LEGISLATOR

US Senator

AL FRANKEN (D-MN)



IN OFFICE

Up for re-election in 2020

2nd Term

Re-elected in 2014

SENIORITY RANK

54

Out of 100

CONTACT

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BGOV BIOGRAPHY

By Brian Nutting and Stefanie Batcho-Lino, Bloomberg News

Al Franken took an unusual route to Washington -- making the city the butt of jokes during a three-decade career as a comedian, TV writer, author and radio talk-show host before becoming part of it.

Once in the Senate, however, Franken toned down his political satire -- showing a more staid mien. His focus has been on serious policy issues, he seldom seeks the spotlight, and has largely eschewed the sometimes wacky behavior that people remember from his days on ``Saturday Night Live."

He's been so diligent about presenting himself as a serious lawmaker that that he has often been eclipsed in the humor department by his senior Minnesota colleague, Amy Klobuchar. After Klobuchar had turned in two well-received comic speeches at Washington's Gridiron dinners, in 2009 and 2013, President Barack Obama informed Franken that he was just the second-funniest senator in Minnesota.

As a commentary in the Minneapolis Star-Tribune put it, ``Five years ago, the risk of encountering Franken was that he'd tell a funny story of the sort that would make your mother blush. Now the risk is that he'd make your eyes glaze over with the inside dope on Washington legislation. Franken has become, with no irony intended, a serious man."

Franken, as listeners to his former radio talk show knew, holds views on the left end of the political spectrum. The Americans for Democratic Action group has given him annual scores of about 95 percent and, on the other end of the scale, the American Conservative Union gave him scores of zero in each of his first four years in Congress.

In the Senate, he's been one of Obama's staunchest supporters and one of Majority Leader Harry Reid's most dependable votes. He makes an effort to be a pleasant Senate colleague, and he has sought out partnerships and friendships across the aisle.

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Franken says that the late Senator Paul Wellstone, who died in a 2002 plane crash, has been a role model. He has continued Wellstone's efforts on mental health issues.

When the Senate took up comprehensive health insurance legislation in the 111th Congress, Franken was able to include a provision that makes insurance companies put 80 percent to 85 percent of premiums toward actual health services, not administrative costs, marketing campaigns, or profits. His legislation was based on existing Minnesota law. Franken also supports repeal of the health law's medical device tax. The original tax has been cut in half, however Franken still believes it represents an unfair burden on the medical device-making industry, which has a significant presence in Minnesota.

Another Franken priority is education, and his seat on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee enables him to weigh in on matters such as preschool programs, college costs and recruiting and training principals.

Continuing his emphasis on the populist themes that he evoked in his 2008 election campaign, Franken has continued to be critical of Wall Street. His statements include such phrases as ``unchecked Wall Street greed," and ``gimmicky loans" that confused homebuyers.

Early Years

Born in New York City, Franken and his family moved to Minnesota when he was 4. His father tried to make a go of it as the operator of a quilting factory in Albert Lea. After the plant folded a few years later, they moved to St. Louis Park (a Twin Cities suburb), where his father became a salesman and his mother worked in real estate.

Franken went to Harvard, where he met Franni Bryson, who became his wife. He tells about how his wife's family -- her widowed mother and five siblings -- grew up poor in Portland, Maine, but were able to make successes of themselves via government assistance, including Pell Grants and G.I. Bill loans. ``Conservatives like to say that people need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps -— and that's a great idea. But first, you've got to have the boots. And the government gave my wife's family the boots," Franken said.

Franken's career took off two years after he left Harvard, when he was hired as a writer and performer for the inaugural season of NBC's ``Saturday Night Live," originally known just as ``Saturday Night." Poking fun at or impersonating politicians dominated his sketches during 11 SNL seasons and four guest appearances. It also garnered him four Emmy Awards as a comedy writer. He also won an Emmy not connected with SNL.

Franken's SNL character Stuart Smalley spurred his first book in 1993, ``I'm Good Enough, I'm Smart Enough, and Doggone It, People Like Me." Later, his writing became sharper politically with ``Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations" and ``Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them," a barbed look at political conservatives and the George W. Bush administration.

Franken in 2004 started a talk show on the nascent Air America talk radio network, which he predicted would be ``an end to the right-wing dominance of talk radio." He presented his views and took rhetorical pokes at such people as Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly and President George W. Bush. He was involved in the 2006 elections, campaigning for progressive candidates and causes, including appearances on behalf of Democratic-Farmer-Labor candidates in Minnesota.

When Franken made his last Air America show appearance in 2007, he announced his run for the Minnesota Senate seat held by Republican Norm Coleman. His campaign was initially set back by reports of unpaid out-of-state taxes, which he then paid.

Complicating the race was the independent candidacy of Dean Barkley, who had served as an appointed senator for two months after Wellstone died in 2002. Barkley got 15 percent of the vote, and two other minor party candidates siphoned off votes as well. Both Franken and Coleman got about 42 percent of the vote, and the 225-vote margin for Franken triggered an automatic recount. A court-supervised count extended Franken's lead to 312. Coleman and his backers filed legal challenges. Almost eight months after the election, Minnesota's Supreme Court ruled in Franken's favor on June 30, 2009, ending Coleman's legal challenges.

Franken was sworn into office in July 2009, six months after the other 2008 election winners began their service, giving Democrats their 60th member of the Senate for a brief period in the 111th Congress, providing enough votes to overcome a Republican filibuster.

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BIO FROM REPRESENTATIVE'S WEBSITE

From the Senator's Website

Senator Al Franken was born on May 21, 1951, and grew up in St. Louis Park, Minnesota. In 1973, he graduated from Harvard, where he met his wife Franni. They've been married for 38 years, and have two grown children, Thomasin and Joe. Senator Franken has one grandchild, Joe, born to Thomasin and her husband Brody in May 2013. Before running for the Senate, Al spent 37 years as a comedy writer, author, and radio talk show host and has taken part in seven USO tours, visiting our troops overseas in Germany, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Uzbekistan - as well as visiting Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait four times.

In 2008, Al was elected to the Senate as a member of the DFL (Democratic-Farmer-Labor) Party from Minnesota. He currently sits on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Committee; the Judiciary Committee; the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and the Committee on Indian Affairs.

Getting Things Done for Minnesota

Since taking office, Sen. Franken has developed an impressive record of legislative accomplishments that focus on holding our nation's biggest institutions accountable to the American people they serve and finding commonsense solutions that improve people's lives. In fact, in both of the most significant pieces of legislation (health care reform and Wall Street reform) considered by the Senate since he's been in office, Senator Franken has had perhaps the strongest provisions in the legislation to do this.

Sen. Franken successful fought for a provision included in the health care reform law that makes insurance companies put 80 to 85 percent of premiums toward actual health services, not administrative costs, marketing campaign, or profits. His legislation, based on existing Minnesota law, represents the largest insurance industry reform in the health care reform bill.

Sen. Franken passed an amendment to the Wall Street reform bill to end the conflicts of interest inherent in Wall Street's current pay-to-play credit rating system. The Securities and Exchange Commission is currently studying the issue and will automatically implement the Franken amendment or another suitable way to eliminate conflicts of interest. This amendment has garnered editorial praise nationwide for being one of the toughest industry reforms in the Wall Street reform bill.

Sen. Franken has also worked hard to improve education in Minnesota and around the country. As a member of the HELP Committee, he successfully incorporated four key provisions into the Senate bill to reform the federal "No Child Left Behind" law. His provisions would provide more flexibility in testing and improve schools by strengthening principal leadership, among other things. He has also been working hard to make college more affordable for Minnesota families. He introduced legislation that would require schools to use a universal financial aid form letter, giving families a better understanding of the true cost of college.

And in 2011, Sen. Franken was named chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law and has held a number of hearings, including investigations of mobile device privacy and electronic medical record privacy.

Standing up for Minnesotans

Since taking office in 2009, Sen. Franken has opened five offices throughout Minnesota and answered more than 500,000 constituent letters. He and his office have successfully closed the constituent cases of more than 10,000 Minnesotans who have reached out to his office for help.

In 2010, Sen. Franken convinced General Motors not to close a family-owned dealership in Faribault, saving a local business and dozens of jobs. After an earthquake devastated Haiti in January of 2010, he worked with a West St. Paul family to ensure that their ongoing adoption wasn't disrupted by the disaster and, thanks to the hard work of his office, the family adopted a 6-year-old girl.

Sen. Franken has also worked hard on behalf of Minnesota's veterans. The first piece of legislation he introduced - and passed - established a study that is currently pairing service dogs with veterans who have physical or mental wounds. He has helped a number of Minnesotans get the military medals they earned, but never received, including a World War II veteran from Duluth who was owed seven service medals for his service in Europe. He also successfully fought to get the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide benefits for conditions resulting from exposure to Agent Orange.

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PERSONAL PROFILE

COMMITTEES

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

CAUCUSES

Senate Rural Health Care Caucus

Senate Rural Health Caucus

Senate Multiple Sclerosis Caucus

Birthdate	05/21/1951
Birthplace	Manhattan, NY
Political Party	Democrat Farm labor Party
Marital Status	Married
Spouse	Franni
Family	2 children;1 grandchild

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Education

Harvard University

Bachelor's Degree 1973

1975 - 1980 Writer/Performer, Natl Broadcasting CO Inc 1985 - 1995 Writer/Performer, Natl Broadcasting CO Inc 1992 - 1992 Network Commentator , Cbs Corp 03-31-2004 - 07-12-2004 Host:O'franken Factor, Air America Radio 07-12-2004 - 02-14-2007 Host:Al Franken Show, Air America Radio 07-07-2009 - Present Senator:Minnesota, (US)Senate

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