

Doles: A capital couple in the world of politics

Robert Senate majority leader

By Karen Heller
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Labels have a way of sticking to politicians like gum to shoes. And if the label were something as damning as "hatchet man," it might be time for a politician to hang up those shoes.

But Sen. Robert Dole, who wore that label throughout the 1976 presidential campaign, when he was Gerald Ford's running mate, chose not to.

"I always worried about the hatchet-man thing," says Dole, 61, now Senate majority leader, "because while I might have deserved a lot of it, I didn't deserve to have it repeated for the rest of my life."

It is repeated no longer. Dole has proved wrong F. Scott Fitzgerald's claim that there are no second acts: His is playing to standing ovations from the public, press and politicians. "He's made the effort to communicate," says Sen. Russell Long, D-La.

"In spite of his toughness," says Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, he is capable of "compassion."

Says former Democratic National Committee chairman Robert Strauss: "I think Bob Dole is competent enough to hold any job in this country."

And these are Democrats.

The accolades are hard won. Dole has undergone a metamorphosis in style, approach and thinking in recent years, displaying a calmer, far more gracious side than in earlier days.

In 1968, after four terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, Dole was elected to the Senate and eager to make a mark. He did. Politics in America describes Dole in those early years as "nasty," "abrasive" and "Nixon's most strident backer."

He escaped Watergate unscathed, then the '76 campaign came along. "You know when you lose — anytime you lose anything — you finally have to say maybe I made a little bit of contribution myself" to the reputation, says Dole. He made a short-lived attempt for the presidency in 1980.

Lately Dole has not been losing much. He was voted Senate majority leader in January. This spring he emerged victorious on the budget battle.

His wife is not surprised by the new view of her husband. "Bob is very adaptable," she says. "He's the kind of person who deals extremely well with adversity. He's always even-keeled."

Friends credit Elizabeth with helping to soften Dole's image. "I think problems in his personal life may have affected his manner," Strauss says of Dole's earlier image.

"His first wife was a very fine person," says Huck Boyd, a Kansas GOP official who has known Dole for 25 years, "but they found there was less and less time they could spend together. Elizabeth is more attuned to the political life."

Dole's legendary humor also has smoothed the way for revised opinions. Asked why he and his wife don't get a cook to replace frozen dinners and dining out, Dole says, "The kitchen's so small. She'd have to be a very small cook. She'd have to be a short-order cook."

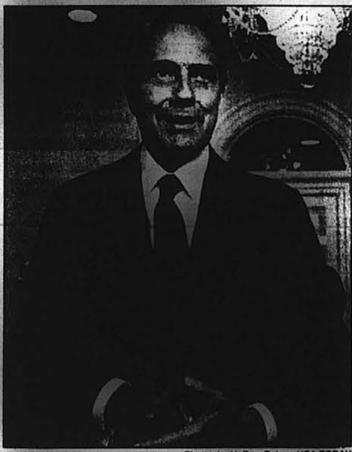
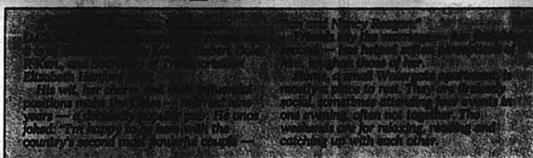
A middle-class Kansas farm boy ("Well, we thought we were pretty slick at the time"), Dole planned to be a doctor until he was badly wounded during World War II, leaving his right arm almost useless. Says Dole: "I was pretty sick. I went from 190 to 20 pounds." He was near death, but an indomitable will kept him from giving up. "Even then they used to send me around to different wards to cheer up the other patients."

Politics became an interest in law school, one that shows no sign of diminishing after four terms in the Kansas Legislature and a quarter of a century in Congress. Says Dave Owen, former Kansas Republican chairman: "I think he probably is one who doesn't have a lot of interests besides politics."

Now he thinks about the presidency. He also is up for reelection in '86 and needs to decide how serious he is about the White House.

He continues to speak his own mind, winning supporters, losing others.

"If you're active, and I've always been active and sometimes often into controversies with different issues, then you're going to alienate some people," he says. "But it seems to me this is the only course to follow. If you're not going to be a participant, you should get out. Politics," he says, for once not joking, "is not spectator sport."



ROBERT DOLE: He has transformed his once-abrasive style.

□ Bio

Elizabeth Hanford Dole was born July 20, 1936, in Salisbury, N.C., the daughter of a floral importer. She received her B.A. in 1958 from Duke University in Durham, N.C., and earned degrees from Harvard's graduate school of education in 1960 and its law school in 1965. She became associate legislative affairs director for President Johnson's Committee on Consumer Interests in 1968, rose to executive legislative director and continued under Nixon. She married Sen. Robert Dole Dec. 6, 1975. She became the first woman named to a Reagan administration post when she was appointed assistant to the president for public liaison in 1980. She became secretary of transportation on Feb. 7, 1984.



ELIZABETH DOLE: Long on preparation, short on enemies

Elizabeth Transportation secretary

By Karen Heller
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — No, she cannot cook. "Well," says her husband, "she can take that stuff out of the little wrapper and put it in hot water."

This is about the only criticism Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole has of his wife, Elizabeth Hanford Dole, the secretary of transportation.

The only complaint other people make is that she has a tendency to overprepare. But even Elizabeth, 48, will admit this. "Probably I spend too much time sometimes on things," she says, poised and relentlessly gracious in her rust-colored office that's roughly the size of a hotel lobby.

"I don't think she has any enemies," says Robert. "I've had people, reporters and others say, 'Now, I've been all over this town and I can't find anyone who says a bad word about Elizabeth,' and I say, 'Keep looking, because you won't find anyone.'"

Consider the facts. She is smart: Duke, Phi Beta Kappa; Harvard Law School. She's accomplished: A climb up the bureaucratic ladder — in Democratic and Republican administrations — led to her position as boss of 106,000 employees. She is socially adored: Last year she was the hit at the capital's Gridiron Club, the ultimate, and mostly male, power dinner. And she's impeccably dressed and undeniably good-looking: dark hair, hazel eyes, pale skin; she was her college's May Queen (as well as Leader of the Year).

There's more. Dr. Edward Bauman, her pastor at Foundry United Methodist Church, recalls the time she went out on a "personal ministry in the inner city when her safety was at risk" when she was President Reagan's assistant for public liaison. Unlike a politician, she never milked the episode for publicity. And, yes, she adores small animals. The Doles' schnauzer, Leader, is a frequent visitor to her office.

She has worked with the handicapped and indigent, been a consumer advocate, a Federal Trade Commission member and a presidential adviser before her appointment as transportation secretary in February 1984.

"I look back over my life and I can see a pattern and it goes right back to childhood," she says softly, with a strong North Carolina accent. "Government, student government. It was just natural that I majored in political science. I think, the student government side of it really goes back to the third grade, and then you see it along through junior high school. I like to organize things."

In seventh grade, she came home from the public library one night thinking, "You know, we really ought to have an organization where all of us can get together and discuss books and things like that." So I established this junior book club and made myself president. It wasn't very democratic.

There has been speculation, by Richard Nixon among others, that she would be an attractive vice-presidential candidate three years from now. She jokes about it. At the Republican National Convention, she got a lot of mileage out of her room number, 1888. But most feel that presidential ambition is her husband's domain. He says, "She keeps saying, 'You ought to do it. I don't have any ambition in this.'" Her only comment is that.

Elizabeth Dole married later (at 39) than most women of her generation. But you won't find her complaining about life before 1972, when, upon first meeting the senator, she must have thought, "My, that's an attractive man." Instead, she says, "I had just such a delightful time in my life being single."

She describes herself as "a person who probably wants to talk a little more. I'm the kind of person if something comes along I'm probably going to want to talk it over." Her husband "just kind of deals with it. I really admire that in him. Yet there's a certain amount of communicating on things that people need to do, too."

Robert agrees: "I don't take work home. I don't talk to anyone much about anything." His wife, he says, would "talk to me all night about Conrail. She'll deny that." She does deny it, ever-present smile. "He has not heard a lot about Conrail. There's a whole lot he hasn't heard."

Bob Dole's Big Gamble

The Senate majority leader from Kansas is taking the calculated risk that he can cut the budget deficit and show that he is, indeed, Presidential material for 1988.

By Hedrick Smith

SENATOR BOB DOLE IS FLYING HOME to Washington from a bankers' convention in West Palm Beach, Fla. He has shed his jacket, slipped off natty loafers and stretched his lanky frame onto two facing seats. He glances down at the coastline before answering a question about running for President in 1988.

"I've thought about it a lot — you know, maybe I ought to get organized and get going," he admits. "I've had a lot of letters saying you're the logical candidate for '88. But if I start being very active, everything I do in the Senate is going to be seen as my positioning for '88. I don't want to start being a candidate now. Right now, I want to be a good majority leader."

However, he is clearly already thinking ahead to a 1988 bid. He thinks aloud: "I'm perceived as a moderate Republican for all the work I've done on tax reform, voting rights, food stamps, all the stuff for veterans and the handicapped. But we're going to make a play for the conservatives. I think I deserve a shot at them."

As a Presidential hopeful, Dole's strategy is to prove himself an effective majority leader who knows how to govern, mold a majority and help fellow Republicans get re-elected. He has boldly staked his political fortunes on a risky effort to cut next year's budget deficit by more than \$50 billion. As a matter of philosophy, Dole believes in protecting major programs for the disadvantaged, but that is balanced by his orthodox, conservative distaste for deficits and a driving urge to bring them under control. When other Republicans voiced fear that they would be hurt in the 1986 elections if popular Federal programs were deeply cut, Dole argued that all would benefit if the economy was kept on track. His performance in steering a hefty deficit reduction through the Senate won rave re-

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views, though differences with the House have raised new problems.

Yet even his friends see long odds against his turning such legislative triumphs into a springboard for the Republican nomination. For the witty, likable, 61-year-old Senator from Kansas is flying in the face of the received wisdom of modern American politics — that capturing a party's nomination is a four-year marathon that demands the single-minded devotion of a citizen-politician.

Typically, the former majority leader, Howard H. Baker Jr., retired last year to test the waters for 1988 without the distractions of legislative leadership and representing the Reagan White House on Capitol Hill. Baker felt his Senate job had aborted an earlier Presidential try in 1980. Reminded of his predecessor's analysis, Dole retorted: "Well, one of us is wrong."

With his gift for pithy, quotable remarks, Dole does get more exposure on the nightly news than did Senator Baker. In Washington, he has overcome the "hatchet man" image he acquired in 1976 as Gerald R. Ford's Vice-Presidential running mate. As Senate Finance Committee chairman in President Reagan's first term, he built a reputation as a solid, mature legislator who masters the issues, knows what Senate chemistry will produce vital compromises, and takes seriously the responsibility of making government work.

But he has had little time for grass-roots politicking or organization-building around the country. He is an inside politician playing an insider's game in a contest that has become the province of outsiders. What is more, he must show his independence from President Reagan, but must do it without looking disloyal to the Reagan legions searching for a new champion.

As majority leader, Dole is bolder and more aggressive than Baker. Early on, he upstaged and ranked the White House by announcing that Senate Republicans would produce a budget before the President. Later, his Lyndon Johnson-style maneuvering and brokering achieved a stunning compromise on the budget, persuading senators and the Administration to backtrack on their positions. His phone calls to the Reagan party touring Europe got the President to accept what he had long resisted — a no-