



## Coleman bowing out of this race, but perhaps preparing for another soon



Renee Jones Schneider, Star Tribune

Norm Coleman spoke to the media standing next to his daughter Sarah in his backyard in St. Paul Tuesday.

By **PAM LOUWAGIE** and **MIKE KASZUBA**, Star Tribune staff writers

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Norm Coleman looked almost serene as he stepped up to the cluster of microphones set up on his backyard patio and, with a three-minute speech, ended his eight-month election recount battle by conceding his

former U.S. Senate seat to Al Franken.

"I have always believed you do the best you can and then you leave the results up to a higher authority. I'm at peace with that," Coleman said calmly. "As for my future plans, that's a subject for another day."

That day will likely come soon.

Coleman deflected questions about what is next in his political career. But at least one insider says he is actively keeping his options open for the next gubernatorial election.

"He's increasingly attracted to the idea of running for governor," said Larry Jacobs, a University of Minnesota political science professor. "What I'm hearing from some folks is that Norm Coleman's made recent phone calls to some of the top Republican donors to him, asking them to hold off making any commitments to other candidates.

"This does not mean he's going to run," Jacobs said. "But he's trying to freeze them."

Some other political observers say Coleman, who styles himself a moderate Republican, could be a serious candidate in a wide-open field.

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"I've always seen him as someone who is a fairly ambitious politician," said Steve Smith, a political scientist at Washington University in St. Louis and a longtime congressional observer. "Now that he's made this decision to discontinue the legal fight, I think it makes some sense."

With former Republican congressman Jim Ramstad also eyeing a run for the governorship, Smith said Coleman may be forced to come to a decision quickly to compete for support. Ramstad is also a moderate Republican who is recognized statewide.

It wouldn't be his first attempt at the highest state office.

Coleman's political participation began when he was a long-haired, antiwar demonstrator at Hofstra University in New York. He was elected as St. Paul mayor first as a Democrat, then as a Republican, after he switched parties in 1996.

Though he ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1998, he narrowly was elected to the Senate in 2002, when Sen. Paul Wellstone died in a plane crash only 11 days before the vote.

Coleman has said he should be measured by what he gets done, adding last fall that he didn't join the Senate to become part of a debating society.

While some view him as too quick to compromise with liberals, others, including Franken, have criticized him for following the GOP party line.

Whatever he does next, Coleman will have to tie up loose ends that sprouted during the Senate campaign.

Suits filed in Texas and Delaware include claims that Coleman supporter Nasser Kazeminy steered at least \$75,000 to the former senator through an insurance agency that employed Coleman's wife. Coleman is not a party to the suit and has denied any wrongdoing. His attorney, Ben Ginsberg, called the allegations baseless in an April 3 letter to the Federal Election Commission. The FBI is investigating the relationship between Coleman and Kazeminy, according to a source questioned by the FBI.

As of mid-April, Franken and Coleman had spent roughly \$12 million combined since the election to pay for the recount the trial and appeal. The National Republican Senatorial Committee spent nearly \$938,000

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in May to help Coleman, with most of it going to pay legal bills.

Republican operative Ben Golnik, who was presidential candidate John McCain's regional campaign manager, said people in the party were reflecting Tuesday on Coleman's years in office and his decision to concede.

"I think he's clearly proven to be a vote-getter in winning elections in a state that still tilts to the Democratic side," Golnik said. "He would be a formidable candidate ... for governor."

Coleman, who joked Tuesday that he was considering how to do a better job of catching fish for the immediate future, said he may talk as soon as next week about what his future holds.

"I've had a lot of time to process this election, to think about the past and to look to the future," Coleman said. "And so I really have a sense of peace with where things are at and it is time now to move forward."

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