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Dole on a Roll

With help from Pat Robertson, he turns the G.O.P. race upside down



The day after the Iowa caucuses, an earthquake shook New Hampshire. It was a small tremor, just enough to give folks a jolt. On the same day, Senator Bob Dole of Kansas swept into the Granite State for a final round of campaigning before this week's primary. The often tightly coiled politician seemed a changed man: jaunty, self-possessed, rejuvenated. After winning the Iowa contest with 38% of the Republican vote, he suddenly had the aura of a champion. "We're winning!" he exulted as he greeted a supporter in Nashua. His rhetoric was sharp-

er, his jokes funnier, his rapport with voters seemed warmer. For Dole and his chief opponents in the Republican presidential race, the Iowa results promised to have earth-shaking ramifications. As he barnstormed through the snow, Dole was clearly on a roll. When he posed for a photographer on a street corner near Exeter, a passing driver honked his horn and yelled, "Give 'em hell, Bob!" Dole marveled at his reception. "People are wishing me luck now," he gloated to his staffers. "He's grown as a candidate in just the last four days," said his pollster Richard Wirthlin late in the week.



"He's grown as a candidate," the Senator's pollster says. "He's more confident"

primary season opened this week. With no incumbent to rally around, each party had hoped for an early consensus behind a strong candidate. Instead, the muddled Democratic results and the turmoil in the G.O.P. increase the chances of protracted warfare right through the spring. As expected, the chorus of lesser G.O.P. candidates began making their exits. Alexander Haig (0% in Iowa, last place) quit the race last Friday with a parting shot at Bush—and, indirectly, at the Reagan inner circle that had ousted him as Secretary of State. "From my point of view," said Haig, "Bob Dole is head and shoulders above George Bush as a potential President." Pete du Pont (7%, fifth place) will soon be heading back to Delaware's chateau country. Jack Kemp (11%, fourth place) had counted on outflanking Bush and Dole on the right as the true-blue conservative candidate. But Robertson's message of moral regeneration proved more appealing than Kemp's pep talks on economics, and the Buffalo Congressman could only hope that a strong finish in New Hampshire would keep him in the game.

Struggling to keep his candidacy viable, Bush badly needed a win in New Hampshire. Two weeks ago polls showed him leading Dole by 20 points in the state. Late last week most surveys found the race too close to call. Dole was poised to upset a rival whose nomination had been portrayed as inevitable. In Iowa, Dole capitalized on dissatisfaction with the Reagan Administration. But in New Hampshire, where the President remains popular, Dole struck a more conservative note, reiterating his support for the Nicaragua *contra*s and, most notably, the Strategic Defense Initiative. "I will develop SDI. I will test SDI. I will deploy SDI," he thundered to the state legislature. A Dole aide boasted, "Ronald Reagan couldn't find any room to the right of that speech." Dole sounded even more like Reagan at a G.O.P. forum in Nashua. "As President of the U.S.," he vowed, "I pledge to veto any attempt to increase new taxes."

Yet even in the midst of his roll, Dole could not completely check the crusty streak that has proved his undoing in the past. His testiness surfaced when liberal students at the University of New Hampshire grilled him about South Africa. "Aren't there any conservative students here?" Dole bantered at first. Then he lost patience. Why, one questioner persisted, was Dole unwilling to support "realistic sanctions?" Dole shot back: "Name those realistic sanctions." When the student faltered, Dole bore in on him. "Name 'em," he growled. "Give me a list of them." The student replied, "I'm sorry, I can't." His point made, Dole drawled, "Oh, O.K. Go ahead."

His weak support in Iowa did not stem from lack of hard work, or even from his involvement in the Iran-*contra* scandal. The essential problem with the Bush campaign was the man himself. His "message" builds on his loyalty to Ronald Reagan, but his rhetoric evokes images of following rather than leading. His stump speech—delivered in disjointed sentence fragments and punctuated by jittery mannerisms—does little to command respect or confidence. When Dole preaches about reducing the deficit, compassion for the poor and "hands-on leadership," he sounds convincing, even urgent. Bush tells his audiences, "I want to be the education President," leaving them sitting on their hands. Try as he might, Bush has not attained the stature that a successful candidate needs.

At midweek the Bush camp brought in former Reagan Wordsmith Peggy Noonan to rewrite his stump speech. The result was a tight, effective assault on the recent lack of congressional leadership. Bush's biggest weapon against Dole, the Vice President scaled back his intimidating Secret Service entourage and lured shopping malls to engage in the "retail politics" required in New Hampshire. Before an audience of retirees in Portsmouth, he pleaded for understanding: "I don't always articulate well, but I always do feel. Nobody believes more strongly. I seemed to work."



Bush no longer the "inevitable" nominee

Nation

states as Michigan and Minnesota. Robertson has built up similarly efficient organizations full of fervent campaigners. To some Republicans, the Dole-Bush-Robertson conflict taking shape is a sign of fragmentation and discord in the G.O.P. "All the cultural contradictions of the party are coming home to roost," says John Buckley, a senior Kemp aide. "We are paying for the coalition we put together in 1980. Unlike Reagan in that year, no Republican in 1988 seems capable of winning the support of both moderate conservatives and right-wing evangelicals. Moreover, Robertson voters seem unlikely to throw their weight to a more electable, coalition candidate. They hold their views with a ferocity that makes compromise impossible," says John Deardourff, a longtime G.O.P. consultant. "There is no middle ground for them."

The Presidency

Watching from the Warmth

Ronald Reagan was in a strange little drama up in New Hampshire last week that the wags in the White House named *The Body Snatchers*. Reagan played the body. Bob Dole on camera waved his letter of presidential thanks for help in the Senate approval of *contra* aid, one of 51 sent to supporters. George Bush played trump and rushed back to Washington, huddled officially in the Oval Office on secret matters with the President, stayed around for his weekly lunch and then made sure a photo of the two deep into beef-pepper-pot soup was pumped out to the press. Reagan kind of liked it. There are a couple of things that have got under his skin during these past few weeks. One is Dole. The other is Iowa. Dole beats up on Reagan when it helps him, then cozies up when the crowd turns out to be pro-Gipper, as in New Hampshire. In Iowa they have been sore at Reagan for eight years, even though he helped jolly them through the Great Depression as Dutch Reagan, ace sportscaster. In the 1980 caucuses, Iowa voted Reagan down, but when he nevertheless went on to win the presidency, he sportingly lifted Jimmy Carter's grain embargo for the farmers. Now Iowa has bashed Reagan's own Vice President. No wonder he's a bit annoyed. Reagan is sworn to neutrality—so he said nothing publicly—but he is not sworn to be oblivious. He is intensely interested. He and Nancy watched the Iowa returns into the night. But nary a leak trickled down. Earlier, when Bush called in from the frozen Iowa precincts to talk about whether or not he should come back for the *contra* vote, the President listened and never tilted either way. Bush decided on his own to return. The President did not even tell Chief of Staff Howard Baker what he and Bush said at the post-Iowa lunch. "Don't you suppose," ventured one White House staffer, he said, "George, when you see a microphone, grab it and tell 'em you bought and paid for it." Surely Reagan passed on his generally warm feelings about those mislabeled Yanks. Whoever Reagan's advice was, Bush seemed more at ease when he returned to the campaign. He sported baseball caps, drove an 18-wheel truck, even manned a forklift. "I'm comfortable in this state," he told New Hampshire voters. It was a sentiment that seemed to come from the heart. A little melancholia has been showing in the White House for some time. When Redskins Supermodel Dexter Manley came around with the Super Bowl champs for the South Lawn ordination and declared, "We're going to renegotiate the President's contract for four more years," Reagan's eyes lit up like a pinball machine. Over in the Old Executive Office Building, a high school delegate in the Senate Youth Program asked him about the two-term limit, and Reagan, with a wistful tone in his voice, made an eloquent appeal to dump the 22nd Amendment and let the American people decide how long a President should serve. He went to Duke University to talk about drugs, and his handlers thought he had forgotten his mission when he grabbed the limousine microphone and began working the crowd like old time. Why not? This is the first year in 23 that he is not on the political line. His aides love watching the first battles from the sidelines. "The next best thing to a snowstorm," said Speechwriter Tony Dolan, "Fate is in the hands of the American people, a force of nature. There is absolutely nothing we can do about it."

Tommy Griscorn, Reagan's communications director, and Baker, who was once a candidate himself, were watching Bush on TV shivering down the glacial campaign trail. Griscorn ribbed Baker: "Just think, if you were a candidate you'd be there." Baker smiled and looked lovingly at the burning logs in his White House fireplace.

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Opinion

'Mean-spirited' Dole upsets the think-tank twits

By Mike Royko
TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES

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If the election were held today, and the entire herd of candidates were running, I'd probably vote for Robert Dole. I like the way he upsets the twits.

The twits are the many political commentators, analysts, pundits and think-tank professors who have been wringing their hands and saying: "Oh, my goodness gracious, Dole has said something nasty... Eek, Dole is showing his mean side... Heavens to Betsy, Dole is using sharp one-liners again..."

All of this stems from one short sentence Dole said to George Bush when they were on TV together after the New Hampshire primary ended.

Dole said: "Stop lying about my record." I watched when Dole said that and I thought it was a reasonable request on his part, since Bush had been running commercials that lied about Dole's record.

So, if Bush and his hired ad-makers lied about Dole, why shouldn't Dole use plain, blunt language and tell them to stop the lies?

As the lead paragraph in a Reuters news service story put it: "Robert Dole, one of Washington's quickest wits, flashed his blunter, mean streak at George Bush this week and political experts say it could be a sign of rocky times in his Republican presidential bid."

That's not the way I would have written it. I would have said:

"Robert Dole told George Bush to stop lying about his record, and Bush just sat there with a foolish smile frozen on his face."

Which is exactly what happened.

The Reuters story went on to quote a twit from the Brookings Institution, a think tank, who said: "It's Bob Dole showing the mean-



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spiritedness he's been accused of. It's very counterproductive, very unattractive."

That's the way they think in think tanks. It must be the water. But let's imagine, for a moment, that I went around Washington telling everybody this guy from the Brookings Institution likes to secretly wear ladies' pink undies.

What would his reaction be? He'd surely say I was lying about his choice of undies and would demand that I stop.

Would that be a mean-spirited reaction, counterproductive and very unattractive? Of course not. His response would be justified, just as Dole's was. Assuming that he doesn't wear ladies' pink undies.

The story also quoted other analysts as saying: "Voters tend to dislike public nastiness in their politicians, preferring those with a sunny demeanor and a quick smile."

Not this voter. I've had enough of sunny demeanors and quick smiles. Any candidate with a sunny demeanor makes me suspect he doesn't know what's going on. Two superpowers poised to blow each other up, and a horde of Third World nations hoping we do, so they can come in and pick over our microwave and snowblowers. The Japanese and Arabs trying to buy up all 50 states and make us pay rent. Our stock market turning into a yo-yo.

What's there to smile about? Anybody with

a sunny demeanor and quick smile ought to be confined for treatment.

We already have too many smilers and sunny demeanors running for president. Pat Robertson is not only a smiler, but he's a giggler. I refuse to believe that God wants a giggler to lead this nation. Have you ever seen a statue that shows Jesus giggling? Did God have a cheerful demeanor when — zap! — He turned a lady to salt, or when He sent down a flood and stuck Noah on a boat to sweep up after a bunch of smelly animals?

If Richard Gephardt's smile gets any bigger, we'll be able to see his vital organs. Bush always smiles like he's hoping to get a better grade from a teacher. At least Gary Hart has finally stopped smiling, except when he thinks of those good old days.

That's why I kind of like Paul Simon. He smiles, but it always looks like it hurts.

The twits are also concerned because Dole has a quick wit and occasionally throws out the ideal candidate is someone who is slow-witted or has no wit at all? Or possibly they would prefer a real yuckster who puts whoopee cushions on chairs.

To show the strange way the twits think, they consider it mean-spirited for Dole to say Bush was lying. But they didn't think it was mean-spirited for Bush to lie. In other words, it's OK to lie if you smile and are polite and gracious while lying. But it's bad form to score at a liar. I'm glad the twits didn't go into police work. We'd have "For Rent" signs on all the prisons.

So I hope Dole ignores the twits and does it his way. If we do it the twits' way, we might wind up with someone like Pee Wee Herman in the White House.

Again.

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