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Viewpoints

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Dole forges new public image geared to presidential race

By KEVIN PHILLIPS
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There's agreement in Washington that Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., has already enjoyed one of the most important public image transformations of the last decade. He has metamorphosed from 1976's much criticized Republican vice presidential candidate-cum-hatchetman into a leading policy-maker, recently spotlighted by one news magazine as the "hot" emerging challenger to Vice President George Bush for the 1988 GOP presidential nomination. Which leads to another question: Could Dole go all the way?

It won't be easy. But while the senator from Kansas was once the ineffectual Rodney Dangerfield of the Wheat Belt, the current measure of his respect was underscored by a Washington reception he recently gave for his Dole Foundation for Employment of Persons with Disabilities. Dole's interest in the disabilities of others basically grows out of his own: He still has little use of his right arm, shattered in World War II. But because of the majority leader's influence, crowds of Washington power brokers have lined up to finance a foundation that essentially gives grants to help crippled children. It's part of the changing perception of what Dole represents. Press reports even evoke analogies to Franklin D. Roosevelt and his role in the March of Dimes.

Yet, despite the growing belief among political insiders that a matured Dole could make a good president, few think fate will deal him the chance. Pitfalls abound. To begin with, Dole's current, second-place standing in most Republican preference polls is more marginal than solid. Bush is far ahead, and Dole's 10 percent to 15 percent puts him second largely because the other two major contenders — former Senate Majority Leader Howard H. Baker Jr. and Rep. Jack Kemp of New York — have been sagging.

Then there's the bad precedent of Dole's 1976 vice presidential defeat, underscored by his inept 1980 bid for the GOP presidential nomination. Second-place nominees on a losing national ticket may make personal and professional comebacks, but it's rare that they convince their party to give them another nomination. This time for the presidency.

Which brings us to the circum-



BOB DOLE
...gaining status

stances that are at once Dole's 1988 launching pad and his prime 1988 obstacle — his GOP Senate leadership. Ironically, the turnaround in Dole's fortunes dates from the emergence of Ronald Reagan in 1980. First came the Reagan landslide, with its corollary of the first Republican Senate in a generation. Then, as the post-1981 context of Washington politics began to lurch to the right, Dole, whose 1976 conservatism had seemed abrasive, found himself perceived as a centrist.

Dole himself changed — his bitter partisanship ebbed as his self-confidence grew. But, in addition, a new generation of zealots and abstractionists took conservatism too far to the right for a Farm Belt pragmatist, whatever his prior combative-ness.

Finally, the GOP's new majority circumstances showcased Dole's legislative talents. Seniority made him chairman of the Senate Finance Committee when the GOP took over in 1981, a position he soon parlayed into leadership of the Republican Party's fiscal-responsibility wing. If Dole's willingness to support tax increases in 1982 and 1984 made him enemies on the supply-side ideological right, it also gave him new stature among hitherto skeptical Establishment constituencies.

Come December 1984, Dole's success in winning the Senate Republican majority leader's post boosted him to a larger platform. And during the spring and summer of 1985, he used it to carve out a profile of dissent from Reagan administration budget-deficit nonchalance. That

helped him in the polls. Indeed, from an institutional standpoint, captaincy of the centrist Republican forces on Capitol Hill during the Reagan era seems to have worked to position the party Senate leader — first Baker, then Dole — to emerge as a prime presidential contender and moderate GOP rallying point.

Since Baker retired in 1984 (ironically, in order to concentrate on running for president), it's been Dole who's climbed in the polls, while Baker has declined — to a point where his candidacy is in some doubt. Meanwhile, there are already signs that televising the Senate has given Dole an audience and a benefit no prior majority leader ever enjoyed.

Yet, the problem is that no one should overstate the fundamental usefulness of the Senate majority leadership as a presidential launching pad. Pre-televising, at least, it simply wasn't one. Occupants got positioned but not launched. Lyndon B. Johnson's success in going from Senate majority leader in 1960 to vice president in 1961 and then president on the death of John F. Kennedy in 1963 is the half exception that proves the rule. Texas geography got him on the Democratic ticket in 1960, not his mediocre showings in either polls or primaries. And an assassin's bullet made him president.

LBJ aside, the rule is that 20th-century congressional leaders have failed in their presidential ambitions — Sen. Robert A. Taft, R-Ohio, never got the nomination, and neither did such Senate stalwarts as Richard B. Russell, D-Ga., Arthur H. Vandenberg, D-Tenn., or Henry Cabot Lodge Sr., R-Mass.

On the House side, Speaker John Nance Garner was selected for vice president by Roosevelt in 1932, but never climbed higher. And House Speaker James Beauchamp "Champ" Clark lost his powerful 1912 bid for the Democratic presidential nomination on the fifth ballot. As for the other exception, House GOP leader Gerald R. Ford became the nation's first appointive vice president in 1975, moving to the Oval Office on Richard M. Nixon's resignation. But it took a combination of two fluky circumstances.

In short, the obstacles facing Dole are formidable. Jumping from the Senate to the White House is unprecedented.

And a Senate majority leader faces a dubious array of tactical options. Consider:

• Serving as Senate majority leader in a White House loyalist role: This is pretty much what Dole has done for the last six to nine months. As his presidential credibility and poll numbers have strengthened, Dole has tilted toward loyalist support of the Reagan White House, cooling his earlier independence.

Carrying water for the White House can yield unfavorable publicity — for example, Dole's June efforts to win confirmation for the administration's controversial federal judicial nominee, Daniel A. Manion. However, White House loyalism has reinforced his earlier ties to the GOP's dominant right wing and bolstered his ability to claim Reagan heirship in 1988.

And there's another, more Machiavellian benefit: Serving as a loyalist to the White House majority leader reduces the extent Dole can be criticized by other GOP senators for using his position for personal presidential ambitions. The drawback, of course, is that despite Reagan's popularity, voters will be looking for independence and new ideas in 1988. And serving the next two years as a

loyalist majority leader could saddle Dole with some of the me-too role that burdens Bush.

• Serving as an independent Senate majority leader: Here's another scenario. Suppose that the Republicans manage to hold the Senate in 1986, but support for Reagan and his policies fades. Then Dole could be tempted to carve out a more independent role for both himself and the Senate GOP. While this might help increase his marketability to the overall electorate in November 1988, it probably wouldn't help him get the GOP nomination. Enthusiastic Reaganites would be offended. So would some Republican senators, ever suspicious of Dole acting on his own behalf.

• Serving as Senate minority leader: If there's minimal evidence that Senate majority leaders can leap from that position into the Oval Office, there's even less reason to believe the jump can be made by Senate minority leaders — especially ones unlikely enough to preside over their party's loss of Senate control. Dole has said he'd probably stay on as majority leader in 1987 if the GOP keeps control. But would he stay on as minority leader?

• Serving as an ordinary senator:

Holding onto the majority leadership could reward Dole. But accepting a comedown to managing a 1987-88 Senate GOP in minority status probably would not. By contrast, as an ordinary senator running for president, Dole could stake out independent positions and new ideas without being hobbled by party leadership responsibilities.

In sum, Dole, for all his talents and Washington esteem, is coming up against an old reality of U.S. politics: Leaders of Congress almost never jump from that role to the presidency. From Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun down to the more recent example of Taft, their executive ambitions haven't squared with their legislative circumstances. And the latter has prevailed. Yet there's also an encouraging item for Dole in the history books. One man did run a losing race for the vice presidency, and then, 12 years later, made it to the White House. His name was Franklin D. Roosevelt.

About the writer

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Is Dole 'the Next Hot Property'?

Although the polls don't show it yet, Republican leaders see Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole rapidly moving up as a main alternative to Vice President George Bush for the 1988 GOP presidential nomination. Dole has impressed GOP strategists with his fund-raising efforts, outreach to the party's right wing and grass-roots support in Iowa and New Hampshire. And conservatives are impressed by his Senate efforts on behalf of the

Reagan agenda—including the president's federal-court nominees—and by Dole's recent appearance at the National Right to Life convention. "He's no one's first choice, but conservatives are beginning to look at him as an alternative to Bush," said one New Right activist. Citing Rep. Jack Kemp's stumbles in Michigan and elsewhere, Bush strategists are now downplaying Kemp's threat to their man. "Dole's the next hot property," said one top Bush aide.

Running Hard Dole's Leadership Role In Senate Helps Shape His Bid for Presidency

Post Is Visible but Requires
Stands on Divisive Issues;
The Manion Vote Dispute
Averting Major GOP Defeats

By DAVID ROGERS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
RUSSELL, Kan. — Like the outcroppings of bleached stone in the prairie grass, there is a hardness to this land, and it shows in Russell's native son, Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole.

In the evening dusk in his old back yard, the Kansas Republican can still find the weathered metal hook he used to exercise his wounded right arm after World War II. Returning to address his former high school, he seems to speak of his own powerful ambition to chase the flat horizon and grasp the dreams that lie beyond.

"You've come from a very special place," he tells the graduating class in the crowded gym. "The horizon is out there somewhere, and you just keep chasing it, looking for it, working for it... to make your mark not only on Kansas but America."

Bob Dole is running. Running for a fourth Senate term. Running to keep Republicans in power and himself as majority leader. And running for president, his passion since that Kansas City morning in 1976 when Gerald Ford tapped him for the second spot on the GOP ticket.

New Visibility
Defeated then and a dropout from the 1980 presidential campaign, Mr. Dole is today finding his stride in the 1988 stakes. The Senate leadership post gives him new visibility in the race for the GOP nomination, and his aggressive, scrambling style has steered Republicans clear of major legislative defeats in this Congress.



Sen. Robert Dole

Toughness and competence are Mr. Dole's trademarks, and he has gained from the troubles of the erstwhile Vice President George Bush and Rep. Jack Kemp. A new Wall Street Journal NBC News poll puts Mr. Dole second to the vice president among Republican voters, albeit a distant 47% to Mr. Bush's 43%. Bush operatives view him as a major rival; Democrats fear he threatens their political base. "He would be tough," says Connecticut Sen. Christopher Dodd.

The coming months pose a major test. GOP control of the Senate is at stake in November; beyond that, Mr. Dole must begin to define the presidential candidacy he will offer. He must balance competing ambitions as a Senate leader and White House aspirant. He must articulate his vision for the country and speak not only from the heartland but to the heart. "You have to show enough of yourself that the people can identify with it," says GOP consultant John Sears.

Slashing Wit
After a quarter century in Congress, this sorting-out process is both political and deeply personal for the 63-year-old Mr. Dole, exposing conflicts in himself. A complex man, he is foremost a survivor. His slashing wit, which hurt him in the 1976 campaign, is more tempered these days, but his humor is self-deprecating only when he is in fact in control. "I didn't become majority leader to lose," he said in a recent, biting exchange on the Senate floor.

Under this hardness, though, are a vulnerability and compassion. Crippled by war, Mr. Dole can quote Job without embarrassment. He rages at the treatment of the handicapped. He reminds the GOP, as he did at the 1984 convention, that it is also the party of Lincoln. "His ambitions help people more than hurt them," says House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dan Rostenkowski, an Illinois Democrat.

Mr. Dole's political challenge is all the more daring because of the way he has chosen to confront it. Other potential candidates — such as former GOP leader Howard Baker and Democratic Sen. Gary Hart — retire from the daily fray to give themselves more time and distance to establish their identities. Mr. Bush and Rep. Kemp have greater claim to the Reagan organization and legacy. The fundamentalist Pat Robertson commands his own base among evangelicals on the right.

Relishing the Limelight
Mr. Dole enjoys none of these advantages and has plunged instead into a forefront on often divisive issues. After opposing television in the Senate, he now relishes the limelight and the role of what Colorado GOP Sen. William Armstrong calls "the guy who gets things done — one of those people who can stand up and take the gaff."

But as he pulls the levers of government, Mr. Dole leaves questions about where he stands. As majority leader, he is the president's man; as a candidate, he must also be his own. "He's opting now to be a loyalist," says Kevin Phillips, a GOP political strategist, but "people are looking for something new. Bob Dole has the talent and vision to be that something new; he can't be that as a loyalist."

"I don't think he takes risks with issues as he does with politics," says Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, Mr. Dole's fellow Kansas Republican. He has pointedly left other Republicans take the lead on South Africa policy. His 1982 tax bill tapped some of the same "reform" movement behind the current tax-overhaul drive, but his focus was on meeting the immediate need for new revenue. That same year, his endorsement of the Voting Rights Act was crucial to the civil-rights movement, yet he chose the role of problem solver, not crusader. "If you can't implement ideas," says Mr. Dole, "it doesn't do any good to have them."

What he has in power and a consummately political role. As GOP leader and a presidential candidate, he is more reluctant to challenge Mr. Reagan on taxes, as seen in his weak support for the budget this year. On major foreign-policy issues — the Saudi arms sale and military aid to Nicaragua — Mr. Dole has protected the administration's interests while also serving his own.

There is always a calculated balance. Mr. Dole helps farmers sell subsidized wheat to the Soviet Union. He wins points with conservative hard-liners by pushing for more sophisticated weapons for guerrillas opposing Soviet-backed governments. He leaps ahead of the president in attacking SALT II. He takes pride — and praise from Jewish organizations — in ratification of the Genocide Treaty.

With the exception of tax overhaul, the domestic record has been less successful. Mr. Dole and the GOP seized the initiative on deficit reduction last year, but their own bold budget was doomed by rising farm costs and a shortfall in revenue. The Gramm-Rudman deficit reduction law was born of that frustration, but a line item

veto initiative and a balanced-budget constitutional amendment — two ideas embraced by Mr. Dole — remain blocked by his own Senate.

A Virtual Conglomerate
The loss of the Senate would mean the loss of his forum. So Mr. Dole has transformed himself into a virtual conglomerate of campaign-finance organizations to leverage contributions to Republicans. If the GOP prevails, he is determined to keep his leadership job at least into next year, but he faces qualms about his role among Republicans and an increasingly aggressive Democratic opposition.

Even Lyndon Johnson — who had larger majorities in a less fractious institution — found it difficult to run for president in 1960, the year that Mr. Dole first won election to Congress.

The Kansan's frequent pitchfork style suits Republican needs in the chamber but doesn't help a candidate trying to soften his image. Relations remain strained with Minority Leader Robert Byrd, and Mr. Dole has seemed elusive and distant from House Speaker Thomas O'Neill, who cooperated with Mr. Baker. "His presidential ambitions put him in a position not to come to me in compromise," says Mr. O'Neill. The fight this summer over the confirmation of federal Judge Daniel Manion illustrates the conflicts. Mr. Dole scored a win for the president and conservatives, but the first roll call was decided under confusing circumstances that led Sen. Bob Packwood, the Oregon Republican, to complain that he was misrepresented by the leadership. "Manion won," said a conservative Democrat later, "but Dole lost."

Mr. Dole has the capacity to represent a "forgotten America" of the poor and the handicapped, admirers say. At a time when the party hopes to expand its political base, GOP consultant Tully Plesser sees in Mr. Dole the "humanistic social conscience" that critics find missing too often in Republican priorities. But by courting the right in his quest for the nomination, he risks alienating moderates.

Backing the Pentagon
A recent issue illustrates his dilemma. Last month, the senator admits, he wanted to support a liberal amendment applying \$82 million in unexpended military funds to nutrition programs for the elderly. When the roll call proved so narrow that his vote might have tipped the margin against the Pentagon, he voted no.

Leadership pressures account in part for such choices, but Mr. Dole is in fact far more closely linked to conservatives than his moderate image suggests. He won his leadership post with crucial support from such GOP conservatives as Utah's Orrin

Hatch and North Carolina's Jesse Helms. The Helms relationship could help in the South, where Mr. Dole's war record and farm expertise give him entrée — as does his Southern wife, Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole.

Without a single base or legacy to draw from, Mr. Dole must reach into himself to find the message and vision he needs to compete in the presidential arena. His own life, from the brick-paved Main Street of Russell to the stone-tiled corridors of the Capitol, is a story of hardships and personal triumph, and it offers a metaphor for the themes of self-reliance and compassion that he wants to project.

"A guy who can be tough, a guy who can be seen as compassionate," says David Keene, a senior political adviser. The self-made man with a conscience, says Richard Smith, a speech writer and historian.

An Underlying Fatalism
In the wheat and oil fields of western Kansas, Russell is a reflection of Mr. Dole's personality. The green fields offer promise, but there is a fatalism underneath, heard in the humor of farmers at the local cattle yard. On the horizon stands the Cathedral of the Plains, a legacy of early German settlers and the populism of western Kansas.

Russell welcomed Mr. Dole home after the war, but he recalls, too, the mean poverty of his early years. His grandparents were on welfare, and his own family lived for years in the basement of a single-story home so that his parents could rent out the first floor.

It was in this town that he delivered an emotional speech after the Kansas City convention in 1976. It is here that he brings a film crew to record his high-school appearance for future television ads. After his speech, he takes a reporter back to the privacy of the family home. The machine he used to record law-school lectures — when he was still recovering from his wound — sits in the corner where his late mother kept it. On the wall is an early photo of her, one of eight strikingly beautiful sisters.

"I think I've been tested," Mr. Dole says. "I have a vision. It's trying to keep things together, trying to make the government more responsive, more sensitive to the needs of a lot of people who haven't had the opportunity. It's strong sensible leadership, prudent... and what you see is what you get."