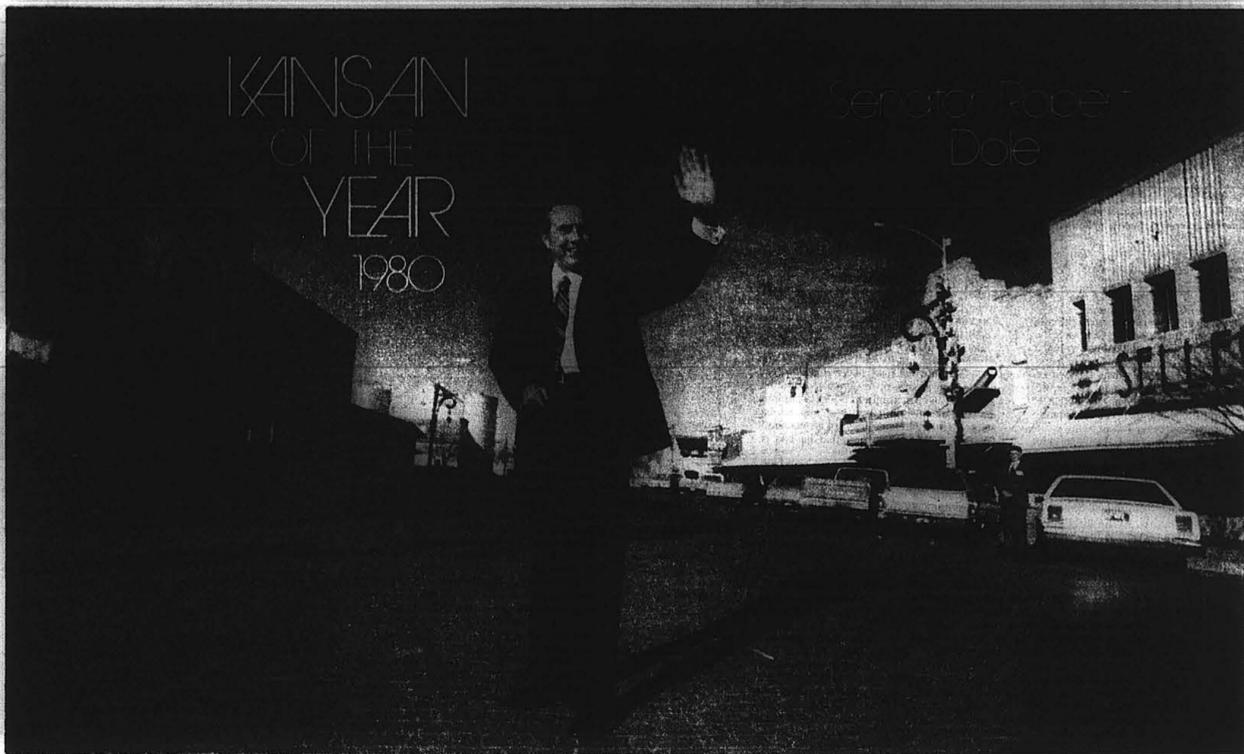


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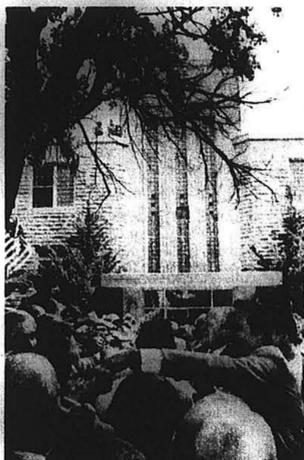
The Sunday Magazine Section of the Topeka Capital-Journal



Six years ago he barely won; four years ago he lost; now he's one of the top U.S. politicians



The political veteran broke down and wept on the streets of Russell when Gerald Ford tapped him as his 1976 running mate, but the tide was against the GOP.



Flushed with optimism, Dole and Ford shook well-wishers' hands in front of the Russell County courthouse where it all began. Dole may be more powerful now than he would have been had he won in '76.

by KEN PETERSON

Political winds blow fickle, and Bob Dole is a survivor.

In the 1980 maelstrom, when the powerful fell like saplings in a Kansas tornado, Dole emerged more firmly rooted than ever before.

Political gusts have taken Dole on a career of highs and lows. They have kept him in Washington, and they have sent him racing back to Kansas for a salvage operation. They have whisked him across the country as a national candidate and crushed him when his ambitions reached too far.

He is now at the pinnacle of power for any United States Senator.

In the tangle known as the federal government, this loner, a complicated, frequently moody 57-year-old political professional, will be among the most influential policy makers in Washington for at least the next two years.

It is a task the Kansas senior senator does not take lightly, but he still is able to wax philosophical about his fortunes.

"I think it depends on how I do the job," he replied, when asked to assess what his new Senate job will mean to the Midwest and to the people of Kansas. "I wouldn't want to predict what may happen. But I think the important thing is, certainly I know where I'm from and I think many of the judgments I make are based upon what impact they might have upon my state, plus I would hope we could find some outstanding Kansans willing to serve the government" in responsible positions.

There's a suspicion among Midwesterners that much of the Washington bureaucracy believes civilization ends not far west of the Hudson River, with nothing between there and California but a wasteland sparsely populated by a few cowboys and Indians. Dole didn't say whether he shares that suspicion — but he did mail a U.S. map, with a circle drawn around the Midwest, to Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nev., a top Reagan advisor, with the note: "Paul, that big blank space is what's referred to as the Midwest."

The implication was clear. There should be a Midwesterner in the cabinet.

"We have outstanding people all over this country, and they're not all located in New York or Boston," Dole remarked. "There may be some in Topeka. There should be a balance, and we shouldn't go back to the same places everyone else has been to find talent."

Of his own new job, Dole says "I don't overestimate my role. I'm one of 100 Senators. I'm not the greatest tax expert in Congress (but) I'm a good conciliator. I can work with Democrats and Republicans. It's going to be a lot of work, but that's what we're here for."

And Dole adds softly, "I think I'm an active Senator; I like to get involved in things. Sometimes that causes controversy, but I don't really believe the people of Kansas want me or any elected official to sit back and let things happen." He pauses, then concludes, "In my view... (we)... should make things happen."

He recalls, not without remorse, the 1976 campaign, the only election he ever lost in his 30-year political career.

He will be back in 1981, but the rest of the cast from the 1976 road show will not: Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale and Gerald R. Ford.

"I think sometimes it goes full circle," Dole mused recently as he walked the familiar haunts of his home town, Russell, where he wept after Ford selected him for No. 2 man on the ticket.

Tall and slim, dark-visaged, with a counte-

nance that has been likened to Richard Nixon and even Humphrey Bogart, Robert Joseph Dole is the quintessential political animal in a dark blue suit.

Through the years, this Kansan's frequently acerbic wit has been a major selling point with fellow Republicans, not to mention the national press.

His political rewards, from GOP national chairman to the vice presidential nomination, have not been the result of any particularly enlightening outlook on his part — though that may be changing now — but because he could do partisan battle so well. Dole is blessed with a political irreverence, a piercing gaze and a well-paced, resonant speaking voice. The ingredients are perfect for the politician who wants to be in demand.

In 1976, before he was selected for the vice presidential slot, Dole offered the observation that the person Ford chose for a running mate should be able to do some "gunslinging."

Whether Dole's own characterization led to the general belief that he was a Kansas gunslinger in that campaign is debatable, but Dole did leave verbal bullet holes in Carter and, some say, himself.

Earlier this year, Dole thought he was running for President. The afterglow of the national spotlight lingered from 1976, and, after reviewing campaign films with his wife, Elizabeth Hanford Dole, the Kansas senator decided that the negativism associated with his vice presidential campaign was unwarranted.

He took the plunge, striving to play the dual leading roles of a presidential candidate and

a leading Republican Senator. It didn't work.

When conflicting demands on his time became too much, he opted to do the job he already was elected to do. He spent long hours working on the windfall profits tax compromise, all but abandoning the presidential quest in the process.

Shackled by Senate demands, a critical money shortage, an embarrassing lawsuit with creditors, and more than likely, voter memories of his 1976 performance, Dole withdrew after stunningly poor showings in Iowa and New Hampshire.

He played a guessing game with the folks in Kansas, tempting fate by withholding an announcement that he would seek a third Senate term. While aides grew restless in Kansas, Dole went his merry way in Washington, saying, "I don't have to be a Senator, you know."

But Dole eventually returned to Kansas and said he was prepared to go for another six years, as nearly everyone figured. It's almost as if Dole wanted to be begged into running again, to receive assurances that he was wanted and necessary. A dramatic flair has always been a part of Dole.

Those fickle political winds have made Dole sit tight in Washington upon occasion, most notably when he served as chairman of the Republican National Committee midway through Nixon's first term.

Dole caught Nixon's eye with his staunch defense of administration policy. The reward was the party chairmanship, but almost too late Dole learned that Nixon and his aides were only interested in their own re-election and not in winning congressional seats.

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Dole knew he was "not a household word" in '76; was flabbergasted when Ford picked him for VP, assumed Ford wanted some "gunslinging" done among the Democrats. Unfortunately, Ford debated Carter...