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Outcome of Senate races a key to Dole's hopes for '88

DAVID B. WILSON

WASHINGTON — Because he is vice president of the United States, because of his extraordinary ability to raise money and because of his New England roots and style, George Bush is and will be expected to win the New Hampshire primary in 1988.

So even if Bush prevails handily in that colorful and consequential early contest, media interest will be devoted to who runs second and third, and by how much. New Hampshire is the granite millstone that grinds out the chaff in presidential politics. Who runs fourth runs out, as they say at the racetrack. A close third, however, pays off.

New Hampshire likes underdogs. Estes Kefauver in 1952, Henry Cabot Lodge in 1964, Eugene McCarthy in 1968 and Gary Hart in 1984 come to mind. None won. But each severely damaged, respectively, Harry Truman, Nelson Rockefeller, Lyndon Johnson and Walter Mondale.

So Bob Dole does not have to win in New Hampshire. Neither do Howard Ba-

ker, Jack Kemp, Pat Robertson and Pete du Pont. What each must try to do is avoid running fourth or worse, thereby telegraphing a negative message to the upcoming superprimary in the South.

Robert Dole of Kansas is comfortable with this tactical situation. Bush's celebrity has not been wearing well in recent months, and the vice president must try to find some way to deal with almost two more years of overexposure.

As Senate majority leader, Dole's chances almost certainly depend upon the outcome of the 1986 Senate contests, in which 22 of the 53 Republican senators, many of them first-termers swept into office in the 1980 conservative revival, are defending their seats.

If the Republicans lose control of the Senate, Dole's present stature will shrink, and he will be blamed. If, as he predicts, they hold their own or pick up a seat or two, he will have a share of the credit and the prominence of leadership and will command more power than is available to the vice president to place others under obligation to him.

Dole is 62 but looks much younger. Kansas Democrats have yet to find a can-

didate to oppose him this year. He will be 65 on Inauguration Day, 1989, which means that, in all likelihood, his last chance at the White House comes in 1988.

He is doing what he can in the Republican Senate fights in the newly two-party South, helping, among others, Rep. W. Henson Moore seek the retiring Russell Long's seat in Louisiana. Sen. Jeremiah Denton in Alabama, Sen. Mack Mattingly in Georgia, Sen. Paula Hawkins in Florida, Sen. Don Nickles in Oklahoma and Rep. Jim Broyhill in North Carolina.

Indeed, the importance of these southern fights is such as to produce a lively contest among the staffs of the potential GOP presidential contenders to book their heroes for fund-raisers in Dixieland.

In this contest, Dole has the advantage of being, hands-down, the best platform performer. Like John F. Kennedy and Massachusetts Senate President William M. Bulger, he has a rare gift for self-deprecating political wit which endears him to audiences and the media.

The gift was on display last Wednesday morning at a breakfast at the Hart

Senate Office Building for some 200 members of World Relief, an international agency representing some 40,000 Evangelical churches.

For 10 minutes Dole convulsed this rather staid crowd with political humor. Then, for 20 more minutes, he fielded serious questions on the deficit, the balance of trade, the Libyan retaliation, the farm crisis, tax reform and the Supreme Court.

He talks the terse, plain, Midwestern English of Russell, Kan. (1980 pop., 5,427), where he was born and still votes, and he isn't afraid to admit that he doesn't have easy answers to tough problems.

It was quite a performance and at the end of it these sober, undemonstrative Christians rose from their chairs and showered him with that kind of explosive handclapping that bespeaks unpremeditated enthusiasm.

Dole, elected to the House in 1960, is a consummate insider. But alone on an end table just inside the rather grand office of the majority leader is a model of a grain elevator, about four inches high. It is the first thing he sees when he gets to work



David B. Wilson is a Globe columnist in the morning. It says "Russell" on its base. He has not forgotten.

President Senate Majority Leader Dole is running hard for THE job

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Sen. Donald Riegle: "He's tough, effective and fair."

alter of deficits," he said, sounding very much like a Kansas Republican of the Alf Landon vintage.

MIGHT THAT mean tax increases? "Well, if we can get the juice out of this tax bill that I think we can, that would be a long way down the line." But he doesn't flatly rule them out.

No matter what else, friends and foes alike agree Bob Dole is no wimp. "This is a very strong individual — he's got tremendous drive," said Democrat Riegle, who has worked with him in the Senate for nine years.

"I think his character was shaped substantially by the long period of recovering from his very terrible injuries in the war," Riegle added.

Second Lieutenant Robert Dole was fighting to take a hill in northern Italy on April 14, 1945, just three weeks before the war ended, when something — probably a mortar shell



Rep. Robert Davis: "Enormously impressed" with Dole.

— ripped through his right shoulder, nicking his spinal cord and temporarily paralyzing all four limbs.

FOR MORE than three years his life was spent in hospitals, enduring an agonizing series of operations. Infection set in, and he lost a kidney. Several times he was expected to die.

He survived, and painfully, learned to walk again. Eventually, he got most of the use back in his left arm. Dole cannot feel coins, and usually has his shirt pocket stuffed full of dollar bills instead. His right arm is withered, and he carries a pen in his right hand so no one will try to shake it.

Yet he made it back. Today, he looks younger than his 62 years. There are, he says, no lingering health effects, no chronic pain.

"I think that I am fairly healthy — I like to hope that I got all my bad luck out of the way at once."

DOLE HAD been a medical stu-

dent before the war. His injuries led him to law instead, then to politics. After a career in the Kansas legislature, he was elected to Congress in 1960, and then to the Senate in 1968.

He soon won notice as an aggressive, hard-hitting partisan Republican — so much so that President Nixon made him Republican National Chairman. He was noted for having a quick but biting wit that often rubbed people the wrong way.

Ten years ago, President Ford surprised Republicans by picking Dole as his vice-presidential nominee. The race was rocky: Dole was at his slashing worst in a TV debate with Democratic vice-presidential nominee Walter Mondale; in it, he seemed to blame both World Wars on the Democrats.

Some said that debate cost Ford the election. Dole disputes that but admits, "I went for the jugular — my own," and adds that "three empty chairs got up and walked out," during the debate.

DOLE'S WISECRACKS, some say, are gentler these days, although he still can show a sharp edge.

Eight years ago, Dole ran for president — and flopped, finishing last in Iowa and New Hampshire and then

withdrawing. "My campaign was a very well-kept secret," he said wryly. "Actually, I probably had no business being in there." 1980 was Ronald Reagan's year.

This time, he vows, things will be different. But Dole has one major handicap he didn't have before: Being Senate Majority Leader is more than a full-time job. Howard Baker, the last majority leader, quit two years ago because he wants to run for president too — and didn't think he could do both jobs at once.

"I don't have three or four days like the vice-president does to go door-to-door," in states like Michigan, Dole acknowledged. But, he said, "I don't think (being majority leader) will be a handicap."

FEW OTHERS agree.

"I think it will be very tough to be majority leader and still be an effective presidential candidate," Riegle said. Republicans not on the Dole team echo those thoughts as well. But Riegle — one man who admittedly will not be voting for Dole, added: "He's shown a willingness to push himself — he's going seven days a week. He's got all the intellectual tools. I think it would be a mistake to underrate Dole."

Dole is showing real presidential timber

Say or think what you will about tax reform, one aspect of this tax bill which passed the Senate Finance Committee and is headed for the full Senate is fairly certain. When it passes, the Republican Party will be the big winners in the short run, and Bob Dole probably will benefit more than any other Republican.



As the majority leader in the Senate, Dole will be front and center during the debate, championing the cause of the little guy against the "greed of special interests." That populist position will sit well with the majority of Americans who will either be relieved altogether of tax liabilities or whose personal taxes will be reduced.

Dole will be the headliner on television leading the charge on the evening news (and C-Span) and before it's over, Packwood and Bradley and others who championed tax

reform earlier will be overshadowed by our senior Kansas senator who has embraced this bill as his own.

That suits me just fine. Bob Dole may just be the best Republican candidate for the Oval Office. Certainly, he is better suited for the job than front-runner George Bush, whose strength is as solid as cotton candy, or Jack Kemp, whose only claim to fame is the now-debunked supply-side economic theory.

Bob Dole has become a statesman. He has proved he can look out for the good of the nation as a whole instead of specific interests. He has faced down the president when necessary. And he has shown that he can be a fiscal conservative while defending the rights of the disadvantaged.

At various times, it has seemed Bob Dole was committing political suicide. He incurred the wrath of bankers, who had been his big supporters, to steer the tax withholding bill to passage.

Dole went out on a limb, which later was chopped off by Reagan, by promoting reasonable limitations on Social Security expenditures. To attempt to touch the untouchable — Social Security — was a courageous act and showed clearly that Bob Dole can do what he thinks is right, even if it may be unpopular.

Early on, Senator Dole said publicly that supply-side economic theory was sheer baloney, even in the face of a tidal wave of political euphoria over the naive notion in this country that we could radically reduce taxes, spend tons more on defense, and miraculously end up without a deficit.

In foreign affairs, Dole has been a hardline pragmatist. He has supported most of Reagan's policies, which says a lot. Most would agree that this has been our president's strongest area of achievement.

What is our current president's greatest weakness, however, is also Dole's strength. Ronald Reagan lives in a dream world, when it comes to the underclass of this nation.

Ronald Reagan says to the unemployed, "Pick up the help wanted section and get a job."

Ronald Reagan says to the uneducated, "Go to school and learn how to read."

To the hungry and homeless, Ronald Reagan says, "You wouldn't be hungry or homeless, if you only knew where to go for food and shelter."

Robert Dole groans when he hears this nonsense. Moreover, he has fought for those federal social programs which are necessary and productive.

Perhaps Dole's greatest personal achievement was his one-man effort to extend the voting rights act over the violent protest of the White House. Our senator proved then and there that he has compassion, that he perceives the unfairness and inequality of our system, and that he is not a political purist who is blinded by doctrinaire theories.

Bob Dole thinks for himself, and the way he thinks is quite presidential.

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