

Wisconsin Maverick

GOP Gubernatorial Hopeful Gains Initiative

By David S. Broder

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OCONOMOWOC, Wis.—“My first buttons kind of upset some of the old-guard Republicans,” the candidate said with a laugh. “My students made them, and they said, LSD for governor.”

“But,” said Lee S. Dreyfus, “I think they’ve gotten used to me now.”

That is unlikely.

Dreyfus, a 52-year-old educator with the mustache and double chin of the Great Gildersleeve, and a chuckle to match, is the most unconventional Republican candidate to burst on the scene since semanticist S. I. Hayakawa won a California Senate seat in 1976.

Like Hayakawa, he is a Ph.D. in communications who has turned college administrator and candidate. Hayakawa wore his trademark tam-O-shanter during the Vietnam protest days at San Francisco State. Dreyfus, who was just as much of a hawk, wore a red vest as his badge of defiance during similar times as chancellor of the Stevens Point campus of the university of Wisconsin, and he has turned it into an instant-recognition symbol in this campaign.

The implausible professor—who joined the Republican Party only 10 months ago—won an upset victory over the endorsed favorite in the September GOP primary and has seized the initiative in what is now consid-



LEE S. DREYFUS

... his buttons upset the old guard

ered a close race with acting Gov. Martin J. Schreiber, a Democrat.

A lot of people—Republicans as well as Democrats—still are trying to figure out what he’s doing there. Mainly, he’s talking.

During his 11 years as chancellor at Stevens Point, Dreyfus became one of the most popular speakers on the Wisconsin banquet circuit.

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He never joined a political party, he said, “because I had to work both sides of the aisle” in seeking money from the legislature for his school. But he struck up a close partnership with Gov. Patrick J. Lucey, a Democrat, whose resignation to become ambassador to Mexico moved Schreiber up from lieutenant governor 16 months ago.

In 1977, when Republicans held their state convention in Stevens Point, Alice Reed, their chairman, invited Dreyfus to keynote the meeting, “just to get a little fresh thinking into the room.”

As is his custom, Dreyfus mixed the jokes and inspiration with a little Truman-style hell-giving.

“I told them they had made a terrible mistake trying to make the Wisconsin Republican Party a conservative party and ignoring the La Follette tradition of progressivism,” he said.

“I told them they had to make room for students and young people and farmers and blacks and get the party out of the country club if they ever wanted to win.”

The talk started tongues wagging and brought Dreyfus some unexpected offers of support.

Lowell and Joni Jackson of Madison, leaders in the 1976 Ronald Reagan

campaign, had their own reasons for wanting to overthrow the Milwaukee-area Republican country club establishment, because it had lined up behind President Ford in 1976.

So did some progressive young Republican legislators, impatient with the pattern of statewide GOP losses. With two Stevens Point friends, William Krause and Robert Williams, both moderate Republicans and veterans of past campaigns, calling signals, the ill-assorted Dreyfus coalition began to take form.

Last December, Dreyfus declared himself a Republican, explaining, “My mother always taught me it was polite to join a party before you take it over,” and jumped into the race for governor.

No one took him seriously. The support of the Republican establishment had swung behind Rep. Robert Kasten, 36, an eastern-educated and well-connected suburban Milwaukee congressman who claimed to have perfected the most efficient system of precinct organization ever seen.

Dreyfus and Kasten competed for the party’s convention endorsement. To no one’s surprise, Kasten won.

After the convention, the Jacksons found an old school bus for Dreyfus and rebuilt it to look like a steam locomotive. All summer, Dreyfus drove it around the state, accompanied by a “Rag-tag Band” of teen-

age musicians, delivering back-plat-form speeches in the Truman vein. The free publicity he received was at last a match for Kasten's \$400,000 television campaign.

Kasten kept his vaunted precinct operation in reserve for the general election fight with Schreiber, and he was as astonished as anyone when Dreyfus beat him with 87 percent of the vote in the Sept. 12 primary.

With Republicans sensing a chance to regain the governorship they have held for only six of the past 20 years, GOP ranks have closed quickly and the Democrats suddenly have come to realize that Dreyfus is now their problem.

Schreiber, at 39, has spent a lifetime in politics, but he is facing his first real challenge at the polls. He grew up at ward meetings with his father, the long-time president of the Milwaukee Common Council, and was elected to the state Senate himself at the age of 23.

During his seven years as lieutenant governor, he was overshadowed by the ebullient Lucey. Even today he tends to be patronized by older party and labor leaders who have trouble remembering that "nice, young Marty" is now the governor.

Dreyfus has grabbed the offensive in the weeks since his primary upset. Pushing an ambitious state energy plan that emphasizes nuclear power,

Dreyfus convinced the publisher of Milwaukee's black newspaper that he has a greater concern than the conservation-minded Schreiber about future job opportunities. Last week, he became the first Republican in 14 years to win the Milwaukee Courier's endorsement.

In Madison, Miles McMillin, retired editor of the Capital Times and for many years the leading spokesman for liberal Democrats, wrote a front-page article endorsing Dreyfus as a "fiercely independent" Republican who would restore the state's two-party system and provide a needed change from the "fat and arrogant" Democrats.

Dreyfus also has seized the initiative on the main issue of the year—the kind of tax relief to be provided from a state surplus that is now more than \$400 million. The day after the primary, he urged Schreiber to call a special session of the legislature to declare a simple three-month moratorium on state income tax withholding.

Schreiber refused, saying the scheme would reward the wealthy more than the poor, but recognizing the public appeal of the Dreyfus plan, Schreiber has come out with a tax-reform plan of his own although he

had said he would wait until a blue-ribbon commission gave him its recommendation after the election.

At a meeting of township officials here, where Dreyfus had just spoken, Schreiber pleaded, "Don't run me out of office for a surplus."

So far Dreyfus has had much the best of their exchanges. When Schreiber tried to explain that much of the surplus was earmarked for future tax relief and other purposes, Dreyfus said, "It's not that complicated. The surplus is just like the blob in Star Wars. The only way to kill it is to cut off its energy source, and that means stopping taxes."

When Schreiber brought in a succession of big-name Democrats from Washington to bolster his campaign, Dreyfus said he felt like "the hero in one of the old Errol Flynn movies, where you've got to fight your way past the spear carriers to get at the king. Well, eventually, I'll get to Marty, and I'll treat him like Errol Flynn used to treat Basil Rathbone."

What worries some Republicans is that sometimes, Dreyfus' gift of gab gets him into trouble.

Asked at a labor convention about right-to-work laws, he casually said he did not know much about them, but in principle he was concerned about anyone having to join a labor organization to take a job.

At an organization of the elderly, where Schreiber endorsed an entire 11-point legislative program for the aging, Dreyfus demurred at the cost and urged the oldsters to weigh their demands carefully so "we don't let the aging become a millstone around the neck of the young."

Democrats and their labor allies are using such statements to depict Drey-



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Wisconsin's Acting Gov. Martin Schreiber carries his son, Matt. Schreiber's daughter, Kris, and wife, Elaine, admire shirt given to boy.

fus as "a throwback to another century."

At a United Auto Workers rally in Racine the other night, Schreiber tried to turn Dreyfus' trademark inside out. "That red vest of his has a big letter R sewn on it," he shouted. "R for Republican. R for Reagan. R for the Rich. R for Reactionary. R for Right-to-work."

Union leaders like the UAW's Ray Majerus concede that Dreyfus' style is a lot more appealing to the members than most Republicans, but Ma-

jerus insists they still aren't buying. In a state where Democrats have established their dominance, Dreyfus has a struggle.

Two public polls since the primary have shown him, alternately, five points ahead and three points behind.

Still to come are three television debates, which Republicans think are made to order for an accomplished speaker like Dreyfus. Schreiber says,

"I know they're a challenge, but I'll use them to show people what's behind that red vest."