

Allegations have surfaced of voter irregularities involving a paid staffer of Sen. Norm Coleman, and the ramifications could have a profound effect on the outcome of Coleman's race against Al Franken.

A reporter for the Minnesota Independent, a progressive online publication, was working on a story about voter turnout when she overheard that Republican poll challengers monitoring voting at the precinct had brought in Mahamoud Wardere to help voters translate.

The Coleman campaign confirmed that Wardere is a paid member of their staff.

"I made some calls, found out his name and I confronted him and I said, 'Are you Wardere?' And he said, 'Yes, I am,'" said Priesmeyer. "At that point I said, 'Are you working for Norm Coleman's campaign?' And he said, 'No, I am on vacation today.'"

However, Priesmeyer said voters told her that translators were telling them to vote for Coleman.

"I had already spoken to at least three people who told me that translators were telling them to vote for Norm Coleman," she said.

The issue could end up being the basis of a legal challenge. According to Prof. Joe Daly of Hamline University, state election law has a provision that if there is a deliberate, serious or material violation of state election law, a district court judge must gather the evidence and present it to the presiding officer of the U.S. Senate, who would then decide the merits of the allegations.

The Senate could even revoke the results of the election and decide who would be seated as senator.

The Somali Justice Advocacy Center says they have gotten complaints about Wardere urging voters to vote for Coleman. But Omar Jamal says he has also gotten complaints of voters being pressured to vote for Franken, admitting he had heard complaints centering on both candidates.

Cullen Sheehan, campaign manager for Coleman, said Wardere was working at the polls but he was taking a day off from the campaign, he did nothing inappropriate and he was merely working as an interpreter.

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