

= Al Franken =

Alan Stuart " Al " Franken ( born May 21 , 1951 ) is an American comedian , actor , politician , and writer . He is currently the junior United States Senator from Minnesota . He became well known in the 1970s and 1980s as a writer and performer on the television comedy show Saturday Night Live . After several decades as a comedic actor and writer , he became a prominent liberal political activist . Franken was elected to the United States Senate in 2008 , narrowly defeating incumbent Republican Senator Norm Coleman . Franken is a member of the Minnesota Democratic ? Farmer ? Labor Party ( DFL ) , an affiliate of the Democratic Party .

Born in New York City , Franken moved to Minnesota when he was four but he later went back to the East Coast and attended Harvard College . With his writing partner Tom Davis , with whom he had developed an interest in improvisational theatre in high school , he was hired as a writer for SNL at its inception in 1975 . He worked on the show as a writer and performer until 1980 , and returned from 1985 to 1995 . After leaving SNL , he wrote and acted in movies and television shows . He also hosted a nationally syndicated , political radio talk show , The Al Franken Show , and wrote six books , four of which are political satires critical of conservative politics .

Franken ran for the U.S. Senate from Minnesota in 2008 and , after a close race , he trailed incumbent Norm Coleman by 215 votes . After a statewide manual recount , required because of the closeness of the election , Franken was declared the winner by a margin of 312 votes . After an election contest and subsequent lawsuit by Coleman , the Minnesota Supreme Court unanimously upheld Franken 's victory on June 30 , 2009 . Franken was sworn into the U.S. Senate on July 7 , 2009 . He was re @-@ elected to a second term in office in 2014 .

= = Early life and education = =

Franken was born on May 21 , 1951 , in New York City , to Joseph Franken , a printing salesman , and Phoebe ( Kunst ) , a real estate agent . His paternal grandparents emigrated from Germany ; his maternal grandfather came from Grodno , Belarus , and his maternal grandmother 's parents were also from the Russian Empire . The Franken family moved to Albert Lea , Minnesota , when Al was four years old . His father had hopes of opening a quilting factory ? but after just two years , the factory failed . The family moved to St. Louis Park , Minnesota , a suburb of Minneapolis . Franken graduated from The Blake School in 1969 , where he was a member of the wrestling team . He attended Harvard College where he majored in government , graduating cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in 1973 . His older brother Owen is a photojournalist , and his cousin Bob is a journalist for MSNBC .

Franken began performing in high school where he , along with his friend and long @-@ time writing partner Tom Davis were known for their humor . The two first performed on stage at Minneapolis ' Brave New Workshop theater , specializing in political satire . They soon found themselves in what was described as " a life of near @-@ total failure on the fringes of show business in Los Angeles . "

= = Saturday Night Live = =

Franken and Davis were recruited as two of the original writers ( and occasional performers ) on Saturday Night Live ( SNL ) ( 1975 ? 1980 , 1985 ? 1995 ) . In Season 1 of SNL , as apprentice writers , the two shared a salary of \$ 350 per week . Franken received seven Emmy nominations and three awards for his television writing and producing while creating such characters as self @-@ help guru Stuart Smalley . Another routine proclaimed the 1980s to be the " Al Franken Decade " . Franken and Davis wrote the script to the 1986 comedy film One More Saturday Night , appearing in it as rock singers in a band called " Bad Mouth " . They also appeared in minor roles in All You Need Is Cash and in the Eddie Murphy and Dan Aykroyd film Trading Places .

On Weekend Update near the end of Season 5 , Franken delivered a commentary called " A Limo For A Lame @-@ O " . He mocked controversial NBC president Fred Silverman as " a total

unequivocal failure " and displayed a chart showing the poor ratings of NBC programs . As a result of this sketch , Silverman refused Lorne Michaels ' request that Franken succeed him as producer , prompting Franken to leave the show when Michaels did , at the end of the 1979 ? 80 season . Franken later returned to the show in 1985 as a writer , and also as an occasional performer . Franken has acknowledged using cocaine while working in the television business . In 1995 , Franken left the show in protest over losing the role of Weekend Update anchor to Norm Macdonald .

In his second stint with the show , one of Franken 's most memorable recurring roles was Stuart Smalley , who hosted " Daily Affirmations with Stuart Smalley . "

= = Post @-@ SNL = =

In 1995 , Franken wrote the original screenplay and starred in the film Stuart Saves His Family , which was a critical and commercial failure . Franken became depressed following the movie 's failure . With an aggregate rating of 27 % on Rotten Tomatoes , Stuart Saves His Family did receive a number of favorable reviews , including from the Washington Post and Gene Siskel .

Franken is the author of four books that made the New York Times best @-@ seller list . In 2003 , Penguin Books published Franken 's book Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them : A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right , a satirical book on American politics and conservatism . The book 's title incorporated the Fox News slogan , " Fair and Balanced , " and included a cover photo of Fox News commentator Bill O 'Reilly ; in August that year Fox News sued , claiming infringement of its registered trademark phrase . A federal judge found the lawsuit to be " wholly without merit " . The incident with Fox focused media attention on Franken 's book and , according to Franken , greatly increased its sales through the Streisand effect . The publicity resulting from the lawsuit propelled Franken 's yet @-@ to @-@ be @-@ released book to # 1 on Amazon.com.

Franken signed a one @-@ year contract in early 2004 to host a talk show for Air America Radio 's flagship program with co @-@ host Katherine Lanpher , who remained with the show until October 2005 . The network was launched March 31 , 2004 . Originally named The O 'Franken Factor but renamed The Al Franken Show on July 12 , 2004 , the show aired three hours a day , five days a week for three years . The stated goal of the show was to provide the public airwaves with more progressive views to counter what Franken perceived to be the dominance of conservative syndicated commentary on the radio : " I 'm doing this because I want to use my energies to get Bush unelected , " he told a New York Times reporter in 2004 . Franken 's last radio show on Air America Radio was on February 14 , 2007 , at the end of which Franken announced his candidacy for the United States Senate .

Franken also co @-@ wrote the film When a Man Loves a Woman , co @-@ created and starred in the NBC sitcom LateLine , and appeared in the 2004 remake of The Manchurian Candidate .

In 2003 , Franken served as a Fellow with Harvard 's Kennedy School of Government at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press , Politics and Public Policy . Since 2005 , Franken has been a contributor at The Huffington Post .

Franken has toured Iraq several times with the United Service Organizations . On March 25 , 2009 , Franken was presented with the USO 's @-@ Metro Merit Award for his 10 years ' involvement with the organization .

= = Political activism prior to election = =

According to an article by Richard Corliss published in Time , " In a way , Franken has been running for office since the late ' 70s . " Corliss also hinted at Franken 's " possibly ironic role as a relentless self @-@ promoter " in proclaiming the 1980s " the Al Franken Decade " and saying , " Vote for me , Al Franken . You 'll be glad you did ! " In 1999 , Franken released a parody book , Why Not Me ? , detailing his hypothetical campaign for President in 2000 . He had been a strong supporter of Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone and was deeply affected by the Senator 's death in a plane crash shortly before the 2002 election . Wellstone was a mentor and political and personal role model for

Franken , with Franken stating his hopes of following in the late Senator ? s footsteps .

Franken said he learned that 21 % of Americans received most of their news from talk radio , an almost exclusively conservative medium . Said Franken , " I didn 't want to sit on the sidelines , and I believed Air America could make a difference . " In November 2003 , Franken talked about moving to his home state of Minnesota to run for the Senate . At the time the seat , once held by Wellstone , was occupied by Republican Norm Coleman . In 2005 , Franken announced his move to Minnesota : " I can tell you honestly , I don 't know if I 'm going to run , but I 'm doing the stuff I need to do in order to do it . " In late 2005 , Franken started his own political action committee , called Midwest Values PAC . By early 2007 , the PAC raised more than \$ 1 million .

Franken was the subject of the 2006 documentary film Al Franken : God Spoke , which was , according to the New York Times , " an investigation of the phenomenon of ideological celebrity . "

Franken initially supported the Iraq War but opposed the 2007 troop surge . In an interview with MSNBC ? s Joe Scarborough , Franken said that he " believed Colin Powell " , whose presentation at the United Nations convinced him that the war was necessary . However , since then he had come to believe that " we were misled into the war " and urged the Democratically controlled Congress to refuse to pass appropriations bills to fund the war if they don 't include timetables for leaving Iraq . In an interview with Josh Marshall , Franken said of the Democrats , " I think we 've gotta make President George W. Bush say , ' OK , I 'm cutting off funding because I won 't agree to a timetable . ' " "

Franken favors transitioning to a universal health care system , with the provision that every child in America should receive health care coverage immediately . Franken objects to efforts to privatize Social Security or cut benefits . He favors raising the cap on wages to which Social Security taxes apply . On his 2008 campaign website , he voiced support for cutting subsidies for oil companies , increasing money available for college students , and cutting interest rates on student loans .

During the 2008 election , New York state officials asserted that Al Franken Inc. had failed to carry required workers ' compensation insurance for employees who assisted him with his comedy and public speaking from 2002 to 2005 . Franken paid a \$ 25 @,@ 000 fine to the state of New York upon being advised his corporation was out of compliance with the state 's workers ' compensation laws . At the same time , the California Franchise Tax Board reported that the same corporation owed more than \$ 4 @,@ 743 @.@ 40 in taxes , fines , and associated penalties in the state of California for 2003 through 2007 because the corporation did not file tax returns in the state for those years . A Franken representative said that it followed the advice of an accountant who believed when the corporation stopped doing business in California that no further filing was required . Subsequently , Franken paid \$ 70 @,@ 000 in back income taxes in 17 states dating back to 2003 , mostly from Franken 's speeches and other paid appearances . Franken said he paid the income tax in his state of residence , and he would seek retroactive credit for paying the taxes in the wrong states .

= = U.S. Senate = =

= = = Elections = = =

2008

On January 29 , 2007 , Franken announced his departure from Air America Radio , and on the day of his final show , February 14 , Franken formally announced his candidacy for the United States Senate from Minnesota in 2008 . Challenging him for the Democratic ? Farmer ? Labor Party endorsement was Jack Nelson @-@ Pallmeyer , a professor , author , and activist . Other candidates were trial lawyer Mike Ciresi and attorney and human rights activist Jim Cohen , who had dropped out of the race earlier . Franken won the nomination with 65 % of the vote .

On July 8 , 2007 , Franken 's campaign stated that it expected to announce that Franken had raised more money than Republican opponent Norm Coleman during the second quarter of the year , taking in \$ 1 @.@ 9 million to Coleman 's \$ 1 @.@ 6 million , although in early July 2007 , Coleman

's \$ 3 @. @ 8 million cash on hand exceeded Franken 's \$ 2 million .

In late May 2008 , the Minnesota Republican Party released a letter regarding an article Franken had written for Playboy in 2000 entitled " Porn @- @ O @- @ Rama ! " . The letter , signed by six prominent GOP women , including a state senator and state representative , called on Franken to apologize for what they referred to as a " demeaning and degrading " article . A Franken campaign spokesman responded that , " Al had a long career as a satirist . But he understands the difference between what you say as a satirist and what you do as a senator . And as a Senator , Norm Coleman has disrespected the people of Minnesota by putting the Exxons and Halliburtons ahead of working families . And there 's nothing funny about that . "

On June 7 , 2008 , Franken was endorsed at the DFL convention . In a July 2008 interview with CNN , Franken was endorsed by Ben Stein , the noted entertainer , speechwriter , lawyer and author who is known for his conservative views and generally supports Republican candidates . Stein said of Franken , " He is my pal , and he is a really , really capable smart guy . I don 't agree with all of his positions , but he is a very impressive guy , and I think he should be in the Senate . "

During his campaign for the Senate , Franken was criticized for advising SNL creator Lorne Michaels on a political sketch ridiculing Senator John McCain 's ads attacking Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election . Coleman 's campaign reacted , saying , " Once again , he proves he 's more interested in entertainment than service , and ridiculing those with whom he disagrees . "

Preliminary reports on election night , November 4 , had Coleman ahead by over 700 votes , but the official results certified on November 18 , 2008 , had Coleman leading by only 215 votes . As the two candidates were separated by less than 0 @. @ 5 percent , the Secretary of State of Minnesota Mark Ritchie , authorized an automatic recount stipulated in Minnesota election law . In the recount , ballots and certifying materials were examined by hand , and candidates could file challenges to the legality of ballots or materials for inclusion or exclusion with regard to the recount . On January 5 , 2009 , the Minnesota State Canvassing Board certified the recounted vote totals , with Franken ahead by 225 votes .

On January 6 , 2009 , Coleman 's campaign filed an election contest , which led to a trial before a three @- @ judge panel . The trial ended on April 7 , when the panel ruled that 351 of 387 disputed absentee ballots were incorrectly rejected and ordered them counted . Counting those ballots raised Franken 's lead to 312 votes . Coleman appealed to the Minnesota Supreme Court on April 20 . On April 24 , the Minnesota Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. and oral arguments were conducted on June 1 .

On June 30 , 2009 , the Minnesota Supreme Court unanimously rejected Coleman 's appeal and said that Franken was entitled to be certified as the winner . Shortly after the court 's decision , Coleman conceded . Governor Tim Pawlenty signed Franken ? s election certificate that same evening .

2014

Franken was re @- @ elected to a second term in 2014 . He faced primary challenger Sandra Henningsgard , winning the nomination on August 12 , 2014 . He won the election against Republican Mike McFadden with 53 @. @ 9 % of the vote .

= = = Tenure = = =

Franken was sworn into the Senate on July 7 , 2009 , 246 days after election . Franken was sworn in with the Bible of late Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone , whose old seat was set aside by Senate leaders for Franken .

On August 6 , 2009 , Franken presided over the confirmation vote of Sonia Sotomayor to be an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court . A year later , on August 5 , 2010 , Franken presided over the confirmation vote of Elena Kagan . His first piece of legislation , the Service Dogs for Veterans Act , which he wrote jointly with Republican Johnny Isakson , passed the Senate with unanimous consent , and established a program with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to pair disabled veterans with service dogs .

A video began circulating on the Internet of Franken at the Minnesota State Fair on September 2 ,

2009 , engaging in a discussion with a group of Tea Party protesters on health care reform , and soon went viral . The discussion was noted for its civility , in contrast to the explosive character of several other discussions between members of the 111th Congress and their constituents that had occurred over the summer .

During the debate on health care reform , Franken was one of the strongest supporters of a single @-@ payer system . He authored an amendment , called the Medical Loss Ratio , to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that required insurance companies spend at least 80 % of premiums on actual health care costs , rising to 85 % for large group plans . In June 2013 , it was reported that the amendment had saved consumers \$ 3 @.@ 4 billion on premiums and resulted in nationwide rebates of \$ 1 @.@ 1 billion in 2012 and \$ 500 million in 2013 . On September 30 , 2013 , Franken voted to remove a provision which would repeal the medical device tax in Obamacare from a government funding bill . Although Franken says he is in favor of the provision , he disagreed with it being used as a condition in preventing the 2013 federal government shutdown .

Citing the case of Jamie Leigh Jones , Franken offered an amendment to the 2010 Defense Appropriations bill that would withhold defense contracts from companies that restrict their employees from taking workplace sexual assault , battery and discrimination cases to court . It passed the U.S. Senate in November 2010 , 68 to 30 in a roll @-@ call vote .

In May 2010 , Franken proposed a financial reform legislation amendment which would create a board to select which credit rating agency would evaluate a given security ; currently any companies issuing a security may select which company evaluates the security . The amendment was passed ; however , the financial industry lobbied to have Franken 's amendment removed from the final bill . Negotiations between the Senate and House , whose version of financial reform did not include such a provision , resulted in the amendment 's being watered down to require only a series of studies being done upon the issue for two years . After the studies , if the Securities and Exchange Commission has not implemented another solution to the conflict of interest problem , Franken 's solution will go into effect .

In August 2010 , Franken made faces and hand gestures and rolled his eyes while Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell delivered a speech in opposition to the confirmation of Elena Kagan to the U.S. Supreme Court . Franken 's actions prompted McConnell to remark , " This isn 't Saturday Night Live , Al . " Following Kagan 's confirmation , Franken delivered a handwritten apology to McConnell and issued a public statement saying that McConnell had a right " to give his speech with the presiding officer just listening respectfully . "

The National Journal reported in 2013 that Franken supports the National Security Agency 's data mining programs , believing they have saved lives , and that " I can assure you , this is not about spying on the American people . ?

When Franken declared his intention to seek re @-@ election in 2014 , his seat was thought to be a top target for the Republicans due to his very slim margin of victory in the previous election . However Politico reported that his high approval rating , large war chest , and the Republicans ' struggle to find a top @-@ tier candidate meant that he was a " heavy favorite " to win re @-@ election , a view subsequently confirmed in the election , which Franken won comfortably .

The Associated Press has noted that contrary to expectations , Franken has not sought out the media spotlight : " He rarely talks to the Washington press corps , has shed his comedic persona and focused on policy , working to be taken seriously . " In interviews he has expressed his desire to be known for focusing on constituency work , keeping his head down and working hard .

= = = Committee assignments = = =

Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Energy

Subcommittee on Public Lands , Forests and Mining

Subcommittee on Water and Power

Committee on Health , Education , Labor , and Pensions

Subcommittee on Children and Families

Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety ( Ranking Member )  
Committee on Indian Affairs  
Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts  
Subcommittee on Antitrust , Competition Policy and Consumer Rights  
Subcommittee on the Constitution , Civil Rights and Human Rights  
Subcommittee on Privacy , Technology , and the Law ( Ranking Member )

= = Books and CDs = =

= = = Non @-@ fiction = = =

I 'm Good Enough , I 'm Smart Enough , and Doggone It , People Like Me ! : Daily Affirmations with Stuart Smalley ( Dell Books , 1992 ) ISBN 0 @-@ 440 @-@ 50470 @-@ 8

Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations ( Delacorte Press , 1996 ) ISBN 0 @-@ 385 @-@ 31474 @-@ 4

Why Not Me ? : The Inside Story of the Making and Unmaking of the Franken Presidency ( Delacorte Press , 1999 ) ISBN 0 @-@ 385 @-@ 31809 @-@ X

Oh , the Things I Know ! : A Guide to Success , or Failing That , Happiness ( Plume Books , 2003 ) ISBN 0 @-@ 452 @-@ 28450 @-@ 3

Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them : A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right ( Dutton Books , 2003 ) ISBN 0 @-@ 525 @-@ 94764 @-@ 7

The Truth ( With Jokes ) ( Dutton Books , 2005 ) ISBN 0 @-@ 525 @-@ 94906 @-@ 2

= = = CDs and compilations = = =

The Best Democracy Money Can Buy : The Truth About Corporate Cons , Globalization , and High @-@ Finance Fraudsters with Greg Palast ( 2004 )

The O 'Franken Factor Factor ? The Best of the O 'Franken Factor

The Al Franken Show Party Album

= = Filmography = =

= = Electoral history = =

= = Personal life = =

Franken met his wife , Franni Bryson , in his first year of college . In 2005 , they moved to Minneapolis , Minnesota . Together they have two children . Their daughter Thomasin has degrees from Harvard and the French Culinary Institute , and she is director of extended learning at DC Prep , an organization in Washington that manages charter schools . Their son Joseph works in the finance industry . Franken is a second cousin of the late actor Steve Franken known for his appearances in the television series The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis . In 2013 , Franken received the Stewart B. McKinney award for his work to fight homelessness .