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The Contradictions Of Bob Dole

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Robert Dole on the campaign trail in San Antonio. "I may not be totally predictable. I'm not certain that's all bad."

By Martin Tolchin and Jeff Gerth

BOB DOLE WAS adamant. The budget deficit, he had said since the beginning of the Reagan Presidency, was "the nation's No. 1 priority." Now, standing on the floor of the United States Senate, the tall, crisply tailored Kansan was elaborating on that theme. Health programs, he said, were "just another instance of how Congress puts spending on automatic pilot."

But later, in the privacy of a House-Senate conference, he took quite a different tack. In a whispered conversation in an ornate room in the Longworth House Office Building, Senator Dole advised Representative Henry Waxman, the liberal Democratic chairman of a key House subcommittee, to ignore his pronouncements on austerity and press for expansion of Medicaid's prenatal-care program. The proposal became law — with Bob Dole's silent support.

It was a virtuoso performance that left few traces, a tactic at which the 64-year-old Mr. Dole excels. He is a nocturnal legislator, introducing bills without hearings or debate on behalf of interests public and private. He is a master of compromise, a necessary talent for a Senate leader. But there remains a question that

has troubled political observers for years and may be a central issue in Mr. Dole's campaign for the 1988 Republican nomination for President, which he is scheduled to announce formally tomorrow: What does Bob Dole stand for?

Bob waits to see which way the wind is blowing, says Nancy Landon Kassebaum, the junior Republican Senator from Kansas. "There's always a question: Does he have a vision? You won't see him creating an agenda."

In a year in which the character of potential Presidents has become a dominant issue, Bob Dole is a man of self-contained contrasts and conflicts. He has a meanness of spirit but a capacity for compassion. He is a strident Republican partisan who woos Democrats and independent voters. He is an expert at building political coalitions, yet is a loner with few close friends.

An examination of Senator Dole's life and record reveals a host of contradictions. Acknowledged by his peers as a consummate governmental insider, Mr. Dole is basing his 1988 candidacy on the affirmation that he will be the "hands-on President" that "most Americans are looking for." Yet he professes a lack of involvement in a series of bitter, controversial campaign episodes dating from the start of his political career.

Although he is campaigning for President as a fiscal conservative and calling the budget deficit "the single biggest black cloud over this country," Mr. Dole was the architect of the 1985 agricultural bill that accounted for 12 percent of last year's total budget deficit.

The Senator has also decried the influence of "the special interests" in politics. "A guy walking out on the scaffolding should have the same rights as some big-city banker," he says. But he has promoted legislation that benefited key fund-raisers and friends. More significantly, the Doles received preferential treatment in the acquisition of Florida property from Dwayne O. Andreas, the chairman of a large agribusiness company that has been a major beneficiary of the Senator's legislative efforts.

Sitting in his office just off the Senate floor, portraits of previous Republican leaders on the walls and a stunning view of the Washington Monument outside his window, Mr. Dole shrugs off the apparent contradictions. "I may not be totally predictable," he says in the flat nasal tones of his native Kansas. "I'm not certain that's all bad."

Martin Tolchin and Jeff Gerth are reporters in the Washington bureau of The New York Times.

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Top: Dole, left, engaged in a lively debate this summer with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega Saavedra when he led a Congressional delegation to Managua.

Center: The Kansas Senator, left, joined fellow Republican Presidential candidates

Pete du Pont, seated, and Alexander Haig Jr. at a clam bake last month in Dover, N.H.

Bottom: Dole, who won two Bronze Stars and lost the use of his right arm during World War II, visits an American Legion station in San Antonio.

The unpredictability is part of a driving ambition that now sees him in his third campaign for national office. That ambition — the strongest constant in Bob Dole's life — was forged during a difficult, Depression-era childhood on the Middle Western plains and by a World War II injury that kept him hospitalized for three years and left him permanently without the use of his right arm. Although most observers agree that he has mellowed considerably since his 1975 marriage to Elizabeth Hanford, who recently resigned as Secretary of Transportation in the Reagan cabinet to campaign for her husband, that injury has left him with an enduring edge of bitterness.

The White House would be the culmination of a quest for power that contrasts with the powerlessness of his poverty-ridden early years and the helplessness that followed the war wound. "Whether you really made a difference, whether you really did anything while you were here," says Mr. Dole, explaining his drive with the half-sentences and second-person references that mark his style. All Bob Dole wants, he adds, is to be "a success story."

RUSSELL, Kan., could be the setting for a Sinclair Lewis novel. Union Pacific railroad tracks divide the town and a grain elevator dominates the skyline. Main Street, six blocks long, boasts a roller rink, movie theater, several shops and two drugstores. The only hint of the town's claim to national prominence is a billboard at the intersection of Routes 70 and 281 that proclaims: "Welcome to Bob Dole Country."

It was in this tiny farming, cattle and oil community, 285 miles west of Kansas City, that Robert Joseph Dole was born on July 22, 1923 to Doran and Bina Dole. They were stern parents. From his mother, "Bobby Joe" Dole recalls receiving a weekly spanking. "No good reason — just must be Saturday," he says. And his father, who ran a cream station where farmers sold their dairy products and purchased bootleg liquor, "never asked you to do something,

twice," says Kenneth Dole, 63, the Senator's younger brother, who still lives in Russell.

During the Depression, the Doles were engaged in a constant struggle against foreclosure. Kenneth was afflicted with osteomyelitis, a crippling bone infection that strained the family budget. The brothers shared a twin bed; their two sisters — Gloria, now 65, and Norma Jean, 62 — slept in another twin bed in the same room. One year, to pay the bills, the family rented out the first floor of their house and moved into the basement.

In high school, Bob Dole earned membership in the National Honor Society and was captain of the basketball team, played end on the football team and almost broke the track team's indoor record for the quarter mile. His daily regimen began at 5:30 A.M. — when he performed household chores, ran, did pushups, lifted weights and, for \$2 a week, delivered the Salina Journal — and ended at 11 P.M., when Dawson's drugstore, where he was a soda jerk, closed shop.

With a personal loan of \$300 from a local banker (who told him to wear a hat because "anybody without a hat is not moving up in the world"), Mr. Dole went to the University of Kansas

to study to become a doctor. In 1943, he left school and enlisted in the Army.

Two years later, the newly commissioned second lieutenant was assigned to the 85th regiment of the 10th Mountain Division, an elite corps of skiers and mountain climbers that only recently had arrived in Italy. "Typical army," the Senator recalls. "I was not a skier. I am not a mountain climber. I came from the plains of Kansas and wound up in the mountain division."

At 10 A.M. on April 14, 1945, his regiment tried to take Hill 913 in the Apennine Mountains, 40 miles south of Bologna. Under a hail of flaming metal, Bob Dole was struck — whether by rifle, machine gun, mortar or artillery fire, no one knew. It was three weeks before the end of the war in Europe.

"My radio guy's name was Symms and he had been hit," Mr. Dole says. "I was trying to get him back into this little ravine, and once I was backed in there, I must have raised up, and I felt this sting... I remember somebody came by and put my arms across my chest, which was a relief because I didn't know where they were."

Bob Dole was awarded two Bronze

Stars for his heroism in storming the mountain. "I don't know if I was ever brave," he says. "You know, there are some people who do things like fall on a grenade or stand in front of something to protect somebody. I didn't have that kind of experience. And that's bravery to me."

AT 21, THE body he had nurtured with predawn exercise was in tatters. He was shipped from hospital to hospital; along the way, doctors removed an infected kidney. And he began the long, slow process of rehabilitation. His right hand was useless; he learned to write and to button his shirts with his left hand, which itself was virtually devoid of feeling.

Mr. Dole resented his enforced dependence, and it was at this time that his temperament as a self-reliant loner began to (Continued on Page 82)

time. It's a wonder anything comes out with any coherence."

He has doubts about the role of the President's Council of Economic Advisers. "There are arguments made that they have all sorts of influence inside on a variety of things," he says. "I doubt that it had much influence on macro policy. But I think the council performs a useful if not indispensable role in inventing a lot of things for economic common sense."

"As a guy who used to be — well, a guy who was brought up in the Treasury and the Federal Reserve, I don't think it is the most vital institution. Government could function without it. You always get these fights about who is the chief economic spokesman in an Administration, and I just institutionally lean toward the Secretary of the Treasury."

As Under Secretary of the Treasury for Monetary Affairs in the Nixon Administration, Volcker flew around the world, negotiating the dollar off the gold standard without causing an upheaval. In 1979, when President Carter asked him to head the Federal Reserve Board, Volcker was president of New York's Federal Reserve Bank. He accepted the Washington appointment (and a 50 percent pay cut), and was reappointed by Pres-

ident Reagan in 1983. At the Fed, he was leakproof, believing that this was crucial to avoid upsetting markets or providing fat targets for speculators. He regularly decried sinful behavior in the marketplace in the best tradition of central bankers.

A month or so after leaving the Fed, Volcker still seems unaccustomed to being out of the hot seat. He is generally regarded as self-assured to the point of arrogance, and his insistence on his insecurity therefore comes as a total surprise. In his first interview, he said that, unlike former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, he did not intend to start his own advisory firm, "just because of my personal insecurity."

"In the first place," he said, "you have to hire people that you don't feel like hiring, and I'd have to turn down the people who would want to join me, and I don't particularly want to go through all that. And with my insecurity — I suppose when one hasn't been in business before it's unavoidable — I'd want to chase clients, not in any obnoxious way, but I would want to cultivate every potential client I saw."

"Why would I want to spend all my life cultivating clients? Because I'd be worried I didn't have enough of them down the road. So I'd think, 'Maybe I'll spend another day with this guy' and another day with that guy."

The first formal assignment he accepted after leaving the Fed was as an adviser to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development — the World Bank — offered by its president, Barber B. Conable, the former upstate New York Congressman.

"I've been in a mixed mood about that, if you want to know," Volcker said. "I obviously am willing to talk

with Barber Conable or any of his people, but I told him he didn't have to pay for that. He said he wanted a little more formalized relationship. It shouldn't imply that I am willing to spend any large proportion of my time doing that. The duration is up in the air, and that depends partly on what I do."

Volcker's reluctance to make too much of a commitment to the World Bank stems from his unwillingness to have his independence compromised. The same considerations affect his thinking about working for private financial institutions.

"I will almost certainly not — cross my heart and hope to die — I probably will not go to a big investment house, or something like that, to make the most money, because I don't know how they want to do it, I don't know what to do with them, and it's constraining, and people would ask questions about your motives."

"If somebody walked in tomorrow and said, look, they've got a nice job in a particularly challenging industry or something, and it's got some appeal to it — you're going to be the executive and we want you to do it — I'm not saying I wouldn't do that, but the odds of somebody coming in and doing that are about one in 10,000." In the post-Black Monday interview, asked point blank if he was returning to Washington as Treasury Secretary, he said in a bull voice: "Noooooo!"

He fusses a good deal these days about the need for money. At a Salomon Brothers party for international bankers in late September, Volcker said he was probably the only one there who could say he was making less money now than when he was in government.

His long years in government have left him with extremely modest savings. But while he insists that one of his reasons for leaving the Fed was his desire to enhance his financial situation, misgivings about making money in ways he fears might conflict with the public interest clearly trouble him. "My wife will say this — and I think she's probably right — 'Why should you turn down a million dollars because somebody says that isn't a classy thing to do? It doesn't sound illegal to me.'"

In the meantime, he is asked, should people stay in or stay out of the stock market?

"I ain't going to give you an answer to that question, for obvious reasons," he says. "First of all, I don't think substantively I can give you an intelligent answer. And if I gave you a clear answer, it would almost by definition be unintelligent, because I don't think it's that clear."

But, he says, "I do think that we have a peculiar mixture of unparalleled opportunity and significant risk at the same time. We've come off this inflation thing, had a big recession, big difficulties, but with the economy in a position — even now it's been expanding for almost five years. There is no inherent reason why it couldn't go beyond." ■

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