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Bob Dole is emerging as most promising senator

WASHINGTON — Bob Dole of Kansas has emerged from the latest battle of the budget as the most interesting and promising character in the Senate.

He just barely squeaked through with a budget compromise President Reagan didn't want but accepted and he jokes at the suggestion that he put it over.

He's lucky that in his first major test as majority leader he didn't lose instead of winning with the tie of a hospital patient and a tie-breaking vote by Vice President Bush. But he laughs when he's given credit for the result. That's part of his charm: Like Reagan, he's always laughing, but unlike him, he's usually laughing at himself.

The revolt of the Senate against the president's defense and Social Security policies were the result of more fundamental things. First, after four years and appropriations of over a trillion dollars \$1,007,900,000,000 — the Senate was in no mood to do more than freeze the Pentagon budget, with allowance for inflation.

Second, with the largest budget deficit and trade deficit in the history of the nation, the Senate suspected that the American people were finally beginning to realize that this was a serious practical problem, not merely a campaign argument as in the last election, and had to be corrected.

To be blunt about it, the Senate got weary of the president's public-relations tricks, his jingoistic boasts, his television appeals to the people over the heads of Congress, and the presumptuous and aggressive lectures of Secretary of Defense Weinberger.

All this Dole understood, and there was another thing. He knew that 22 Republican senators would be up for re-election in 1986 and that his party would probably lose control of the Senate if they campaigned on the president's military, Social Security and Central American policies.

The alarm sounded — that the last two years of the Reagan Presidency might be spent with both a Democratic House and Senate — no doubt persuaded Reagan to go along with Dole.

As usual, whenever a senator breaks out of the pack and gets out front, as Dole has, the great "mentioning game" begins and he is hailed, poor man, as a potential presidential candidate. It's not an unreasonable dream. After Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan, most senators and many governors also think that just maybe they could make it, and begin to

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hear "Hail to the Chief" in the night.

Dole is not immune to this common Washington fantasy. He has made it to the perilous perch as the leader of his party in the Senate, but he has some problems.

He has to decide whether to run for re-election to the Senate in 1986 or to stand down and run for the White House. He will be 62 in July, and like Ted Kennedy, this will be his last call for the dining car.

His predecessor in the Senate, Howard Baker of Tennessee, decided to resign in the belief that he couldn't meet his legislative responsibilities and still run for president.

Dole may very well refuse to do the same and stick it out, trying to lead the new young generation of senators who don't want to be led under rules that he can't abide and can't change.

But you can't tell. Dole has a sense of humor, which hurt him when he ran as vice president in 1976, but may help him now when, looking around at the alternatives, we either have to laugh or cry.

He has been a loyal supporter of Reagan's conservative policies, after his fashion. He was in the Kansas Legislature for four terms, in the House for eight years, in the Senate since 1968 and in the Army for five and a half years, twice wounded and decorated for "heroic achievement."

This is not the sort of man you would find by accident in Congress. Outside politics, he has devoted much of his time to abandoned veterans and crippled children, and farmers and their families.

It's a painful thought, but the presidential campaign of 1988 has already started, and the Republicans have two possible and formidable teams:

The Bakers — Howard of Tennessee and James, the Treasury secretary, from Texas; and the Doles — Robert J. of Russell, Kan., and his wife, Elizabeth Hanford, the secretary of Transportation.

It's no wonder the Democrats are so sad these days.



In the 1976 race, Dole traveled widely, attacking the Carter-Mondale ticket, while President Ford campaigned from the Rose Garden.

talked about Dole in these terms. As the western Kansas congressman, senator, national party official and 1976 vice-presidential nominee, Dole often was criticized as a mean-spirited partisan hatchet man. But the 61-year-old senator, mellowed by his second wife, Elizabeth, and vaulted into a new role as a member of the majority party in the Senate, has matured to the point at which even his bitterest former enemies sing his praises.

"Bob has unquestionably changed from 1974," says Bill Roy, a Topeka obstetrician and former congressman who nearly beat Dole in the 1974 Senate race, one of Kansas' dirtiest. "I hate to be in this position because my fellow Kansas Democrats don't agree with me, but I'd just as well have him be the nominee of the Republican Party [for president] as anyone."

Dole's strategy for the 1980s centers on his performance as the majority leader. In that job, he determines the Senate's priorities, decides which bills make it to the floor and generally serves as Ronald Reagan's point man in the Senate for the passage of administration programs. His colleagues narrowly elected him the successor to mild-mannered Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee last fall not because Dole was an ideological clone of Reagan (Dole is more moderate and pragmatic) but because Dole possesses the Senate GOP's most experience as negotiator and tactician.

A test of that experience came early this year when Senate Democrats, in a rebuff to Dole and the Reagan Administration, successfully passed more emergency credit assistance to debt-ridden farmers, including those in Dole's home state. The president vetoed the farm legislation, but the vote damaged Dole's leadership reputation and the drive to cut the deficit.

"It is frustrating, very frankly, to have the first piece of legislation passed in this Congress be one that costs money," Dole said at the time. "We seem to have demonstrated [that] we do not have the will to face the deficit."

The budget deliberations provided an opportunity for Dole to demonstrate how he handles adversity. Early on, his chances of securing a budget agreement looked bleak. The president wasn't thrilled about trimming the defense budget and tampering with Social Security benefits, as the Senate wanted. Several members of Dole's own party said they couldn't support some of the proposed cuts. As a result, Dole could not produce his own budget plan by Feb. 1, as he had promised.

But Dole has dealt with adversity before. Forty years ago this spring, as a 21-year-old Army lieutenant, Dole was shot in the right arm as he was

leading an infantry platoon up a hill in the Po Valley of Northern Italy. He spent the next 39 months in hospitals in Europe and the United States, miraculously recovering from near-paralysis with only the loss of a kidney and the use of his right arm.

"Those years in the hospital," says his wife, Transportation Secretary Elizabeth H. Dole, "enabled him to deal with adversity. He has a mechanism inside to deal with adversity. Nothing gets him down."

Including political challenges. During the first four months of this year, one step at a time, Dole convinced the president to accept cuts in the defense build-up and a freeze on Social Security benefits. More difficult, he also persuaded most of his colleagues to go along with his deficit-reduction plan that called for cuts or freezes in nearly all government programs and the outright elimination of 13 of them.

"I thought a lot about what would happen if we lost," Dole said in an interview in his office, which was the scene of more than 100 private meetings, including 45 in the two weeks leading up to the vote. "It would have been like Bitburg, I suppose," he said, referring to the German military cemetery that President Reagan visited despite widespread outrage.

"I think you have to be very patient," he said. "Everyone says I was, but we've had some real screaming matches in this room the last 30 days—

calling each other bullies and all that stuff, marching out and not coming back. I learned this with a little luck you can put it together."

What Dole put together may turn out to be the script for the 1986 elections. For five years, Dole has said that 1986 would be the watershed election for the Senate Republicans, who will try to keep their narrow 53-47 majority. That election is critical because 22 of the 36 senators up for reelection next year are Republicans, and 16 of them were part of the "Reagan class of 1980" that was among the most politically immature and ideologically recent years. Moreover, the party out of power historically picks up seats in the middle of a president's term.

A measure of the significance that Dole gives to the '86 campaign came clear moments after he was elected majority leader last fall. Asked about his priorities, he responded, "We're going to retain the Republican majority in 1986. That's our agenda."

Dole figures that the economy will be the top issue next year and that the Republicans must lead the fight for a plan that shaves the deficit and stimulates economic expansion. If the economy performs reasonably well in 1986, the Dole-led Republicans could take credit for it.

In addition to shaping the party's theme for next year, Dole socks money into the war chests of his col-

The closer
Robert Dole gets to
the top, the better
he likes the view

STRATEGIES FOR A WINNER

Early on the morning of May 10, while most Americans were sleeping, Robert Dole and the United States Senate were pulling, as a college student would put it, an all-nighter. After 71 hours and 13 minutes of debate during 11 days, the Senate was staying up late to consider a \$965 billion federal budget resolution for fiscal 1986 that Dole, the Senate majority leader, had assembled in private dealings with Reagan Administration officials and colleagues.

"I am not one much given to quoting poetry," the Kansas Republican said as the vote neared, "but what we are confronting here tonight reminds me of a simple but poignant poem written by Robert Frost. The closing lines read, 'Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the less traveled by, and that has made all the difference...'"

Dole continued: "Politicians are not known for taking 'the road less traveled,' especially if it means taking a course that leads to some very difficult decisions—decisions that would cut or freeze most federal programs and eliminate other programs that affect almost every citizen in the United States. But tonight, if we have the courage to take that road, we can make a difference."

With that, the Senate began the dramatic vote about 1:30 a.m. A papa-jama-clad Republican, Sen. Pete Wilson of California, who had undergone

emergency surgery the day before, had to be wheeled into the chamber to set up a 49-49 tie vote on the GOP plan, which would slice the deficit by \$300 billion during three years. Vice President George Bush broke the tie, and the Senate, Dole at the point, took the road less traveled.

At 4 a.m., Dole gathered other Republican leaders and their aides in his office and uncorked champagne. Then, President Reagan called from Lisbon, Portugal.

"We had very close evening," Dole told the president. "But a \$300 billion package is worth staying up all night for."

Winning the budget battle revealed a lot about the Bob Dole of the 1980s—how far he's come and where he's headed. Measured one way, the budget fight showed that Dole, in five months as the Senate GOP leader, has tremendous clout in the Senate and that he is one to be reckoned with in future battles. But viewed another way, Dole illustrated that he is arguably the most influential Republican outside of the White House because he is in a position to control the destiny of the 22 Republicans up for re-election in 1986. Tied to that election is his own political future, which may include a run for the presidency in 1988.

Years ago, no one would have

BY STEPHEN FEHR



"A \$300 billion package is worth staying up all night for," Dole told President Reagan after the early-morning Senate budget vote.

Dan Glickman of Wichita as the only Kansas Democrat who could seriously challenge Dole. So the senator will try to discourage Glickman by building up a huge campaign chest.

"I'm going to have to raise money for the Senate campaign until Glickman decides what he wants to do," Dole said. If Glickman runs—and he has said he'll decide by Labor Day—Dole says he probably will need to raise three times the amount he spent in 1980, or about \$3 million.

A Dole-Glickman race would match the 1974 Dole-Roy campaign in its intensity and would attract national attention because of Dole's position. But, as Democratic consultant Bill Hoch surmises, "Dole is perilously close to being invincible."

But no politician can assume automatic support. Many Kansas farmers criticized Dole when he refused to join the Democrats and some farm-state Republicans in bailing out agriculture earlier this year. Two years ago, moreover, he angered Kansas bankers and their customers by supporting the withholding provision of the 1982 tax bill. And it was Dole who led the effort this year to enact what Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., called "a cruel budget" that included cuts for virtually every group in Kansas and the rest of the nation: students, farmers and Social Security recipients, to name a few. Finally, for all the perceived intensity,