

ROGER
SIMON



Gibson machine rolls confidently toward victory

At 7 o'clock yesterday morning, Larry Gibson voted for Kurt Schmoke. It was the only unnecessary thing Gibson did all day.

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of campaign managers: The big-picture kind. The sweat-the-details kind. And the fanatics.

Larry Gibson is all three.

"If I have done my job correctly, I will have nothing to do on Election Day," he tells me. "You can hang around. But there will be nothing to see. Nothing."

Great kidder, that Larry.

By 7:45 a.m. Gibson is already wrestling with his first crisis. "The door to the stairs," he is telling an older, solidly built, dignified gentleman manning the phones at campaign headquarters. "I want people to know that they don't have to wait for the elevator, they can also use the stairs. So we have to unlock the door to the stairs."

"The door to the stairs is already unlocked," the gentleman says.

"But people won't know it's unlocked unless we put up a sign that says it's unlocked," Gibson says. "I want people to have an option. They can take the elevator. Or they can walk."

The dignified gentleman sees the wisdom of the argument, and a volunteer is dispatched to make a sign. And if Gibson is at all intimidated by the fact that the gentleman happens to be Murray Schmoke, the father of the mayor, he does not show it.

Everybody gets treated alike on Election Day, which is to say they are treated like members of a large family with a serious task before them. And instructions are to be carried out immediately, or if possible, an hour or two before they are issued.

As Gibson bursts down the corridor of the rather elegant office space (it was formerly an architectural firm and has come complete with faux marble pillars and a ceramic tile fireplace), I stop and ask the elder Mr. Schmoke if he has spoken to his son this morning.

"Yes, he called," Mr. Schmoke says.

And what did he say?

"Oh, he didn't call for me," Mr. Schmoke says. "He called for someone else. I'll probably talk to him after, though."

After tonight. As in after the victory.

Gibson bursts back up the corridor and enters his war room. On one glass wall are three maps: The first divides Baltimore into 50 areas of Gibson's own creation. Each area has an area coordinator. Each precinct within an area has a polling captain, and all 50 areas are divided into four quadrants, each of which has a regional coordinator.

If all this sounds vaguely like a military campaign, that is what modern politics has become.

The second map breaks down the city by race, and the third map shows the results of the last mayor's race in five shades of red for precincts Schmoke won and five shades of green for precincts Du Burns won.

Generally speaking, Schmoke's areas engulf the city in a pincerlike movement from the north and west.

"Right now, we are in the poll coverage phase of Election Day," Gibson says. "We want to be sure that each of the 334 polling places is manned. Or womaned. Or personed. You can't knock on doors at 7 a.m. Later, we will switch from poll coverage to turning out the vote."

Gibson has about 3,000 people on the streets, a fantastic number. And none, he says, are paid. "They get lunch, and I do not mean lunch money," he says. "I mean lunch."

See SIMON, 2C, Col. 1

Schmoke all but a bystander as Gibson machine rolls confidently on

SIMON, from 1C

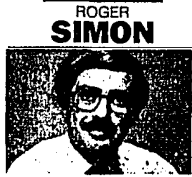
Have you talked to the mayor today? I ask Gibson. Has he asked you how things are going?

"No," Gibson says, "there has been no need. He does his job; I do mine. We had our last real meeting on Monday. There was nothing new. I told him that he would win the election and the range that he would win by."

And?
"And," Gibson says, "he seemed pleased."

Last year at this time, even with one TV station predicting a Burns victory, Gibson was equally sure of his numbers. "I was off by a few thousand votes," he says, "but I knew we would win by a comfortable margin. And 8,000 votes was a comfortable margin even if the media doesn't think so. We were, after all, unlodging an incumbent who had the support of a popular governor."

The idea this time, however, is to win by a big enough margin to make everybody forget about the margin last time. And Gibson spends the day immersed both in minutiae —



what kind of fishing line and nails to buy to hang the banners at the victory party — and critical matters:

In Area 31, in the northeast part of the city, workers for Sen. John A. Pica Jr. have agreed to hand out Schmoke literature at the polling places. But they also are supposed to be wearing Schmoke T-shirts and Schmoke caps, and reports filter back to Gibson that they are not doing this.

"There is supposed to be a more physical Schmoke presence than now exists," Gibson says diplomati-

cally. "But I will get this straightened out."

By calling Pica?
"By calling Pica if necessary, but it will get straightened out," Gibson says.

He works the phones. Meetings are held. And within about an hour, Pica's people are walking the streets wearing powder-blue "Stay on Board with Kurt Schmoke" T-shirts and striped Kurt Schmoke railroad hats.

What's with the train theme? I ask Gibson. Is it because this campaign runs over its opponents like an onrushing freight?

"A train represents strength," Gibson says, "and a sense of direction."

"And he loves model trains," an associate of his tells me later. "He never had one as a child."

At 11:45 a.m., Kurt Schmoke enters the headquarters and strips off his suit jacket to reveal a short-sleeved shirt and an athlete's shoulders. He is up, happy, relaxed.

"We have an army out there," he says. "We have the others outnumbered, and that's good. Four years ago at this time, I found out one poli-

ster was calling the election for Burns, and I was shocked."

About a year ago, I say to him, your people were saying that if you were re-elected, it would represent the beginning of the Schmoke years in Maryland and the end of the Schaefer years. Does that really mean anything?

Schmoke nods. "It will help me govern better," he says. "People in the city administration, in the bowels of the bureaucracy who continue to look to Schaefer or Burns, will now have to reckon with me. It will be my administration, and they can't take their orders from anyone but me. In terms of my effectiveness to govern, this election is a critical election."

Then he stops a moment and continues: "And one other thing: As a re-elected mayor and with Governor Schaefer in his last term, I am hoping we might develop a better relationship. The governor has been extremely helpful toward the city. But I am just hoping for a different dynamic between the two of us after the election."

Some people are saying that your

next term is going to be more difficult than your first, I say. The city is facing terrible problems and people are getting impatient for solutions.

"I don't disagree," he says. "Everyone in the state is in pain, in wealthy areas as well as poor areas. And everywhere I go, people are talking about crime and grime: safer streets and a cleaner environment. But we are doing things and we have more things planned."

And you still like the job?
"Oh," he says with a grin, "the good days still outnumber the bad."

Larry Gibson now stands at the top of the corridor. "We need to convert to phone banks!" he says. "Let's get the phone books of registered voters and move the tables and everyone either works the phones or works the streets!"

"You know, I feel like the most useless guy here," Kurt Schmoke says. "Every time somebody looks at me it's like: 'Why don't you just get out of here so we can do our jobs?'"

I wait a moment for somebody to disagree with the mayor, to assure him that he is wrong.

Nobody does.

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