

Spaceman: Of Roadkill & Governors

Bill Lee Seeks To Be Labor's Anti-Candidate In 2016 Vermont Governors' Race

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Montpelier, Vermont, 8/23/16- Anyone who grew up in New England or Quebec in the 1970s, any baseball fan really, knows tales of the Spaceman. Pitching for the Boston Red Sox from 1969-1978 and the Montreal Expos from 1979-1982, yarns of Bill sprinkling “marijuana dust” on his pancakes to help him cope with big city bus fumes abound. We Vermonters know him as an adoptive (and eccentric) favorite son, involving himself politically in support of single payer healthcare and endorsing Anthony Pollina’s own 2008 run for governor. Now the Spaceman is running for Governor in his own right; as the candidate of the Vermont Liberty Union Party. To his right is Republican Phil Scott. Also to his right is Democrat Sue Minter. Bill may be one part conservative but he is also two parts socialist (and three parts tell-it-like-it-is *or should be* maverick). His name recognition is strong enough to cause concern among some Democratic Party insiders (*will he draw votes from Minter?*), and his policy positions are out-side-the-box enough to, perhaps, gain interest among working class voters who may otherwise lean towards racecar driving Scott. With a campaign war chest of 20 bucks (*American –not Canadian*), he may be something greater than long shot to win, but what he lacks in traditional political advantages he makes up for in candor. All told, he is the curveball in this year’s election. And oh, he also wants the vote of the union worker.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Bill, by phone, while he was in in New Brunswick, Canada, doing a community fund raiser with former ball player Matt Stairs.

Dave Van Deusen: Bill, I appreciate your out-spokenness on issues, and your time with the Sox, and somewhat with the Expos (I’m more of a Sox guy myself). I understand you are running for Governor of Vermont and would welcome the vote of union workers.

Spaceman Bill Lee: [Look,] I have created more millionaires [out of working people] than anybody in the history of unions. I took the money from the billionaires [owners] and gave it to [Major League Baseball] players.

Van Deusen: let’s talk about that. You were playing during the 81’ strike, right?

Spaceman: Yes, I was elected Player Rep [for the players union] in 70’ for the American League, after Gary Peters was going to be released, and then in two years I was the head Rep for the American League [serving with Marvin] Miller, & Dick Moss; Joe Torre was the rep for the National League. [Together] we started arbitration, we started free agency with the Sykes decision and basically opened up [pay] from [a minimum of] \$9500 a year pay to \$502,000 [a year] where they are right now.

Van Deusen: Perhaps many people don’t understand that before the MLB Players Association really got strong, under Marvin Miller, the average pay was something like nine thousand bucks a year. Is that accurate? I remember reading Ball Four [by Jim Bouton], great book, where he talks about that; same kind of wages guys were getting working at a non-union warehouse.

Spaceman: Yes. And eventually we [MLB ball players] got to be where we made 8 times more the average worker. Then it jumped highly after free agency. I got very upset that they were making too much money. That’s my socialist views under Eugene Debs. I kinda wanted to give some of the money back, or redistribute it through the minor league/AAA, but the major leagues would have nothing to do with that. Then I got up to the 81’ strike, and I was basically gone cause the 82’ season came and I got released in May from Montreal for sticking up for Rodney Scott. But the amazing thing is I lead the team in ERA at 2.94 and I hit a 348 BA; I lead the team in hitting and I got released.

Van Deusen: Wait a second.. You’re telling me you lead the team in hitting?!

Spaceman: Hitting AND ERA and I got released.

Van Deusen: That's impressive. I did not know you had a history as a batting-pitcher (excuse my ignorance of baseball history).

Spaceman: Yeah, I was a good hitter at the end. Donald Corrin gave me really good contact lenses. My vision got better. I got really good at hitting. [More recently] I lead the Vermont league in hitting one year and I also won the VT State championship two years ago with [Burlington Mayor] Miro Weinberger behind the plate. I am still playing, I continue to play.

Van Deusen: But wait, can you go back to why you were fired from the Expos? Do I understand right that you were sticking up for a co-worker and management did not like that?

Spaceman: Rodney Scott. That was our second basemen. Before Dick Williams was fired he called him our most valuable player, our most unsung hero; he was a great defensive second baseman ; he played D, knocked the ball down, kept a lot of runs from scoring, and he was a good base runner and he could sacrifice. In the three years we put him at second base, we almost won the National League pennant [each of those years]. Now Fanny comes in, gets rid of him and I just went nuts; I snapped. I agree I snapped. [Fanny] tried to fight me, and I wanted to fight him, and he wouldn't and he ran away. Then I went to [this area in Montreal] and wrote him a note 'you meet me there and I'll kick your ass...' They made a movie about it, called "Spaceman.". It just came out. There will be showings in Waitsfield, Warren, and Burlington sometime coming up pretty soon. It's amazing. I didn't plan the movie and I didn't plan running for Governor. I was told to run by Peter Dimondstone. And when Peter Diamondstone says I'm the solution, then you know we got a really good problem. (hahaha)

Van Deusen: So you have played ball since the 1960s, before that really, going back to little league.

Spaceman: I only missed one year when I had my shoulder surgery in 1994. I rehabbed it good and came back and played in Venezuela; I played all over Cuba; I have played all around. I have probably won more games than Satchel Paige. I'm blessed.

Van Deusen: That's awesome... Getting back to Marvin Miller, didn't he come from the Steel Workers before he represented MLB Players?

Spaceman: Yes he did. He worked under John L Lewis. FDR anointed Lewis as head of the Steel Workers [Lewis was head of the United Coal Miners of America, was a founder of the CIO, and played a key role in the formation of the United Steel Workers of America], and Marvin learned from him then came to us and basically said 'you guys gotta get together.' When he saw the contract discrepancies and the fact that the Reserve Clause kept you in perpetuity with one organization, and that if you had a bad season the owners could cut your pay by 20%... [For example] there was a great player... He led the league in home runs (although his team came in last place) and the owner cut his pay by 20%. He asked 'why -I lead the league in home runs' and the owner said, 'yeah but we could have finished last without that.' So that's basically the way the owners 'respected' labor back then, and Marvin jumped on it, and I jumped on it with him and the rest is history.

Union Arbitration & Labor Board Appointees

Van Deusen: Let's bring that up to the present... I have been a union officer and/or a union rep for many years. As such I know that in past years State employees, tried to establish third party, traditional, binding arbitration and the State was very resistant to that. Right now final resolve to settle disputes means going to the Labor Board. The Labor Board process is very legalistic, very much like going to court; it's not geared towards a regular person being able to go to advocate for themselves. The process also takes lots of time. So: 1.) As Governor, would you support State

employees having the right to third party arbitration; and 2.) What role would you see organized labor playing in regards to your appointments to the Labor Board?

Spaceman: Well, third party [arbitration] is a great idea. I don't know why they don't do that. As for the Labor Relation Board that we [MLB Players] had, they put in Sykes for us (he was the third person). You had someone from the owners, someone from the union, and Sykes. Sykes agreed with us on arbitration and on the Reserve Clause. So appointing the right people to get them into the right position, you guys [organized labor] need to stick together and really be firm on that. I'll help you *anyway* I can. 'Workers of the world unite' –that's what I've always been about; I've been a Samuel Gompers [American Federation of Labor supporter and a] Wobbler and I've even gone further than that being a Eugene Debs [socialist].

US Senator Bernie Sanders

Van Deusen: Debs of course is somebody that Senator Bernie Sanders is a huge proponent of. What's your opinion about the recent Bernie Sanders campaign for US President?

Spaceman: I was *for* him and not *against* Hilary... I am a Bernie guy. I [helped] get him elected as a Congressman when he was petitioning in Hardwick a long time ago. I've been with Bernie for a long time. I believe he's always had his heart in the right place. But now he is [working in] the Democratic Party and that's just a tough party to deal with... [Bernie] could have stayed Independent. I would have liked to have seen what would have happened if [he] ran as a third party candidate. I believe Trump would have blown away, faded away, and his supporters would have gone with Bernie. I thought in my heart that they are not that dumb, to stick with Donald Trump. Maybe I 'underestimate the gullibility of the American public', [to quote] PT Barnum.

[In *my* campaign for Governor] I don't take any money. I have only received \$20 and that was from a 91 year old from Wisconsin Rapids who wrote me a check and said 'I want you to cash this because I have a friend who after you [do] will buy it from me for \$40.' That's my only campaign contribution. I don't want money from anybody. My [policy] decisions are based on what's good for the planet first and what's good for the workers on the planet second (as far as humankind goes)... [We need to protect] endangered species. You know there is a Madagascar periwinkle endangered that has the highest alkaloid composition of any plant on earth and it reduces cancer. If that plant goes extinct, we go extinct. I am pro-labor, but not at the expense of [being] pro-earth.

The Working Class & The Economy

Van Deusen: Well, speaking of endangered species, what about the middle class?

Spaceman: Exactly. We gotta create more jobs in Vermont that are based on our natural resources which is our woods, our maple syrup. You know we can raise more sheep. We can create a wood product unlike the particle board that causes cancer. Why can't *we* invent and design for the real world? I am a [advocate] of Buckminster Fuller and Victor Papanek. Papanek says we need to design for the real world. We don't design for the real world. We design for the petroleum industry; we design for the big companies; we design for the things that are gonna give the 2% [the richest of the rich] more money. If we designed differently, for the workers, the jobs would stay in America... We [the workers] will be a dominate force in the future. And the death of the Republican Party will be good for us. I hope it comes quicker than not....

My theory is that the workers are responsible for making the goods and providing the services and therefore they should have a bigger piece of the pie... In baseball [the bosses] never opened their books. They never put the money on the table and that is what got them wrong. When you get the owners and these people to put the money on the table you realize the discrepancy

between the worker and the owner is larger than you think. That money [should] go to the worker and that is what I have always believed... When the middle class gets more money, they spend more money and everybody's happy. I'm not a trickle down economist. I never believed in Reagan. I only believed in McCarthy actually a long time before that and I believed in a guy named Fred Harris from Oklahoma. Those are the only guys I really liked (and Ralph Nader).

Van Deusen: I assume you mean *Eugene* McCarthy and not *Joe* McCarthy?

Spaceman: Oh, for sure. Eugene McCarthy. (haha)

Van Deusen: So I suppose then that you support fair raises for union workers?

Spaceman: Yes. Most definitely. You produce the goods, you produce the services... Thomas Malthus was wrong. The Malthusian notion that all the economists and all the right-wingers and all the conservatives use was wrong. Population does not grow exponentially and goods and services don't grow arithmetically. His theory is the theory of most of the economic models that we see and it's wrong. With the advent of new technology we are going to be able to feed all the people all the time [so to speak]. That's what I've always believed.

On The Democratic & Republican Parties

Van Deusen: Let's talk about the Democratic & Republican Parties. Of course we have two other major party candidates for Governor. We have Sue Minter who has said her top priority as Governor will be gun control, and for the Republican Party we have Phil Scott, who I understand is for (so called) right-to-work anti-union legislation.

Spaceman: Both are bad. Sue Minter is gonna lose if she keeps the gun thing as her priority [as opposed to] jobs and keeping people in the State of Vermont... She has got to be a little more flexible when it comes to guns in Vermont. Guns are not our problem in Vermont. Guns are a problem in inner-cities, guns are a problem in the south, guns are a problem in a lot of places, but guns are not a problem in Vermont... I have tons of guns. I'm a responsible hunter. I eat road kill and pick up hitch hikers. When I get on the debates I am gonna show that I am more conservative than the Republican and more liberal than the Democrat. I am both. In other words I represent both ends of the spectrum. I will prove it. I pick up all my cans, I harvest all my potatoes by hand, I don't use machinery... I am very much pro-worker, but I'm kinda anti-technology which is a funny combination...

Tax The Rich Or Open The Contracts?

Van Deusen: Let's talk about some of the workers represented by public sector unions in Vermont. I know for a fact that one of the things union members very much care about is making sure 'a deal is a deal.' A couple years ago State employees settled their contracts, and a couple months later Governor Shumlin wanted them to reopen them to give back money to the State. Shumlin, of course, refused to endorse any raising of revenue by taxing rich folk or out-of-staters. As Governor, how would you deal with a financial situation where revenues were falling short? Would you ask the State workers to give back their hard earned raises or would you be willing to consider increasing taxes on those who could afford it [i.e. the wealthy]?

Spaceman: I'm a big proponent of raising taxes on the [richest] 2%... I think there are five Saudi Arabian princes living in Stowe and they use that airport over there (the Morrisville-Stowe Airport). How [else] we gonna get more money? We're gonna make sure we all buy from Vermont; we [need to] buy in Vermont; make sure things stay in Vermont; we don't go to the Walmart across [the river] in New Hampshire. [But if you do] you should pay a percentage of that back to the State. I believe in supporting the little guy through buying Vermont products and keeping the money within the State.

Privatization

Van Deusen: Fair enough. Another issue the VT Democrats have supported in recent years is privatization. Governor Shumlin and the other Democrats in power, for example, supported the privatization of Workers Comp. Workers Comp historically is administered by State employees who are union members. Yet the Governor has taken bids from out-of-state corporations to do this work. As Governor would you continue to push for privatization?

Spaceman: No. I won't privatize anything. I am a collectivist. I believe we will get it done within [a collectivist] system... I would [also] keep everything within the State. We're all in this boat together. [In addition] we need to find a way to get [more] outside revenue from outside the State. I believe the Vermont label is golden. I know a lady in Morrisville who opened a "Vermont" peanut butter company. She couldn't do that in the State of New York ["New York Peanut Butter Company" doesn't have the same ring], and now she is making money right here. We need to keep more jobs in Vermont and gain more revenue.

Healthcare

Van Deusen: Healthcare... How do you envision a healthcare system under your Governorship?

Spaceman: Wow. You know I want the Canadian plan. My theory is if we can't do it in the State [because of the Democratic & Republican legislators] were gonna do what Bernie did earlier [rent busses] and we can all go up and get our x-ray for \$18 in Sherbrook Quebec. Why not? If it's better on one side of the boarder or the other, we'll erase that northern border and [develop] a relationship [with Provence Québec]. I don't know how the Federal Government is gonna like it, but I want Vermonters to have free access to Quebec healthcare. I use it. My doctor, my dermatologist, my dentist, my orthopedic surgeon, all my x-rays, [I have] everything done in Quebec. I don't do anything in the State of Vermont because I can do it in Quebec. I played for the [Montreal] Expos, and I know how their system works. And if they say it doesn't work, it's [just] the Republicans using that fear mongering tactic.

Van Deusen: You are saying that until we fix our healthcare system it makes sense for us to cultivate a government to government understanding, concerning healthcare access, between Vermont and Quebec? And until we get this fixed, this is the one place where we should break the 'buy Vermont' rule?

Spaceman: Yes. [And right now we all should] get [our] pharmaceuticals up there. Get everything you need. But look in a healthier environment you won't need as much. Get the kids out there, get them running at an early age. Get them in track, in gymnastics, you put physical education back into things, and people will not become sedentary. And, I'm gonna ban Bud-Lite if elected too. -I'm a bottle bill guy; a buy-local drink-local beer guy; pay a little extra and put the money back in your own economy and don't give it to someone else; don't give it to outside corporations.

Renewable Energy

Van Deusen: Earlier you said that the environment is a priority for you. What is your position on wind power?

Spaceman: Those windmills up in the Northeast Kingdom weren't put there for the benefit of Albany [Vermont]; they weren't put there for the benefit of Montpelier; they were put there for the benefit of the big money guys down in Connecticut and for Metro Gas up in Montreal. We're not reaping the benefits of that wind generated power. I want little, redesigned windmills

on everybody's house that will spin around and make it so you don't have to pay for energy ever again.

Van Deusen: If, for sake of discussion, we do consider there to be a need for large energy producing plants, should they be owned by the public as opposed to a private for profit corporation?

Spaceman: Oh, for sure. JP Morgan Chase owns the grid. Every system that you see is [intended] to keep the little guy out. Like Bernie said, it's a rigged system.

Town Meeting

Van Deusen: Town Meeting? What role do you see Town Meeting playing in the future of Vermont?

Spaceman: I like everyone getting up... Most the people in Vermont are very conservative but they have a very liberal heart and they always take care of their neighbors. [For example] the hay on my field was gonna be brush-hogged and the guy that was gonna do it said 'Bill this hay's too good. Give it to one of your neighbors.' And I said, 'Your right. The Stoddard's need that hay, therefore the hay goes to the Stoddard's... and that's how Vermont works, and that's how its gonna work for forever, and that's part of your 'Town Meeting.' I think reason always comes out and those loud mouths that are out there [you know them], the right-wingers always get talked down by the normal people.

Support From Union Workers

Van Deusen: When union members vote, tell me why they should vote for you and not Phil Scott and not Sue Minter?

Spaceman: Those two are vestiges of the past and not the future and we gotta move into the future. It's gonna be painful at stops, but I'm the only guy to get you into the future and to get the model differently. The model is flawed; thereby you gotta change the model... The Republican and Democratic Party are of the past. You got to be progressive, you got to move forward. I'm the only guy that can out-conservative the right-wingers because I drive a 96' Buick (it my father's car), I repair it down at Denton's Auto all the time, (by the Craftsbury Garage) and everything I do stays within the State of Vermont.

Van Deusen: So you say you are the future. So for the average working class man or woman, what does that future look like with you as Governor?

Spaceman: You're gonna be happy to go to work. You're gonna be happy to see your paycheck. You're gonna be happy and you're gonna be content. You're gonna be healthy. You're just gonna be better off. As long as everyone makes more money and everybody is more equal, the world is healthier and happier. When you have divisions between a tool and dye maker in India making so much, and a guy in Detroit making so much, well Buckminster Fuller says that model does not work in the future. And you cannot tie yourself to fossil fuels. You have to tie yourself to the future... [Right now America] is not willing to do that. We keep sucking our thumbs and looking back.

Montreal Vs. Vermont

Van Deusen: One thing I absolutely have to take issue with you on.. This will be a tough question.. But I understand that you advocate in favor of bringing back the Montreal Expos. But as a candidate for Governor of the State of Vermont, would it not be more appropriate advocate for the creation of a Vermont MLB team, perhaps using the Green Bay Packers model whereby the team is owned by a city or, in this case, the State?

Spaceman: Haha. The trouble with Vermont is that the people of the north can't [often enough] get to the south, and the people of the south cant [often enough] get to the north. [But

the thing is] I'm an Expos guy and I don't believe in boarders. I do not see a border between Burlington and Montreal. I do not see it. I see it as another American League team that would draw Red Sox fans through the State of Vermont, and we would pick them up by the heels and we would shake the change out of their pockets.

Van Deusen: Hahaha. I like it.

Spaceman: It will pay for everything (haha)! Think of it, you would have 17 ball games. You gonna get 30,000 Red Sox fans a game. That's 510,000 people passing through our state. And that's only one direction. They gotta go back home too!

Van Deusen: Well maybe we can put tolls at the entrances to New Hampshire and Massachusetts?

Spaceman: Exactly, all the way. I am a firm believer that if we put an American League team there it will benefit us exponentially.

Last Word

Van Deusen: Well Bill, I have very much enjoyed this interview. Are there any last words you would like to provide to Vermont's union members about your run for Vermont Governor?

Spaceman: I ask that you provide them with a letter I wrote to my younger self that was published in the Players Tribune. It will give them an idea of who I am... Also, I am the only candidate that hasn't taken a dime from anybody [except that 20 bucks from the 91 year old in Wisconsin]. I'm the only guy whose pockets are clean and whose hands are clean; I am the only one who has no [obligations] to fulfill. The fact is I have always been on the worker's side. As Cassy Stengel once said, 'you can look it up.'

Van Deusen: Will do. Give um' hell and good luck Bill.

*Letter To My Younger Self:

<http://www.theplayerstribune.com/bill-spaceman-lee-letter-to-my-younger-self/>

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