories to the code. Independent groups such as the AFL-CIO ran most of the anti-Gutknecht ads.

Involvement in political campaigns by members of the Minnesota Compact's "Steering Committee" created a significant political controversy in the Congressional race in the first district race. Mary Rieder, the DFL candidate, ran an ad that the Gutknecht camp labeled false. The debate focused on whether a vote by Gutknecht that increased spending by \$12 billion but reduced a seven-year projected spending schedule by \$10 billion (that is, it was less of an increase than was asked for) constituted a cut. Rieder's campaign manager, Blois Olson, defended the ad as truthful.

Of special concern were two things. The role of the Minnesota Compact in the controversy and the position of Tim Penny, Mary Rieder's Campaign Chairman and spokesperson for the Compact in the controversy. Gutknecht's aide, Mike Alm, issued a stinging press release asking Rieder and Penny "to abide by Penny's clean campaign code." She was questioned on "whether she ever intended to live by the Compact's principles." Penny was dragged into the fracas with Alm's charges that "Rieder has made a mockery of Tim Penny's Minnesota Compact" adding "silence implies consent." "It's bad enough if Mary Rieder and Tim Penny can't see that these ads are false. It's even worse if they understand the deception but are refusing to live by their word or the ideals they profess," Alm concluded [all quotes from Gutknecht press release, 10/26/97].

The controversy did receive some press coverage (*MST*, McCormick, 10/10/96). The article notes that the co-chairman of the Rieder campaign is Tim Penny, a major organizer in the Compact; it notes further that both candidates signed on to Compact. The article indirectly criticizes the Minnesota Compact citing the fact that some of the organizers are involved in partisan campaigns and the absence of any mechanism for deciding what is a “truthful” ad claim or not.

The problem is less the truth or falsity of the ads and more the appearance of impropriety and political bias on the part of one of the most visible spokespersons for the Minnesota Compact. Events such as this one can undermine a sense of the moral force of the Compact. To maintain the appearance of political neutrality, it is important for the Compact’s Steering Committee to separate itself from current or pending political campaigns.

Too, this event points out that the Compact, and purported violations of its tenets, will be used as weapons by opponents in political warfare. The same has occurred with political ad watches. Ad watches critical of one candidate have been used in the ads of opponents. The Compact can become a set of standards that campaigns use to judge one another. Adjudicating differences of opinion about clean and dirty ads according to the Compact can then be left in the hands of the public or the press.

As the Gutknecht-Rieder campaign reached its concluding weeks, the negative and misleading ads escalated. *The Post Bulletin* and other state papers kept on top of the ads with articles and ad watches, in most cases providing carefully stated information that would allow voters to reach decisions about the ad’s claims.

SPENDING

The Senate and Congressional campaigns in Minnesota expended large quantities of money. The Senate campaign alone accounted for more than 10 million dollars, 6 by the Wellstone campaign and 4.4 by Boschwitz. Soft money was something else. By some estimates the Boschwitz campaign expended over 1.5 million dollars in ads just from the NRSC (11/15/96, *MST*; 11/2/96, *MST*). Not to be outdone the Wellstone campaign is reported to have outspent Boschwitz on ad buys, says the *Washington Post* (1/19/97). Wellstone’s campaign benefited from \$360,000 on issue ads sympathetic to him from the coordinated campaign effort of the state DFL party.

The first district led the congressional races in spending with more than 1.5 million dollars. The amounts of soft money are not completely clear. The Gutknecht campaign is reported to have received an infusion of \$200,000 in the final weeks of the campaign from the state Republican Party (11/15 *Star-Tribune*, Greg Gordon). According to one source, the Rieder campaign expected to go through about \$1.2 million in campaign expenses. This would mean about \$600,000 from outside sources (11/2 *Star-Tribune*, deFiebre).

The following table summarizes what is known at this time about campaign expenditures in the Senate and Congressional races in Minnesota in 1996 based on Federal Election Commission reports. What is clear, is that the availability of financial support made possible an intense advertising campaign in the Senate race and in several of the districts.

1996 Official Campaign Spending
(Figures from the Federal Election Commission – website: www.fec.gov)

	Money Raised	Money Spent
Senate Race:		
Paul Wellstone:	\$5,991,013	\$5,979,224
Rudy Boschwitz:	\$4,399,974	\$4,385,982
Dean Barkley:	\$37,725	\$37,240
House Races:		
(1st District)		
Rieder (DFL)	\$644,547	\$625,244
Gutknecht (Rep.)	\$954,726	\$927,715
(2nd District)		
Minge (DFL)	\$633,295	\$616,673
Revier (Rep)	\$285,203	\$284,943
(3rd District)		
Leino (DFL)	\$29,351	\$22,600
Ramstad (Rep)	\$742,385	\$494,908
(4th Dist.)		
Vento (DFL)	\$570,244	\$559,370
Newinski (Rep)	\$316,031	\$315,410
(5th Dist.)		
Sabo (DFL)	\$498,260	\$515,970
Ulbrich (Rep)	\$68,843	\$66,821
(6th Dist.)		
Luther (DFL)	\$1,368,013	\$850,638
Jude (Rep)	\$389,724	\$392,953
(7th Dist.)		
Peterson (DFL)	\$565,973	\$532,229
McKingney (Rep)	\$182,887	\$181,026
(8th Dist)		
Oberstar (DFL)	\$502,907	\$538,159
Larson (Rep)	\$27,150	\$26,951
Fuhol (I)	\$3,155	\$3,118

DEBATES

Ten debates were held between senate candidates Paul Wellstone and Rudy Boschwitz. Each of the candidates for Congress participated in at least one debate. As Tom Hamburger put it “Minnesota leads the country in debates” (*MST*, 10/25/96, Black & Hamburger).

We evaluated the final two debates between the candidates for U.S. Senate. The first (10/25/96) involved citizens as questioners. These citizens were frustrated almost from the beginning. Each candidate seemed to look upon the debate as a way to score points at the expense of his opponent. This occurred despite requests from the citizen participants—which grew more pointed as the night wore on — to directly address the questions and stop attacking the opposing side, as well as efforts from the hosts to direct Boschwitz and Wellstone away from their bickering.

Using the debate as a campaign forum also meant that the two candidates were unable, or unwilling, to respond specifically to many of the questions. For example, one citizen asked what sorts of budget cuts the two men would support, and emphasized that he wished them to “be specific.” Boschwitz replied by referring to “slow growth,” i.e., the principle of slowing increases in government spending rather than cutting programs. Wellstone used his reply as an opportunity to rail at “corporate subsidies” (not specified) and pentagon spending (not specified). He also expressed a desire to decentralize government programs and bring them back to the people, once again, not specifying where he would cut to achieve savings in government spending.

It quickly became apparent that the candidates were intent on bringing in what they thought were their best lines and using them to reach the audiences yet undecided without alienating supporters. Wellstone mentioned corporate subsidies, or a variation thereof, several times, never making it quite clear what he meant by this. Boschwitz kept repeating the mantra that the National Union of Taxpayers had voted Wellstone the highest-spending senator in the country.

Despite the weakness of the politicians’ performances, some important information did get out. For example, Wellstone explained why he favored tax subsidies to Credit Unions but not other big corporations. And Boschwitz made clear his position on the BWCA dispute. Second, the questioners were citizens who, due to their participation in the Citizens’ Forum, were well informed about the issues. Some of the information they heard might have been old hat to them but useful to others more removed from the political process.

The last debate was held on Oct. 29, 1996 on station WCCO-TV, (CBS affiliate). The League of Women Voters sponsored the debate. Reform candidate Barkley was included this time. The debate was split into three segments. The first was a series of “political passwords,” in which the main host (a representative from the LWV) threw out a phrase and the three candidates had to respond to it.

The next segment allowed the three members of the media panel to ask the three candidates one question each. The questions had to do with taxes, hardship provisions for entitlement programs, and aid to Russia.

Then followed four questions from members of the audience. These four questions dealt with help to low and middle-income families, help to foreign countries, encouraging private savings as a way of addressing the crisis in Medicare and Social Security, and changes to the Clean Water Act.

Finally, the media panel was given the opportunity to ask another round of questions. These last questions dealt with decentralizing government (and the costs involved), and campaign attacks.

The “political password” approach was innovative, especially as it appeared the candidates had no idea what the passwords were going to be, and therefore had no opportunity to tailor their responses. The media panelists asked substantive questions about policy, by and large. Moreover, when the candidates gave vague answers or tried to evade a difficult question the reporters were quite good about holding their feet to the fire. The citizens’ segment was disappointing, not because the citizens didn’t ask intelligent or probing questions, but because, unlike the reporters, they were not allowed to press the candidates to give satisfactory answers.

Overall, the debates helped the quality of the campaign even if they did not always provide the kind of depth that scholars recommend. Although one could blame the candidates primarily for the quality of the debates (*MST* editorial, 11/3/96), the debate structure may bear some responsibility. The debates allowed citizen input, but the journalists, and arguably the norms of television news that require pithy responses, determined the length of the responses. And these were brief. The candidates welcomed the opportunity to do some sound-bite commentary but the citizens-questioners were frustrated by the brevity of the answers and the candidates’ failure to engage each other and the question fully.

INVOLVING THE PUBLIC

The fourth plank of the Minnesota Compact concerns citizen involvement and participation. Citizens were encouraged to become informed about candidates and elections in their districts and, specifically, to engage in informal conversation and organized discussion about campaign issues. The Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota took responsibility for organizing discussions before Congressional and Senate debates during the fall. Janna Hauge of the Humphrey Institute indicates that as many as a thousand packets went out to discussion leaders.

These materials included a summary of the tenets of the Compact; guidelines for hosting an organized discussion; important dates; how to watch a debate; sample questions to get discussion going; forms to evaluate the discussion; and a “Keep It Clean” button. No hard information on the number of conversations or their quality is available.

The materials distributed appeared to be useful. The “hosting” document and the “How to Watch a Political Debate” each provided valuable insights for leaders, many of whom had never tried to organize and run a potentially difficult discussion group. Politics, along with religion, is one of those topics to be avoided among strangers in polite conversation in the United States. The discussion groups sought to alter that norm but it is a strong one nonetheless.

The “hosting” insert provided good guidelines about convening and running a group discussion. Especially useful were the suggestions about keeping the TV off until the debate starts and turning it off immediately after the candidates finish. This avoids being biased by the usual pre- and post-debate commentary. Keeping everyone involved and tolerating conflict (in the form of disagreement) rather than trying to avoid it are necessary admonitions in every group dealing with political issues.

The “how to watch” page advised hosts to steer clear of who won or lost the debate – a clearly important directive if the strategy of campaigning is to be downplayed. It also noted that televised debates have norms of coverage – including for example reaction shots — which can distract the audience from the substance. Tidbits like these can serve an important educational function.

The “sample questions” page was less useful. It used questions that were quite general and might not be found to be as helpful to leaders as the other materials. For example, some kinds of questions (and issues) should be avoided. Factual disputes (for example, the number of jobs brought into the state from the federal government) cannot be resolved in the group. Questions that invite win-lose comparisons play into strategic evaluations. Some discussion about what should be avoided – at least in general terms – would assist leaders in thinking about their direction. Finally, questions that direct the group’s discussion to precisely those issues where the candidates engaged one another and have different positions should be encouraged. These represent the nexus of candidate comparison in the debate both because they disagree and because they are willing to engage one another’s positions.

On October 25, 1996 the first author had the opportunity to observe a discussion group at the invitation of its host. In addition to the observer, 3 women and 6 men were present. The debate was televised state-wide on KCTA-TV, the Minnesota Public Television affiliate. The format of the debate was unique because it involved questions from citizens located in Minneapolis and Duluth. The candidates were in the studio with two news people.

The debate was part of the “Citizen’s Issues Forum,” a joint project between KCTA and the *Star-Tribune*. The only two candidates invited to speak were Senator Wellstone and former Senator Boschwitz — Barkley was excluded from this debate as part of the station’s formal policy against inviting candidates without at least 10 per cent support in the polls. The program began with a short news-story that gave the background of the Citizen’s Forum: how it was chosen, what it required participants to do. Most of the rest of the program consisted of citizen participants addressing a single question (and sometimes a follow-up question) to the candidates. Usually the question was addressed to both candidates, and the hosts tried to alternate first responses between the two. Very occasionally the questioner would address his or her question to one or the other of the candidates, but the host would generally find an opportunity to rephrase the question in order to give the other candidate an opportunity to respond to the question as well. The final segment of the show allowed one of the hosts, Eric Eskola, to throw a few easy questions to either candidate. This last segment lasted only about two or three minutes. Most of the show was taken up with the citizens’ questions.

The group that the first author observed had a negative response to the debate. The members found the citizens’ questions sharp and pointed while the candidates were accused of pandering, being disrespectful, of engaging in “sound bite thinking,” being simplistic, and of failing to answer the questions. The group was very unhappy about the quality of response and the personal styles of both candidates in this debate. The discussion within the group did not delve deeply into issues or candidate’s abilities to meet the needs of Minnesota. Instead, it was sidetracked for lengthy periods on issues of international economics that was the expertise of one of the discussants. The interaction between debate and discussion did not produce the desired synergy for this group, we are sure.

The candidates gave pat answers that were recapitulations of previously stated positions. Although the questions of the highly informed citizens were subtle, there was no deep exploration of the issues. There are several reasons for this. The most important is that the norms of the medium (television) and the format of politically sophisticated questioners and discussants do not mix. The candidates have free television time state-wide about 10 days before the election. They also have strict time limits for their responses that are vigorously enforced by the moderators. They chose and were constrained to offer sound-bite answers that contrasted their views to those of the opponent.

The citizen questioners had been primed over months of seminars to be politically well informed and were therefore expecting a lot of detail in answers. But this expectation does not mix with the reality of television in a state-wide feed just prior to the election. The format constrained the candidates, as did the requirements of simple, easy-to-grasp answers to complicated questions. At the same time, the members of the group I observed were clearly politically sophisticated, as I expect were most attendees of other groups. They expected deeper, not shallower answers. There was a mismatch between the group's needs and expectations and what could be provided by the tightly controlled 2 minute format.

It may be that a state-wide televised debate over general issues with discussion is useful early in the campaign but as the election moves forward more targeted debates on selected topics may be more helpful. Knowledgeable people who are politically involved want deep exploration of issues of interest to them. The general audience would not find specific topics, explored over lengthier periods enticing.

The mixture of informed citizens awaiting engaged, informed debate, informed citizens posing more subtle questions than the answers they are receiving, and candidates restricted to a two minute answer period is a formula waiting to backfire. Instead of involving citizens in spirited, substantive discussion of the issues with one another, the debate-discussion approach may well have served to confirm citizens' cynicism about elections and politicians.

Voter turn-out. Voting in the state of Minnesota is always among the highest in the nation. In 1996, 65% of the eligible voters participated in the presidential election down from 72% in 1992, 67% in 1988, and 69.5% in 1984. Some of this drop can be explained by the decreased interest on the part of the electorate in the presidential campaign. It is possible that the public's perception that the Senate race was negative could explain the drop but this seems unlikely. Voting turn-out in presidential elections is determined primarily by the presidential race, not subsidiary races, and the drop in Minnesota is within the boundaries of the drop in national voting levels.

One interesting comparison is between Minnesota and New Jersey in 1996 Senate races. The percentage voting for president in Minnesota who also voted for senate was 99.6%. In New Jersey, the same ratio in 1996 was 89.2%, down from New Jersey's typical ratio of 94.4% (based on 1988, 1984, 1976, and 1972, all years when both presidential and senate races coincided). New Jersey's highly negative senate campaign is a likely cause of the sharp down turn in New Jersey voters' casting votes in their senate campaign. Although Minnesota's senate race was also marred by negative advertising, the voters were not alienated from the Senate race as they may have been in New Jersey. The voters of Minnesota saw a difference between the candidates and did not tar both with the same brush. Our view is that the public and the press helped to create an environment in Minnesota discouraging cynicism and encouraging involvement.

Voting by Congressional district reflects the overall pattern of turn-out for the presidential election – up from the mid-term elections of 1994 and down from the high of the three way presidential race of 1992.

Voting In Presidential, Senate and Congressional Races 1990, 1992, 1994, and 1996.

Senate race	1990	1996
	1,806,194	2,183,062

Congressional races	1992	1994	1996
1st	278,736	212,941	261,162
2nd	275,989	219,705	262,353
3rd	314,989	235,434	293,621
4th	277,528	210,193	255,759
5th	276,315	194,773	246,061
6th	300,720	226,930	295,482
7th	264,282	210,646	251,599
8th	282,148	232,979	275,338

Presidential race:	1992	1996
	2,355,796	2,192,640

Note. All figures prior to the 1996 figures are taken from the Minnesota Legislative Manual (The Minnesota Blue Book). Figures for 1990 are from the 1991-92 edition of the manual. Figures for 1992 are from the 1993-94 edition. Figures for 1994 are from the 1995-96 edition. All 1996 figures are taken from the Federal Election Commission website: www.fec.gov.

Surprisingly absent from the Citizen Participation plank of the Minnesota Compact is a call for participation by voting. Some materials encouraged citizens to register to vote, to speak with candidates, to volunteer time for candidates, to ignore “horse race” polls, and to offer praise and blame to media and candidates. But there are no calls to actually vote in any of the prepared materials we saw. Social norms are important for encouraging citizens to act in socially desirable ways. Social norms are communicated by the behaviors that people can see others perform. The more people vote, the more likely it is that others will be encouraged to vote. Although other citizens groups have “get out the vote” goals, the Compact might consider adding this element to plank 4. If citizens’ opinions are one of the vehicles for enforcing adherence to the Compact, then citizens must be voters as well as discussants.

Other forms of citizen participation. Research in social trust and cynicism about government indicates that involvement with one’s neighbors and fellow citizens is positively linked to trust of others and to trust in government. The Citizen Participation Code seeks to encourage Minnesotans to add to the dialogue of democracy by participating in political conversation.

The Wellstone campaign got citizens involved in a very different, but old-fashioned way. Wellstone ran a grass roots campaign involving as many as 5,000 volunteers in the final weeks to turn out the vote (Corn, *The Nation*, 12/2/96).

In addition, the campaign surveyed 400,000 voters, identifying 150,00 who were undecided and open to influence. These persons were contacted 5 times during the campaign via telephone, face-to-face contact, and follow-up letters (Blodgett, personal communication). A large number of local people participated in this grass roots activity that, importantly, had citizens engaging other citizens in dialogue about (partisan) issues meaningful to them. These were not created dialogues in artificial groups but rather were committed people involved with members of their community in meaningful conversation. Every person who contributes time to grass roots contacts in their community involves several others in dialogue about politics — however briefly. The effect is to multiply the impact of each volunteer on the dialogue of democracy.

Informing citizens about the Compact. To be the enforcement mechanism for the Compact’s provisions, citizens must be behind it. Doing so, requires that citizens be informed about the Compact and the importance of their role in its success. Without serious funding from other sources and with relatively little coverage of the Compact in local media, knowledge was likely to be low.

THE NEWS MEDIA

PRINT COVERAGE

AD WATCHES

Four newspapers were examined for their use of ad watches during the fall election period: *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Pioneer Press*, *Duluth News Tribune*, and the *Post Bulletin of Rochester*. Here we distinguish between articles about political advertising during the campaign and a special feature directed solely at ads. Aside from the *Duluth News Tribune* for which we could find no examples of an ad watch feature, the other three papers made extensive use of ad watches. The typical format included the ad’s title, the sponsor, the script (sometimes separating the text from the audio and visuals), and an analysis. The analysis section usually provided a critique or additional substantive information that voters could use to put the ad’s claims in context.

From July, 1996 to election day, the *Pioneer Press* ran nine separate ad watches. They focused primarily on the NRSC and Boschwitz ads against Paul Wellstone. One focused on Minnesota House and Senate Republican caucus ads against the ethics of the DFL. The *Post Bulletin* printed at least 12 ad watches during the fall election. The *Post Bulletin* critiqued ads primarily by Gutknecht and Rieder, the candidates in the hard fought race in the newspaper’s Congressional district. Seven Gutknecht and 4 Rieder ads were subjected to scrutiny. One Boschwitz ad was evaluated. The analyses in the *Post Bulletin* tried to provide information rather than indicating whether a particular claim was a distortion or a lie.

The *Star Tribune* used the ad watch format as early as May, 1996 when the NRSC ads targeting Wellstone began. We counted 12 ad watch features in the period, 9 in the fall.

In addition to the ad watch feature, several articles on political ads appeared during the campaign. Two gave in-depth treatment first to issue ads (*MST*, 9/8/96) and, toward the campaign’s denouement, a second considered the full set of ads generated by Wellstone and Boschwitz (*MST*, 10/25/96). An editorial on October 5, 1996 entitled “Those Darn Ads: Voters should demand a better campaign,” was ostensibly about loopholes in campaign financing

that allowed a huge influx of money to fund issue advocacy ads. However, the editorial began by debunking three issue ads that had been directed at Wellstone. It invited citizens to demand that Boschwitz repudiate “independent ads that contain half truths and false innuendo about Wellstone” and “look with favor on candidates who have pledged to abide by ... the Citizens Campaign Advertising Code.” The editorial ends with the observation that “voters should make candidates whose ads offend feel their wrath, at the polls” (*MST*, editorial, 10/5/96, p. A22). The editors invited Minnesota voters to punish candidates who use negative ads. Polling results issued two weeks later in this same newspaper suggest that voters may have done precisely this.

A week earlier, *Star Tribune* writers Hamburger and Black wrote about the word “liberal” in a section of the paper titled “News with a View.” The article takes off from the NRSC attack ads accusing Paul Wellstone of being liberal, ultra liberal, and embarrassingly liberal. It takes the reader on a tour of the concept’s rise and decline in national and local (i.e., Minnesota) politics. But the article is not just a “backgrounder.” The infamous Boschwitz cartoon ad featuring Paul Wellstone flashing a sign saying “liberal” over and over is discussed as a flagrant example of liberal bashing. Readers are invited to think about whether they want to make their voting decisions on one-word characterizations of candidates. Although this article is not a critical assessment of campaign ads, it does take its impetus from issues framed by the NRSC and Boschwitz ad campaigns.

The *Pioneer Press* and the *Star Tribune* endorsed different candidates in the senate election with the *Pioneer Press* ultimately picking Rudy Boschwitz. But both papers carried articles and ad watches critical of the Boschwitz and NRSC ad campaigns. Curiously, the *Star Tribune* did not run any ad watches between June 19 (the DFL welfare ad) and September 8, a nearly three-month stretch. This is interesting since a September 22 article in the *Pioneer Press* says the national Republicans regularly produced and broadcast new commercials — eleven of them since May, compared with just a handful from Democrats and Wellstone (*PP*, 9/22/96, Ragsdale).

After it ran an ad watch on Wellstone’s “Struggle” ad on September 21, the *Star Tribune* published three more ad watches — all on controversial, attention-grabbing Boschwitz ads. One of them, “Hall of Fame,” depicts a “college professor” type inducting Wellstone into the fictional “1967 Liberal Hall of Fame” before a sparse audience of mostly zoned-out, aged hippies. The ad watch calls the commercial “pure theater and about imagery, not issues.” Still, the reporter gives credit to the ad’s basic premise: “Wellstone’s advocacy of federal health and welfare programs, and a more active, expansive federal government than Boschwitz favors, is well established.” But “Wellstone also favors bigger cuts in military spending than Boschwitz and a tax system that puts more burden on the wealthy.” (*MST*, 10/1/96, D.Smith). The *Star Tribune* characterizes another Boschwitz ad, “Embarrassing,” as misleading. While the commercial charges Wellstone with launching a “personal attack” on Boschwitz, the ad watch points to the Republicans’ “relentlessly negative campaign against Wellstone for months.” (*MST*, P.L. Baden, 10/8/96).

When one considers all of the *Star Tribune’s* ad watches together, one gets the impression that the paper wanted sober, no-frills, and unbiased analysis from its reporters who handled these features. The *Pioneer Press* took more liberties. Both papers ran an ad watch on Boschwitz’s “Embarrassing” ad. The *Star Tribune’s* Patricia Lopez Baden begins her analysis by writing, “Back in 1990, it was Wellstone who ran ads that accused Boschwitz of throwing mud. This time Boschwitz has beaten him to the punch.” (*MST*, P.L. Baden, 10/8/96). On the other hand, the *Pioneer Press’s* Jim Ragsdale playfully gets right to the point: “Excuse me? The guy who has been pummeled mercilessly since April by a mysteriously funded Republican attack ad campaign is now the bad guy in this race? Are the media mavens who put this spot together anywhere near the Twin Cities’ media market?” The *Pioneer Press* also ran an informative editorial about negative advertising (*PP*, “Are negative ads losing their touch?” 10/18/96).

The point here is that two newspapers, editorially on different sides of the political spectrum and ultimately supporting different candidates, nevertheless drew voters' attention to the quality of the ad campaigns being conducted. The so-called "priming hypothesis" implies that media coverage has an effect not so much on people's attitudes as on what kinds of information people use in making decisions. Consistency across news sources in concern about the advertising environment could have contributed to encouraging voters to use the quality of the ad campaigns as a criterion in their decision-making.

One could argue that the use of ad watches by the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* was too infrequent and the feature too often buried deep in the Metro section to be of much use to citizens. After all, there were nearly 40 different ads in the senate race alone and far fewer ad watches. But even if many of the ads went undiscussed in news media, this is not necessarily undesirable. Campaigns often see ad watches and related articles as free publicity; a controversial ad with a relatively small buy can reach many more people than will ever see it on television. "Before a commercial becomes subject to glorious Ad Watch treatment ... editors and news producers need to slow down and find out if the ad is going to actually be on the air enough times to have some impact on the voters".⁴

All told, the *Star Tribune*, and *Pioneer Press* gave a great deal of attention to the ad environment in Minnesota, especially the atmosphere created by the trickle down from the senate campaign. They did not just use the ad watch feature, but employed editorials, news articles, and news analysis. They were not reluctant to differentiate the Wellstone and Boschwitz ads in terms of how they framed the election decision for Minnesotans. At the same time, the *Post Bulletin* gave a good deal of its attention to how advertising had been affecting the election process in the first district. Together the voters could have been primed to use their own evaluations of the quality of the ad campaigns as a part of the reason for their vote.

NEWS AND FEATURES

The same newspapers monitored for their use of ad watches were also analyzed for the quality of their substantive coverage of election issues.

The Star Tribune. The newspaper coverage in the *Star Tribune* was probably superior to that of any of the other four papers reviewed, at least when looked at in terms of the mandate of the Compact. Their coverage of the debates between Wellstone and Boschwitz was thorough, and often beyond merely reporting the debate. For example, the article, "For Questioners, a frustrating night of talk," run in conjunction with the paper's Citizen's Forum series helped place the debates in perspective and gave full rein to the voters' opinions of them. It showed that citizens are not content with having the candidates merely appear in debates but want answers that directly respond to their questions.

The coverage was highlighted by two different series that ran through the month of October (see Appendix B for more information). One was called "You Decide". It was a six-week series that ran every Sunday. The series focused on six different areas of interest to voters. It laid out the stances of the three major presidential candidates on legislation related to the issue of the day, but focused largely on the issue as seen from the eyes of citizens and voters: what ordinary Minnesotans thought about welfare, or social security, or the size of government. The series was informative, it outlined the issues in a nuanced way, and it tried to demonstrate the effects that larger political

4. Bob Balkin, "O.D.ing On "Ad Watch,"" *Politics Now* 28 May 1996: <http://www.politicsnow.com/views/buzz/hive/hive0596/052896.htm>

debates might have on readers' lives. Good use was made of graphics in highlighting illuminating or especially relevant statistics. A final story in the series ("Residents more than ready..." Nov. 3) was published just prior to election day. This story focused on a small suburb, Anoka, examining how the six issues affected that town specifically.

The second series was called "Where They Stand." It, too, was an issues-based series, but aimed mostly at the Senate race. This series was composed of four different stories, running four consecutive Mondays in October. The articles treated complicated issues at length and with the degree of circumspection they deserved, while incorporating opinions of ordinary citizens.

Several other series included: eight different pieces on the various congressional races in Minnesota; a "Minnesota Politics" page that included both election and non-election news about the state's politics; and the "Politics Page," a daily feature that often included wire or syndicated stories about the races outside the state, or featured more strategy-type stories.

Like the *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, the *Star Tribune* was quite concerned with two very close races: the Wellstone-Boschwitz and the Gutknecht-Rieder race. However, unlike the *Post-Bulletin*, which found itself drawn more and more to strategy stories as the race wore on, the *Star Tribune* seemed to be operating with the goals of the Compact in mind even if such explicit recognition was not present.

The Pioneer Press The Pioneer Press gave a good deal of attention to the debates in the Senate race. It stayed close to reporting what the candidates said. This became a problem once it became clear that Wellstone and Boschwitz both were intent on using the debates largely to score political points. One part of the Compact's planks encouraged journalists to get response from voters during and after debates. The *Pioneer Press*, like most of the other papers (with the occasional exception of the *Star Tribune*) did not do this in any of its stories on the debates.

Much of the *Pioneer Press*' coverage, contrary to the Compact's expressed desire to cover issues and to downplay the "horse-race" or strategic nature of the campaign, seemed to do exactly the latter. It is hard to say that there were any strong trends in the *Pioneer Press*' coverage. Most of the issue-oriented pieces, such as there were, appeared in the early parts of October, although a good piece by Bill Salisbury on Wellstone and Boschwitz's avoidance of some tough issues appeared Oct. 13. Some of the highlights of the paper's coverage included an editorial by Glenda Holste decrying attack ads (Oct. 18), the Knight-Ridder series "Public Choices," that ran for several days (see Oct. 9, and Oct. 8) and two long profiles that appeared in the Oct. 6 issue on Wellstone and Boschwitz. The Boschwitz article was especially good, giving a long run-down of the former Senator's record while in Washington. It was reprinted by one of the other papers (The *Duluth News-Tribune*).

The Post-Bulletin of Rochester: The coverage of the *Post-Bulletin* had several bright spots. It did a good job of covering campaign advertising and letting readers know about misleading or inaccurate information in ads, and it gave the candidates' debates prominent and in-depth coverage. It downplayed "horserace" coverage and highlighted issues, although as the election wore on more and more stories seemed to revolve around who was ahead, and who had raised the most money.

The high points were its coverage of campaign ads, especially in the tight race for the 1st congressional district. Although all the papers had some sort of "Ad Watch" series in their pages, the *Post-Bulletin*'s was notable for its detailed descriptions and analyses of ads, as well as its sober accounts of the claims. The *Post-Bulletin* also gave extensive coverage to what we might call some "problem" ads directed at Gutknecht. One of these was aired by the

AFL-CIO and exaggerated the amount of money Gutknecht had taken from PACs. Another was aired by the Rieder campaign itself. The first story was notable because it showed how the media could cooperate with each other and with the campaigns to improve election discourse. When radio stations agreed not to play the AFL-CIO ad until the offending sentence was changed, the *Post-Bulletin* gave the story a lot of play. Rieder's campaign also went on record as decrying the tactics used in the ad. Another story, in which Gutknecht challenged one of Rieder's own ads, was important for different reasons. For one thing, the accusation that the ad was "lying" to voters was not as clear-cut; the dispute over one of the ad's claims, as the *Post-Bulletin* pointed out, was as much a debate over definitions as anything.

The *Post-Bulletin* also produced a series of election previews that the paper ran throughout October. These reports not only gave an overview of the race but also tried to highlight the issues on which the candidates differed. Rather than telling us that the Republican candidate wanted to cut taxes and the Democrat wanted to help workers and single mothers, the series tried to point out exactly what this might mean in terms of a legislative agenda. At the end of the month of October, a series called "Face Off," allowed Gutknecht and Rieder about 15 inches of editorial space to answer a question put to them by the paper (*Post Bulletin*, 10/15/96).

A weakness of the coverage was perhaps due to the fact that two of the more important races in this area—the Gutknecht-Rieder race and the Wellstone-Boschwitz race—were important nationally in the plans of Democrats to regain control of Congress. Thus, there was a lot of what one might call strategic coverage, especially as the campaigns moved closer to Election Day. By the end, most of the coverage was aimed at what the candidates were doing in order to win, little about what they were saying on the issues. This is, of course, problematic for voters who begin to pay attention in the closing days of the campaign.

The Duluth News-Tribune The small *Duluth News-Tribune*, carried surprisingly significant coverage of the 1996 elections. The highlight was two complementary series that ran throughout the month of October, usually on alternating days. These series were called "Election '96: the issues," and "Election '96: the candidates." The former included in-depth treatment of issues, and an attempt to personalize them for readers. For example, social security, was discussed in terms of its impact on the everyday lives of people living in Duluth and the surrounding area. By quoting the candidates directly on the issue, and often at length, it gave voters a good idea about what the candidate might do, legislatively, to deal with the problem. The series on candidates highlighted issues that were important to voters while also discussing the candidates' personalities and the race itself. Both series would appear to have been the result of a poll taken of readers earlier in the summer. Readers told the paper they wanted changes in reporting, and the staff seemed to listen.

Overall, the four newspapers tried to innovate in their coverage of election issues. They took seriously the need to help inform voters about political ads, to provide nuanced coverage of substantive issues, and to provide the information in a way that was meaningful to local people and their concerns. They appeared to be downplaying horse race coverage. When the *Star Tribune* did give hefty coverage to polls comparing the status of Wellstone and Boschwitz it also tried to use the polling information to contextualize substantive discussion about the ad environment. Polling became not simply a description of where the candidates stood relative to one another but a means of probing more deeply into election issues.

5. Two journalists we interviewed suggested that attitudes toward the Minnesota Compact were "lukewarm" at best at his newspaper. Too, newly designed series appealing to readers in unique ways derived more from individual journalists' insights than any other source.

It is impossible to say how much of the newspaper coverage was prompted by the Minnesota Compact, creative attempts at civic journalism at the various papers, or simply the desire of sincere journalists to appeal to their readers' better instincts.⁵

TV NEWS

It is much more difficult to get a sense of the nature and frequency of election coverage on television news than in newspapers. We focused on the final week (10/28 to 11/1/96) of local news before the election obtaining seven days of coverage for each of the three network affiliates (WCCO, the CBS affiliate; KSTP, ABC affiliate; and KARE, NBC).

WCCO provided limited coverage. Like all the newscasts, the reporting was heavily slanted toward stories focussed on campaign tactics. The election coverage averaged one story per nightly 30 minute segment. However, WCCO did air the League of Women Voter's debate on October 28 between Boschwitz and Wellstone, and encouraged viewers to get more information from its web site.

KSTP's election coverage for this week was, in our judgment, the best of the three stations. The station was obviously experimenting to try to improve campaign discourse. One story tested the claims made in election advertisements for the first congressional seat. This was one of two ad watches during the final week of television coverage. It missed providing the kind of information necessary to allow voters to evaluate the validity of the Rieder ad – what is the difference between a cut in rate of growth and an absolute decline in the dollars allocated? Another story focused on a Wellstone campaign worker attending the Clinton rally on October 28. The worker was disappointed not to hear anything specific about health care or education from the president. But the issue was then dropped rather than exploring what the president had or had not said about this issue elsewhere.

KARE provided the least political coverage of the three major newscasts in Minneapolis during the week we monitored. It ran only two election stories of any note during this week on its 6 p.m. newscasts. On Monday, the newscast led with the story of President Clinton's visit to the city that day. This story was covered primarily as a strategic story, emphasizing the reasons why Clinton came to the state rather than paying any attention to what any of the candidates at the rally—Clinton, Wellstone, or Mary Rieder—might have said in the way of substantive remarks. On Friday, the station came out with a poll story indicating that Wellstone was well ahead. The opportunity to convey some of the substance of candidates' positions was not taken up. On Tuesday and Thursday no political reporting was done in this time slot. On Wednesday, a short story about a mock election held by sixth-graders constituted politics from 6 to 6:30. When the station was not covering political strategy, it was not covering politics at all.

Exposure to candidate debates. Although the candidates for Senate engaged in 10 debates, the final two televised state-wide were disappointing engagements. The format of the debates allowed sound bite answers rather than deeper, more complex exchanges. Too, some of the debates televised state-wide reached a small number of households. The last debate between Wellstone and Boschwitz — in the week before the election — broadcast on KSTP-TV reached only 70,000 households. Many citizens simply changed channels (Hamburger, *MST*10/31).

An alternative would encourage the Massachusetts model of coverage. Since 1994, news organizations in Massachusetts have tried to work together to improve the quality of elections and public information. The result in 1996 was a series of debates between Kerry and Weld, half of which were carried simultaneously on the three major networks. The audience reached in these debates was substantially greater than in Minnesota. As Tom Hamburger,

godfather of the Minnesota Compact, noted, the Boston media “came together to simply demand that the candidates debate each other seven times. Further, they got agreement from the state’s three major television stations to broadcast at least half of the debates simultaneously, meaning that Boston voters saw the debate on every major local station.” (Hamburger, *MST*, 10/31/86)

FUTURE EVALUATIONS

The quality of public discourse in Minnesota during the 1996 election cannot be attributed to the effects of the Minnesota Compact per se. Neither can the failures of 1996 be laid at the feet of the Compact and its organizers. The data are simply not available to praise or blame the Compact for apparent consequences.

In future evaluations of the Compact, or similar interventions, three issues should be kept in mind. The first is sometimes called the “Hawthorne Effect.” It is named after a researcher in organizational behavior who found that it was not the specific changes introduced into a business that improved productivity and efficiency but the mere act of introducing change. Attempts to improve the quality of public discourse could be effective just because they are giving attention to issues important to the public. By giving attention to citizens’ concerns, it is possible that any intervention with any reasonable guidelines would be as effective as one as well-conceived as the Minnesota Compact. If one wants to know whether the specific components of the Minnesota Compact were especially effective, one must compare locations publicizing the Compact to other locations advocating a different kind of intervention. For example, the Compact’s emphasis on the press, the public, and politicians’ mutual responsibility could be compared to other regions where only a civic journalism component is present. The point is simply that an evaluation of a social intervention such as the Compact must decide in advance whether it is important to know whether the specific components of the intervention are necessary or whether any intervention is equally acceptable.

An alternative evaluation strategy is receiving some discussion in work on health communication campaigns. The argument is that the specific methods chosen by a particular campaign are less important than the existence of the campaign at all. As the number and intensity of the campaigns aimed at changing a health-related behavior increase, so will the behavior change. Evaluations under this view are not concerned with the specifics of one type of campaign over another, but rather in the efficacy of a campaign to change social norms. On this view of what is and is not important for evaluation, the specific tenets of the four planks of the Minnesota Compact are simply replaceable means to the more important end – changing the social norms about political discourse thereby improving political campaigns.

We would argue that what is centrally important about the Minnesota Compact and deserving of careful evaluation is the concept of equal responsibilities among the press, the public, and politicians. Other interventions aimed at improving the quality of public discourse have been one-dimensional or gave only lip service to the systemic nature of social discourse. How those responsibilities are met by politicians, the press, and the public is less important than the fact that each shares in the problem and in the solution. The Minnesota Compact is unique in this regard. If this feature has the capacity to improve the quality of public discourse, then the program should be evaluated precisely along these dimensions.

The specifics of each of the four planks of the Compact are likely to evolve with feedback from those outside the Compact and from self-reflection. It is important to remain open to changes within the methods of the Compact so

that it does not fall prey to the criticisms that have been leveled at interventions like civic journalism offered by the very people it aims to enlist — journalists.

CONCLUSIONS

The questions addressed in this report are not whether the Minnesota Compact per se was effective in improving the quality of public discourse during the election of 1996 but whether its goals are desirable and whether its methods are the most effective available to achieve those goals. We have tried to argue that the goals of the Compact are well directed and comprehensive but that the methods to achieve them may need to be reviewed.

In thinking about revamping and expanding the methods of the Minnesota Compact and similar interventions, it is necessary to think in terms of the self-interests of the targeted groups. Now self-interest immediately raises questions. If the Minnesota Compact is focussed on the public welfare, how can a focus on self-interest benefit the public good. Self-interest does not necessarily contradict the public interest. When the Wellstone campaign marshals a small army of volunteers to reach out to a group of targeted voters, the volunteers are acting in their own self-interest. As the same time, they are engaging other members of the public in dialogue about issues consequential to governing the state of Minnesota. They are in effect increasing the frequency of discussion about political issues, one of the goals of the Compact. They are doing so by acting in their own self-interest, seeking the election of their favored candidate.

There are three sets of interests that can be tapped in designing interventions to increase the quality of public discourse during campaigns.

Run seminars by journalists, for journalists on conducting ad watches in print and broadcast media.

Part of the interests of journalists is to do their jobs with a high degree of professionalism, meet the public's need for information, report the story behind the story, and break new stories, while sustaining and ideally increasing the size of the audience. These interests are met in the focus on ad watches by both print and broadcast journalists. Ad watches provide the public with much needed perspective on claims and innuendoes offered in political ads, contextualize the ad's claims, and provide new information. Doing ad watches well requires a lot of careful background work. At least one representative of the broadcast media indicated that his station was unable to do much in the way of ad watches because the ads themselves changed too quickly to conduct the necessary background checks. Too, ad watches can raise the public's cynicism about elections especially when every news story insists upon debunking ads from both sides, in a false sense of balance. But ad watches can be starting points for substantive stories about the issues raised by an ad, even if the content of the ad is dismissed. Ad watches can also help deal with the problem of accuracy in ads by maintaining elevated levels of sensitivity on the part of ad makers and their campaigns.

Ad watches can be a vehicle for increasing the quality of campaign discourse and, indirectly, the accuracy of ad campaigns themselves.

Publicize the consequences of campaigns built on illegitimate ad claims that undermine public support for candidates who use them.

Politicians want to win. To the extent that they and their campaign managers believe that attack ads work and are necessary, these kinds of ads will be used. Although there is some scholarly evidence that attack ads might demobilize the public, reducing the likelihood of turn-out for the ad's sponsors, the prevalent belief among practitioners is that attack ads work to raise motivation and interest and to impart information. In the senate election in Minnesota in 1996, there is some evidence that the attack ads of the NRSC and the Boschwitz campaign failed. Part of the electorate cited these ads as some of the reason that they were voting for Wellstone (or against Boschwitz). Responses such as this can be used as evidence to influence campaigns to avoid personalized attack ads because the public is fed up with them, even if partisans do not change their votes as a result. The basis for this approach is self-interest. Use available, legitimate evidence about the failures of personalized attack ad campaigns to appeal to politicians' self-interests.

Conduct seminars on the use of grass roots organizing and face-to face campaigning.

The Wellstone campaign used a technique that was a throw-back to earlier, less media-dominated times. It targeted a group of voters in two congressional districts believing that these districts were consequential to Wellstone's re-election. These voters were contacted by a small army of Wellstone volunteers. Jeff Blodgett, Wellstone's campaign manager, indicated that their group had attended work shops on grass roots organizing with every intention of using this old fashioned technique to mobilize targeted voting groups. In combination with Wellstone's history in community organizing and committed volunteers, the strategy appears to have been successful in advancing the goals of the campaign.

Importantly for public interventions such as the Compact, people were being involved in the political process in ways that were important to them. This was tangible and real involvement with a candidate and with issues that made a difference to the volunteers. In turn, these citizens engaged other citizens in political discourse about the election and issues of concern to their communities. The value of this kind of involvement cannot be understated. Everything we know about cynicism about government, general trust of others, and volunteering suggests that the greater the involvement in volunteering, the less the cynicism and the greater the trust.

Citizen involvement in political discourse and political activities meaningful to them which at the same time reach out to others in the community is precisely the kind of involvement needed. It has the real possibility of altering cynical attitudes and amplifying its effects across the community. We believe it is the kind of activity to be preferred to artificially created discussion groups with no past contact or prospect of future involvement.

APPENDIX A

The following are the four planks of the Minnesota Compact as they appeared on the University of Minnesota Web Site (<http://www.umn.edu/compact/back.html> on 10/23/96).

PLANK # 1

MINNESOTA COMPACT - DEBATES

Recognizing that democratic elections require the open exchange of ideas, as a candidate for United States Senate (House of Representatives) I agree:

1. To participate in a minimum of two public debates;
2. To abide by the ground rules, format, and criteria set forth by a sponsoring organization which does not support or endorse political parties or candidates;
3. That such debates may incorporate a series of newspaper point/counterpoint articles;
4. That such debates may be carried on-line;
5. That the debates may include live audience participation and follow-up news conferences;
6. That one or more debates will be broadcast statewide (or district-wide) on radio and television.

PLANK # 2

MINNESOTA COMPACT - CANDIDATES' ADS (THE "TEN COMMANDMENTS OF CLEAN CAMPAIGN ADS")

Candidates for United States Senate or House of Representatives from Minnesota agree that some standards of practice in campaign communications are essential if we are to maintain a well-functioning democracy, rather than degrade that democracy. Those candidates should therefore adhere to the following code of conduct in campaign communications.

I. General responsibility and ad format

1. The candidate will take full and personal responsibility for all advertising created and placed on behalf of his/her campaign by its staff or related committees.
2. In television advertising, either the candidate's visual likeness, voice, or both will be in the ad at least 50% of the time.
3. In radio advertising, the candidate's voice will be in the ad at least 50% of the time.
4. The candidate will publicly renounce any independently financed ad that violates the standards set forth in this agreement.

II. Ad content; other campaign communications

1. The candidate will use no appeal to discrimination based on race, gender, or religious belief and will condemn those who do.
2. The candidate will refrain from false and misleading attacks on an opponent, staffer, or member of his/her family and shall do everything in her/his power to prevent others from using such tactics for his/her

electoral benefit. ("Misleading attacks" include taking votes or actions significantly out of context and/or distorting the opponent's record by the use of demonstrably unrepresentative votes or actions.)

3. The candidate will document fully any criticism of an opponent or his/her record (including as much of that material as possible in the ad itself).
4. The candidate will refrain from using any still photos, film or video of the opponent that are designed to make him/her personally unpleasant or contorted or that are taken significantly out of context.
5. The candidate will acknowledge that the principles detailed above apply to other sorts of campaign communications in addition to ads in the media, e.g., speeches, billboards, direct mail, etc.
6. The candidate will acknowledge that the principles detailed above also apply to campaign communications from his/her political party.

PLANK # 3

MINNESOTA COMPACT - THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS

Journalists agree:

1. to identify through polling and other methods the issues that concern their readers, viewers and listeners. To emphasize those issues in campaign coverage by:
 - a) covering the candidates' proposals and other policy options for dealing with citizen concerns
 - b) providing in-depth, explanatory articles on significant issues, such as taxes, health care, crime, and education;
2. to de-emphasize the "horse race," or predictions about the outcome of the election in their stories and broadcasts;
3. to write and broadcast stories about candidate debates, citizen reaction to these debates, and follow-up news conferences;
4. to inform audiences of opportunities for participation in public discussion of campaign issues;
5. to review campaign ads for fairness and accuracy and publish and broadcast stories detailing their findings; and
6. to describe to readers the news organization's decision-making process on ethically challenging or controversial campaign stories.

PLANK # 4

MINNESOTA COMPACT - CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

1. As citizens, we acknowledge a responsibility to play an active role in the political process;
2. we expect candidates, as fellow citizens, to engage in constructive discussion of public concerns;
3. and we expect the news media to support this constructive discussion of public concerns.
4. Believing that public dialogue is essential to democracy, we commit to participating in both informal conversation and at least one organized discussion to be held in conjunction with the Minnesota Congressional or Senate debates (scheduled for Fall 1996).

The Campaign Advertising Code proposed by a group organized by Lee Lynch follows. Its principles are consistent with those of the second plank of the Minnesota Compact.

THE CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING CODE

The General Principles

I recognize that some standards of practice in campaign communications are essential if we are to maintain a well-functioning democracy in Minnesota, rather than degrade that democracy. I recognize that campaign advertising should present meaningful information on the candidates and their records, philosophies, issue stands and leadership capabilities. I recognize that emphasis on mere personal attacks or sensational “issues” and demeaning photos or video of my opponent increase public cynicism, decreases voter participation and degrades democracy. I recognize that at times it is appropriate to criticize my opponents’ record, beliefs, and positions and that these criticisms must be fully documented and must not be false, misleading or taken out of context. I recognize that any appeal to discrimination based on race, gender or religious belief violates acceptable standards of campaign communication.

I further recognize that some of these general principles will be subject to various interpretations and therefore I commit myself and my campaign staff to the following specific principles.

Specific Principles

1. I take full responsibility for all advertising created and placed by my campaign staff, committees or groups connected with my campaign. I will review and approve all such advertising and will publicly rebuke advertising created and placed in support of my candidacy by independent groups.
2. In television advertising my voice and likeness will be in the commercial at least 50% of the time.
3. In radio advertising my voice will be in the commercial at least 50% of the time.
4. In print advertising including newspapers, direct mail, brochures, posters and fund raising materials, I will display the logo of the Code in a legible fashion.
5. I will not use any photo of my opponent that has been retouched or modified; I will not use any cartoons, illustrations or drawings that are representative of my opponent; all film or video of my opponent will be run in real time and will not be distorted, retouched, colorized, or morphed in any way.
6. I will request by certified mail that broadcast stations turn down any independent expenditure, political action committee or special interest advertising that supports my candidacy. If the stations, in their own interest, reject my request then I will ask them to at least run advertising that is in keeping with the spirit of the general and specific principles of this code.

You have my word that I will be true to this Campaign Advertising Code.

Signature of the Candidate

Candidate for the Office of

APPENDIX B

Examples of features from the *Star Tribune*

MINNESOTA CITIZENS' FORUM:

An ongoing discussion with 214 citizens from around the state, chosen to represent demographically the state's population as a whole.

Days Run: Oct. 26, "Voters pin down Wellstone, Boschwitz," by Patricia Lopez Baden—about a debate in which members of the Forum were allowed to ask the candidates questions directly.

Example: Oct. 26 article, pp. A1, A18. Article outlines the debate in front of the Citizens' Forum, whose members were linked to the debate hall through a satellite feed. Focuses mainly on the candidates' responses to questions, leaving the citizens' responses to a second story [see "For questioners..." Oct. 26, in the next section]. The story does mention, however, that the citizens were generally harder on the candidates, and generally more determined to get answers to their questions, than were the journalists. The end of the story featured the protests of Reform candidate Dean Barkley, who was not allowed in the debate.

Comment: This story, combined with an accompanying story on the debate, probably formed the best coverage of the debates of all the reports studied. It highlighted relevant information in the candidates' answers, but also pointed out where they fell short.

THE POLITICS PAGE:

Daily (except weekends) round-up of news about the presidential campaign and races for other offices

Days run: Oct. 26. Oct. 25, Oct. 24, Oct. 23, Oct. 18; Oct. 4. Sept. 24, Sept. 25.

Example: Oct. 23 page, p. A10. This day's page saw a story on campaign fund-raising; a story on Dole's continued failure in the polls, and a campaign story on the presidential race.

Length: A full page (none of The Politics pages were a full page long. Some only ran half a page.)

Comment: One of the *Star Tribune's* less successful series efforts. Many of the stories were conventional political stories, centered on campaign events and horse-race style coverage.

MINNESOTA POLITICS:

This feature was a weekly round-up of politics within the state, usually containing the following: a major story; a series of shorts called "Week in Review;" another group of short stories called "Week in Preview;" a feature called "Campaign Talk," focused on the elections; and a feature called "By the Numbers" — graphics on political issues.

Days Run: Oct. 27; Oct. 20; Oct. 13; Oct. 6; Sept. 29;

Example: Oct. 27, p. B3. This week's page featured a story called "Bonuses for recent vets," by Conrad deFiebre, which dealt with a state amendment to include Gulf War vets to receive bonuses. The story, about 15 inches in length, outlines what the amendment is about and quotes several politicians and veterans-rights organizers who support the amendment. "By the Numbers" showed how Minnesotans have generally voted opposite to the nation as a whole in the presidential elections, and listed the phone numbers of all the candidates in the U.S. Senate election. "Campaign Talk," pulled a few quotes from VP Gore's speech in Duluth earlier in the week, informed readers about the less-than-savory reputation of some of Boschwitz's ad-men; and described a series of election signs for a state senate candidate based on the old "Burma Shave" ads. The "Week in Review" and "Week in Preview" sections had articles relating only to state and local politics.

Length: A full page.

Comment: A good idea. Contains mostly useful information. Even the graphics — such as the one listing the candidates phone numbers — are more useful than most USA Today graphics.

WHERE THEY STAND:

A four-part series on several selected issues and an in-depth look at the positions of the three major candidates — Wellstone, Boschwitz, and Barkely — on each.

Days Run: Oct. 28, "For voters, hot-button issues can be the driving force," by Patricia Lopez Baden — about four particularly divisive issues in this year's campaign: abortion, gay rights, gun control, and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern Minnesota; Oct. 21, "The foreign policy debate: Wellstone, Boschwitz are worlds apart," by Dane Smith — about foreign policy issues; Oct. 14, "3 candidates: On crime, welfare and health care — Senate hopefuls weigh society vs. individual," by Patricia Lopez Baden; Oct. 7, "Senate hopefuls represent the left, right and middle of the spectrum," by Dane Smith — on the size and role of government.

Example: The Oct. 14 article, pp. A1, A9. The article outlines what each of the three major Senate candidates thinks about the major social issues in the race, but starts with a quote from a non-politician, welfare mother Dawn Peterson, who thinks some sort of welfare system is necessary but hates the current system. It quotes the three candidates' stances on the three issues and plays them off against Peterson's opinions. The story also includes a chart that summarizes the views of Boschwitz, Wellstone, and Barkley.

Length: Three-quarters of a page.

Comment: This is an outstanding article, mostly because of the decision to include Peterson, and to quote her at length (note that not all of the articles in this series did this, some stuck to merely quoting the three candidates on the issues). A welfare mom, Peterson does not automatically take the liberal tone on most issues, as one might suppose. She wants to work, and she doesn't care much for lazy people who abuse the system, or for having to work overtime to pay taxes. At the same time, the system is working against her. Her voice allows the debate to move beyond an agenda dominated by the politicians and lobby groups and opens up new ways of looking at the problems. Even the politicians in this article seem to have allowed themselves a more nuanced view of the problem than they give on the stump or in the debates.

YOU DECIDE:

A six-part series, run every Sunday from Sept. 22 through Oct. 27, on six major policy-areas of importance to both national and state policies. Unlike the Where They Stand series, which focused on the candidates' opinions, You Decide focused on what voters were thinking about the direction policy should be going. A huge series, most Sundays had at least three stories on the issue—one discussing general concerns in the area, one geared to a specific topic related to the area, and a large chart outlining where the three main Presidential candidates stood on the issue, covering about two and-a-half pages. They also included graphics highlighting specific problems, short "Fact Sheets" outlining some of the major problem areas, and a side-bar called "Digging Deeper," that told readers how to get more information on the issue.

Days run: Oct. 27, "How do you solve urban poverty?" by Bob von Sternberg — dealing with the problem of urban poverty both in Minnesota and the nation, and "Immigrants paint different picture from the rhetoric of the campaign trail," by Dee DePass — about the special problems of the immigrant, mostly working, poor; Oct. 20, "What's United States' place in the world," and "Dole's resume doesn't appear to help," by Eric Black — both on foreign policy, and "The president's hand," by Frank Wright — on the five major foreign policy issues that the president will have to face; Oct. 13, "What's the best way to handle change?" by Bob von Sternberg — about the changes society is undergoing and what politics can do about it, and "Change: Got techno-anxiety? Get over it," by Jonathan Gaw — about the information technology revolution; Oct. 6, "Clinton and Dole 'kiss the babies and fund the elderly,'" by Steve Berg — on the government's decision to sacrifice funding for programs for younger Americans in favor of other entitlement programs from people who can vote, and "They help each other," by Warren Wolfe — about one Minnesota family's take on inter-generational responsibility, and "What do the generations owe one another?" by Eric Black and Tom Hamburger — about what American's mutual obligations to one another should be; Sept. 29 — series of articles on the economy [see more below]; and Sept. 22., on the role of government.

Example: Sept. 29 segment, pp. A1, A20, A21. "How can more of us prosper in a more competitive economy?" by Jill Hodges is about the bind many Minnesotans feel themselves in. The article begins with the story of 25-year-old Fawn Bernhardt, who is working four part-time jobs at 50 hours a week and earning about \$13,000/year, just enough to make ends meet. Asks the major question about the economy: how can more Americans prosper in a changing world? Notes a growing gap between rich and poor: a two-tiered society. Lists the solutions of both Dole and Clinton to the problem: Dole's tax cut, intended to spur growth, Clinton's emphasis on educating people for jobs in a new economy. "Three Minnesota families trying to 'make it' in a changing economy," by Mike Myers is a profile of three different families: the working-class Schlichtings, the Clarks, an elderly couple, both of whom are consultants, and Mary Forliti, single woman living in a trailer park. Accompanying the articles are four different side-bars. One summarizes the economic policies of each major candidate, one outlines the economic advantages of a good education and a two-income household, one shows the sharp increase in poverty in the state and illustrates how incomes are stagnating, and the final one is called "Digging Deeper" lists scholarly books the reader can turn to find out more.

Length: About two and 1/2 pages in total. Each story is about 3/4 page long.

Comment: One of the strongest of the *Star Tribune's* series. Hodges' article goes into the policies of each candidate in depth, presenting the pros and cons. Myers' article helps to put the problems in context. The side-bar contain good information that can help voters make up their minds about who they want to choose.

TODAY'S FOCUS:

A regular front page series, that takes a particular issue in the news and treats it to in-depth coverage. The series is not aimed specially at the election campaign, although during this time it ran a number of election-related stories.

Days Run: Nov. 2, "New Loopholes let soft money flow like never before," by Greg Gordon, Tom Hamburger, and Chadwin Thomas — about soft money in the '96 campaigns, especially as it relates to the Wellstone Boschwitz campaign; Oct. 25, "A player who defies the norm," by Patricia Lopez Baden and Tom Hamburger — a profile on Wellstone; "Believer in the American Dream," by Dane Smith — a profile on Boschwitz; Oct. 16, "Down the stretch, Clinton leads by 22 points in the state," by Steve Berg — outlining the results of a state-wide poll on the presidential race; Oct. 15, "Wellstone pulls ahead of Boschwitz," by Patricia Lopez Baden — about a recent state poll of the Senate race; Oct. 7, Dole and Clinton counter each other on range of issues," from the Washington Post, and "In Hartford, the spin was in the eye of the beholder," by Carol Byrne — both about the first presidential debate; Sept. 30, "Boschwitz, Wellstone play it safe," by Patricia Lopez Baden — covering a Senate debate between Wellstone and Boschwitz the night before;

Example: The Oct. 25 article, pp. A1, A20. Long profile, highlighting Wellstone's strengths as a legislator, his history as 60s radical and professor at Carleton College. Notes the changes in Wellstone's political behavior—becoming more pragmatic and less strident—since becoming a senator.

Comment: Interesting article because Wellstone has lived an interesting life. The series in general tends to contain, well-written, thoughtful stories that give extensive treatment to the subject at hand.

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