

By Adam Platt

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

JUST WHAT MINNESOTANS NEED, ANOTHER reason to be smug. They've got more than 10,000 lakes, few traffic jams and, now, the most progressive senator (-elect) in America. Paul Wellstone's victory over two-term incumbent Sen. Rudy Boschwitz has left-leaning Minnesotans in a self-congratulatory frenzy, and Wellstone (or "the professor," as Boschwitz calls him) isn't helping things with talk of cleaning up the environment, reforming the nation's educational policy and finding a "real, real cheap apartment" in Washington, D.C.

Wellstone's wit was evident in a post-election press conference when he described his campaign as "more important than me, larger than me—I'm only five-five-and-a-half and not five-four, *Pioneer Press*," referring to the St. Paul newspaper that reported his height incorrectly. "I have some power now," he added. "I can insist on these things."

The man John McLaughlin calls "the white Ron Dellums" pulled off the political upset of 1990. With 99 percent of precincts reporting, Wellstone masses beat out Boschwitz' with 52 percent of the vote (881,712) to Boschwitz' 48 percent (828,432). Pundits across the state are framing Wellstone's election two ways. If you're Republican, it's a fluke and Boschwitz was a victim of circumstance. If you're a Democrat, Minnesota is a harbinger of national political realignment, setting the agenda for the '90s, or what Wellstone calls the "we" decade.

He'll try harder: If this sounds like back-to-the-future rhetoric, it is. Wellstone's political values bear no resemblance to those that dominated the past two decades.

In his acceptance speech, Wellstone referred to the "incredibly sacred trust that I have been given. I will work so hard to live

Wellstone's Senate win bodes well for the left

up to your trust. I will work so hard to do well by you. I will work so hard to be a senator that you will be proud of."

He promised last week to limit his use of the federal franking privilege and develop more responsible fundraising strategies. He said he will serve no more than two terms in office. "I don't think I can go there and, through all the norms and the folkways, try to build up to the point where 28 years from now I'll be effective," he said. "So I have to try to have a big impact." He said he plans to pursue seats on the Senate Agriculture, Armed Services and Labor committees.

Finally, Wellstone intends to make his January move to Washington in the same old green school bus that he traveled in throughout his campaign.

His win has left-leaning Minnesotans in a self-congratulatory frenzy.

Buses aside, it's been more like an eight-week roller-coaster ride for Wellstone, the Carleton College political science professor who began his campaign on September 12 after winning Minnesota's Democratic primary. Outspent nearly 8-to-1 by Boschwitz, Wellstone relied on creative, if infrequent, campaign advertising and a committed, young organization to get out the vote.

After his election, Wellstone had a special message for those who helped elect him. "The support and enthusiasm of young people around Minnesota was unbelievable. And if there's anything I hope for, it's that while I'm in Washington ... my actions [will] convey to young people that politics is, indeed, not about money and power games but improvement of people's lives."

Less than three months ago, members of Wellstone's own Democratic Farmer-Labor (DFL) party were questioning whether he was too liberal for their own tastes. Luckily for Wellstone, Boschwitz was preoccupied with the budget crisis and let all but 3 percent of a once-27 percent lead slip away before returning to the state on October 25.

Turned off: A blistering and relentless series of negative Boschwitz advertisements occupied the last 10 days of the campaign, pushing him out to a nine-point poll lead the weekend before the election. The Republican's ads reeked of desperation and were often outright lies. One told seniors that Wellstone's strident advocacy of a national health plan would result in the forced closing of Mayo Clinic. Another assured the elderly they would be left writhing in pain waiting for emergency medical treatment—rationed due to bureaucratic control ("like in Canada").

Wellstone appeared in trouble—that is, until Boschwitz sent out what is now referred to here as "the letter." It was a note from

influential Jewish Boschwitz backers to Jewish Minnesotans. The letter claimed that Wellstone (like Boschwitz, a Jew) had not raised his children Jewish, since his wife Sheila is Christian. It questioned Wellstone's commitment to his faith, his people and the Israeli cause. (A tiny minority of Minnesotans are Jewish.) Although Boschwitz didn't sign the letter, his campaign paid for the mailing.

The letter outraged DFLers, generated angry newspaper editorials and appeared to turn the tide back in Wellstone's favor. A near 60 percent voter turnout didn't hurt either.

Although the national political climate certainly helped defeat Boschwitz, Wellstone loyalists insist he was the only Democrat who could turn out the popular Republican. Yet cynics say the budget mess and a sex scandal in the Minnesota Republican gubernatorial campaign doomed Boschwitz from the start. The extreme right wing of Boschwitz' party blamed him for pushing out gubernatorial candidate Jon Grunseth. These same Republicans are said not to have voted this year, as a payback to Boschwitz.

Three months ago, Wellstone's own party scoffed at his ideology and campaign strategy. After his victory last week, reporters asked if a man as far to the left as he can have any influence in a Senate dominated by Dale Bumpers, Ernest Hollings and Sam Nunn. He replied that the nature of politics is to have your finger to the wind, and he's busing off to Washington on the breezes of political realignment.

That's pretty big talk from a guy who stands five-foot-five-and-a-half, but if Paul Wellstone has taught Minnesotans anything since Labor Day, it's not to underestimate him. Just ask Rudy Boschwitz. □

Adam Platt is a staff writer for the *Twin Cities Reader*.

Another reason to cheer: Sanders makes the House

By Kevin J. Kelley

BURLINGTON, VT.

BERNIE SANDERS' REMARKABLE LANDSLIDE victory in Vermont's congressional race marks the climax of a relentless 20-year electoral march by the independent socialist.

According to unofficial returns, Sanders ousted first-term Republican incumbent Peter Smith by a whopping 18 percentage-point margin. The 49-year-old former mayor of Burlington received about 117,000 votes, or 57 percent, in the battle for the state's lone House seat, compared to Smith's 83,000, or 39 percent. Democratic nominee Dolores Sandoval, a politically inexperienced university professor, was barely a factor in the contest, picking up just 3 percent of the vote.

This was Sanders' seventh attempt at winning statewide office. Beginning in 1972, he campaigned repeatedly as a standard-bearer for Vermont's Liberty Union Party, which never managed to threaten what its supporters derided as "Republican" hegemony.

In 1986, five years into his eight-year tenure in Burlington's City Hall, Sanders ran for governor as an independent, once again finishing a distant third with 14 percent of the vote. But the Jewish native New Yorker,

who still speaks with a strong Brooklyn accent, fared far more impressively in 1988 when he came within 3 percentage points of defeating Smith for the open House seat. That contest, in which Sanders outpolled a well-known Democrat by a 2-to-1 margin, certified his electoral viability. No longer could he be credibly branded with the "spoiler" label attached to all of Sanders' previous bids for statewide posts.

Unreconstructed radical: Still, no one expected that the unreconstructed radical

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Sanders succeeded November 6 by replicating on a statewide level the coalition that enabled him to win four terms as Burlington mayor by increasingly comfortable margins. Beginning with a base of ideologically committed and well-educated young and middle-aged voters, Sanders fashioned a strong appeal to working-class and older Vermonters, many of whom normally vote for Republicans. It is this singular ability to find support across cultural lines that accounts for the first congressional victory by an independent socialist in over 40 years.

Sanders' basic message has changed little during the past two decades. He has consistently called for economic justice, demanding that corporations and wealthy individuals be taxed in accordance with steeply progressive rates. Sanders also emphasizes the need for national health insurance and opposes U.S. intervention abroad, though that stance has been tempered somewhat in regard to the current situation in the Persian Gulf.

In his most recent campaign, Sanders took pains to distinguish his own brand of politics from that practiced by party bosses in the former Soviet bloc. Stressing his respect for democratic values, Sanders explained that his vision of socialism has much in common with the Swedish system.

During the past few months, Sanders deliv-

ered few of his usual blasts against the Democratic Party. But as his stemwinding victory speech suggested, that was probably just a tactical decision. As long as the outcome was on the line, Sanders was careful not to offend the many prominent Vermont Democrats who spurned their party's own candidate and embraced the radical outsider. Seeking to counter charges that he would be isolated and ineffective on Capitol Hill, Sanders likewise pledged that, if elected, he would apply for membership in the House Democratic Caucus.

Third-party platform: However, there is little doubt, despite these alliances of convenience, that Sanders will use his congressional office as a platform for promoting third-party politics, both in Vermont and across the country. His efforts in that regard will be aided at home by two independent progressives who won seats in the Vermont legislature. Both are members of Burlington's Progressive Coalition, which continues to control the mayor's office in the state's largest city.

The grass-roots organization that may soon evolve into a full-fledged political party in Vermont deserves much of the credit for Sanders' runaway victory. A core of veteran organizers scattered around the state mobilized thousands of volunteers who distributed Sanders leaflets in trailer parks, suburban shopping malls and general stores in farming areas.

Smith's defeat can also be attributed, in

Continued on page 22

IN THESE TIMES NOV. 14-20, 1990 7

By Brett Campbell

AUSTIN, TEXAS

FOR MONTHS, TEXAS DEMOCRATS HAD DESPAIRED at State Treasurer Ann Richards' lackluster gubernatorial campaign, which failed to present her many qualifications and accomplishments and muffled her gregarious personality. Richards never really succeeded in giving swing voters a reason to punch her name on their cards. But, as it turned out, she didn't have to.

In the campaign's waning days, Clayton Williams, a millionaire Republican rancher and businessman, was slowed by a number of self-inflicted wounds that had the cumulative effect of sinking his \$20 million candidacy.

Bad ol' boy: Despite his genuine charm, Williams managed to tarnish his nice-guy cowboy image by behaving badly at several campaign stops. He called Richards a liar and refused to shake her hand at a joint Dallas appearance. Though he sought to portray this as a spontaneous response to a negative ad run by Richards, remarks recorded by a TV cameraman before the confrontation revealed it to be a carefully staged snub.

In another campaign blunder, Williams revealed during a television interview that he knew nothing about the sole referendum item on the ballot, even though it pertained to the governor's appointment power—and he'd voted in favor of it when he cast his ballot days earlier during the Texas early voting period.

Around the same time, newspaper reports

Richards squeaks past wealthy Texas cowboy

revealed the Williams' business empire was plagued with debt and lawsuits (which undercut his bottom-line image); that his huge farming operation had pumped dry a lovely spring (which flouted environmental concerns); and that his bank had forced poor people to buy unneeded credit insurance—at usurious interest rates—as a condition of obtaining car loans (which contrasted strikingly with Richards' late calls for insurance reform).

In the campaign's final week, Williams, who had refused to release his tax returns, admitted that he paid no federal income tax during 1986—the same year he contributed tens of thousands of dollars to political candidates. He dropped this bombshell at the exact moment when Republicans across the country were being blamed for a decade of

unfair, soak-the-working-class tax policies.

Richards got wind of the news and responded, "1986 was a tough year for teachers and pipe fitters too ... but they paid their taxes." She made the issue the centerpiece of her campaign in the last four days, even getting a TV ad on the air within hours.

Rich and crude: Suddenly, Williams was no longer a friendly good ol' boy made good. Instead, the new series of verbal missteps—coupled with his previous gaffes, including his infamous "relax and enjoy it" rape remark—showed Williams for what he was: just another crude, rich, businessman who wasn't above screwing the little guy to make his pile.

Williams' declining appeal showed up at the polls, and when a survey showed that Richards had almost entirely made up Williams' once-formidable lead with two weeks of campaigning to go, the news galvanized her supporters and dollars and volunteer efforts surged. Williams dismissed the poll results and joked that he hoped Richards, a recovering alcoholic, hadn't gone back to drinking.

Even in conservative West Texas, Williams' home territory, the rigidly right-wing Lubbock newspaper refused to endorse him. His willingness to spend \$20 million—twice

as much as Richards, and almost half of it his own money—and a nonsensical budget plan offended the rural area's traditional frugality.

In the Republican suburbs of Dallas and Houston, middle-class professionals were put off by Williams' crass remarks. And his rude personal attacks on Richards offended the sensibilities of chivalrous rural Texas, where you're supposed to treat a lady with respect. Richards became the first Democratic candidate for governor to take Dallas in a dozen years.

Overall, Richards got 18 percent of the Republican vote, while Williams pulled only 15 percent of self-described Democrats. She held a strong edge among the elderly and first-time voters. Meanwhile, as happened in the Democratic runoff, Richards' core support turned out much stronger than the media predicted.

Exit polls showed that Richards garnered 60 percent of the women's vote, in part because she ran a strong pro-choice campaign. Even though she lost the white vote, she took nine out of 10 black votes and won the important Hispanic vote by a 3-to-1 margin. In all, Richards received almost a million and a half votes and won by a 49.6 percent to 47.1 percent margin.

The governor-elect claimed victory at a party at Austin's Hyatt Hotel. At the end of her victory speech, she hoisted aloft a T-shirt portraying the state Capitol building. The shirt read, "A woman's place is in the dome." □

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By Jennifer Wong

AUSTIN, TEXAS

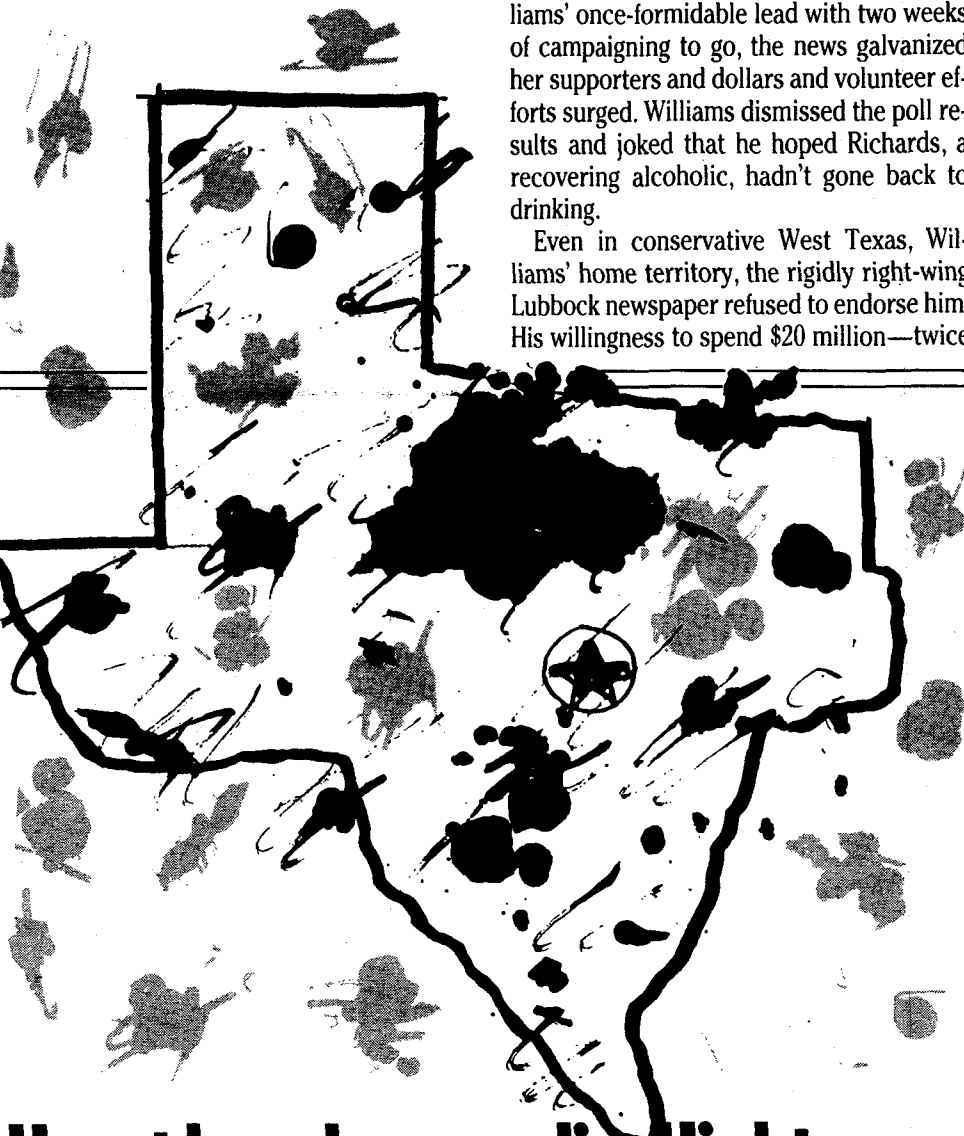
INCUMBENT AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER JIM Hightower's upset defeat was a corollary to—and possibly a casualty of—Democrat Ann Richards' surprise victory in the governor's race. A nationally prominent populist who led the Democratic ticket in 1986, Hightower was expected to prevail in a race against state Rep. Rick Perry, a neo-Republican who last year jumped parties to challenge the popular farm leader.

Hightower had maintained a double-digit lead in several polls as late as one week before the November 6 election. But the chemical lobby, the Texas Farm Bureau, the National Republican Party and agribusiness opponents of Hightower raised millions for Perry, who launched a negative television campaign two weeks before the vote.

When Hightower desperately needed funding to buy air time to respond, the eyes of Texas—and, more critically, the money—had already turned to the governor's race, where Richards was closing in on Clayton Williams.

As a colorful maverick who has taken on "the bankers, bullies, big boys and bastards" throughout his political life, Hightower is no stranger to hardball politics. Eight years ago he defeated a conservative Democratic incumbent then turned a sleepy 600-employee bureaucracy into a consumer-service and environmentally oriented agency where officials would say, "If you eat, you're involved in agriculture."

Hit by the hard ball: During the past few years Hightower has come under attack in the Texas legislature, where a Republican governor has led the fight to cut Department of Agriculture funds and strip the commissioner of his authority to regulate agricul-



Upset knocks populist Hightower out of Texas agricultural office

tural pesticides.

In the last legislative session the governor, the Texas Farm Bureau and the Chemical Council joined in an effort to make Hightower's position appointed rather than elected. When that failed, the Farm Bureau and the governor even proposed dismantling the Department of Agriculture and leaving Hightower without an agency.

After the session, the Texas Farm Bureau wrote to its national lobbyist, asking that U.S. Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter be enlisted in an effort to investigate Texas' Department of Agriculture. For the past year

a San Antonio federal attorney has presided over an FBI investigation of the agency. By the time Hightower's campaign began, the investigation had become the poorest-kept secret in the state capital.

But it was television that finally undermined Hightower's popularity. Two to three weeks before the election, the Perry campaign made large media buys in Dallas, Houston and the Panhandle.

In one ad, Hightower's face was superimposed on the image of a flag burner, while a voice-over asked, "Does this man represent your values?" Another targeted Hightower's

Democratic primary endorsement of Jesse Jackson, while a third ad raised questions about the FBI investigation—which after almost a year has discovered no indictable offense.

Too late: With a \$750,000 budget—\$120,000 going to radio commercials—Hightower said he simply could not afford to buy time on television. When he realized that he had to respond, it was too late. Hightower said that in the final weeks of his campaign, he made personal phone calls to contributors who assumed his race was won and were moving their money to the governor's race.

"I stand before you a living breathing example of a candidate who now knows that you cannot let television ads—negative personal-attack ads—go unanswered for that period of time," Hightower said in a concession speech the day after the election. He lost by a margin of about 1 percent—40,000 votes.

Few expected Hightower's defeat. Not the press, which largely ignored the race; not even the Republicans, for all the money they had spent; and not Hightower himself, who had rejected the idea of a U.S. Senate campaign against Republican Phil Gramm—in order to keep what everyone thought was a safe elected office and a base from which to organize.

Hightower said he has no idea what he's going to do after his term ends but emphasized, "I am not going to go away. I come to my politics not through any particular office that I might hold but through a set of values and principles that I advance. I'm going to continue to do that whether in office or out of office." □

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