

351. 1988

Dole's errors crippled quest for nomination

By The New York Times

Sen. Bob Dole, once the hero of the political circuit and even described as the inevitable Republican Party nominee for president, is spoken of now in almost contemptuous terms, especially as he vows to continue his quest against seemingly impossible odds.

His campaign, it is said, was marked by blunders, internal rivalries, and the unpredictable personality of a candidate who switched signals and traveling plans with abandon.

Dole, the argument goes, failed to appoint a single, dominant campaign manager and allowed his organization to go on a 1987 spending binge that left the cupboard bare when it came time for television commercials on Super Tuesday.

Vice President George Bush's success in transforming himself from a loser to an almost certain winner in just 29 days is one of the remarkable stories of recent American political history.

It is a triumph deeply rooted in recent Republican history. It is also the lucky consequence of facing off against a foe, Dole, who at crucial moments seemed to do everything wrong.

A Bush victory is now spoken of as the inevitable product of a long-term battle plan that worked out exactly as it was supposed to.

What follows is an account, based on interviews with top officials and former officials of both campaigns and Republican political professionals, of the rise of Bush and the fall of Dole.

Bush had better staff

Bush won in large part because he had a better staff, a keener sense of organization and a more prescient long-term plan.

In politics, one brilliant last-minute decision can make up for months of bad ones and a key strategic miss can leave even the best organization in chaos.

Thus in the praise that Bush's campaign manager, Lee Atwater, receives now, what is not mentioned is that Bush, according to several aides, was prepared to fire or demote him if Dole won the New Hampshire primary.

Dole, in the meantime, had many opportunities in the past month to turn the race around.

Dole decisions faulted

In New Hampshire, many of Dole's allies believe he could have won if he had stayed on the attack against Bush. Even after his New Hampshire defeat, they say, Dole could have contained Bush's Super Tuesday sweep by concentrating resources in states he could have won: Missouri, North Carolina and Oklahoma.

And neither campaign was fully prepared for the unusual role Pat Robertson, the former television evangelist, played in the contest. At first, he wounded Bush, in caucuses in Michigan and Iowa.

But ultimately his candidacy helped Bush by splitting the conservative vote and dooming the candidacy of Rep. Jack F. Kemp of New York.

Today, with Dole's candidacy mortally wounded, opponents of Bush have nowhere to turn.

Four-year head start

The first key step came just before Christmas in 1984. The vice president called Atwater, a political consultant who had worked on Ronald Reagan's campaigns, to his White House office and made two things clear: He told him that he had all but decided to run for president and that Atwater would manage his campaign.

Two key Atwater theories governed the Bush effort. The first held that conservatives had become the "nominating wing" of the Republican Party. The other highlighted the importance of the South.

One of the Bush campaign's first decisions was that it had to neutralize the Republican right. In 1986 and 1987, Bush veered right, knowing he would have time to move back to the political center for the election year.

In contrast to Bush, Dole took until November of last year to appoint Bill Brock as a national chairman to whom he was willing to delegate authority. By then, internal bickering had set in.

Dole spent money fast

Bush's campaign had better control over money than the Dole campaign did.

Although the Bush campaign began operating nearly a year ahead of the Dole campaign, Dole's campaign quickly depleted its resources: By the end of 1987, the Bush campaign had spent \$7.9 million against an overall ceiling of \$27.6 million. The Dole campaign had already spent \$9.5 million by this time.

Typical of the different spending patterns of the two campaigns were early expenditures by Dole in contests held late — money now essentially wasted. As of Jan. 31, for example, Dole had spent \$119,733 in California, which won't vote until June; Bush had spent just \$1,328 there.

Too far from Reagan

For all the talk of organization, however, Dole may have been crippled by a judgment he made early on — an error that seemed to many as a brilliant stroke at the time.

All during the Iran-contra controversy and on other issues, Dole maintained a careful distance from Reagan. This made Dole popular among Democrats. But it made it easier this year for Bush to run as the true believer in Reagan, and to do so where it counted: In Republican primaries.

If Dole in early 1987 made the mistake of underestimating George Bush, he was certainly not alone. Periodically, Martin Pflieger, the political editor of CBS News, and Susan Morrison, a television producer and former political aide, organize gatherings of the politically connected at their home in Washington and poll them.

On Feb. 8, 1987, a year before the Iowa caucuses, the result was: Dole 35, Bush 33, Kemp, 10. This was when Dole should have been organizing.

By Nov. 1, 1987, the results of Dole's organizing failures were in. A new poll showed: Bush 62, Dole 26, Kemp 8.

Conventional wisdom said a sitting vice president could not be beaten. But January 1988 was a hellish month for Bush. Reporters asked uncomfortable questions raised by the Iran-contra affair. And Bush was standing on the unstable ground of Iowa, one of the worst states in the union for a Reagan partisan.

Dole's campaign fell apart as Bush gathered steam

Bad loss boosted Bush

In the end Bush may have been saved because he performed so miserably in Iowa that he came in third behind Robertson. On Feb. 8, this hardly seemed like a blessing, since stories circulated about Bush's impending political demise.

But such stories set Dole up for his fall. And Robertson proved so interesting a phenomenon that he stepped on Dole's headlines.

Dole stormed into New Hampshire. From the Tuesday after the Iowa primary through Thursday, Bush's support melted away. On Friday, former Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. endorsed Dole to much televised fanfare.

Seen from the perspective of both campaigns, this was the critical moment.

Watching the decay of the vice president's support, Roger Ailes, his media adviser, and Atwater knew that a television commercial attacking Dole was essential. He got the idea to attack Dole as a "straddler" on tax increases from a Dole commercial that used the same word about Bush.

The Bush campaign also decided to counter the Haig endorsement with the dean of American conservatism, Barry M. Goldwater, who flew to New Hampshire on Monday. What was not told is that the Goldwater endorsement almost did not come off. Goldwater vacillated.

The Dole campaign's problem was a belief that Dole had New Hampshire wrapped up.

Among the many post-New Hampshire feuds that developed in the Dole camp, one is a debate over exactly why Dole became more gentle on Bush, why he did not respond more quickly to the tax "straddler" commercial.

The Dole campaign did try to respond, but the effort was foiled by a series of technical foul-ups, including Dole's failure to get the lines right.

Dole's work falls apart

Dole lost New Hampshire, and things fell apart.

Dole did at least three things wrong after New Hampshire. On Feb. 16, the night of his loss, he snapped at Tom Brokaw, the television anchor, during a live NBC News broadcast, that Bush should "stop lying about my record." All his work to erase a notion that Dole was "mean" was undone.

Second, his campaign assumed Dole's expected victories in South Dakota and Minnesota would receive substantial news coverage and give him new life. But the news media, perhaps because of political overload and a focus on the approaching Super Tuesday primaries, did not emphasize the Dole wins.

The final failure, in the eyes of aides in both campaigns, was the Dole camp's unwillingness to concentrate most of its resources on the few states he lost only narrowly on Super Tuesday. The Bush camp targeted just those states — notably Missouri and North Carolina — in its successful effort to sweep all 16 primaries.

"We got outspent two and a half to one in Missouri, which is an outrage," said David Keene, a former Dole aide. "We spent money in places we had no prospects of winning. It was a nonsensical strategy."

Given all the ill feeling already built up inside the tottering Dole organization, it should not have been surprising that the week of campaigning for the Illinois primary was dominated by leaks from Dole's staff that he was on the verge of leaving the race. Dole insisted he wasn't, but the leaks guaranteed that his campaign in Illinois would have a deathly pallor.

Dole never managed the art of running for president. He never assembled, as Bush did, a group of aides whom he genuinely trusted. He never developed an vision to offer Republican voters.

On the afternoon of Feb. 20, Dole sat down in a hotel room in Sioux Falls, S.D., with aides. It was four days after his defeat in New Hampshire and less than two weeks before Super Tuesday.

Still shaken from his New Hampshire loss, and having traveled, almost aimlessly, for days, Dole looked at his staff and asked: "What's the strategy?"

He answered his own question in a quiet voice: "We don't have one."

The Undoing of Bob Dole

Blaming everyone but himself for his blunders

At a campaign stop in Chicago two days after Bob Dole's massive defeat on Super Tuesday, senior campaign aide Mari Messing reassured staffers that there was no doubt in her mind. Dole would stay in the race. Yet in another room just a few feet away, longtime Dole adviser Kim Wells was on the phone telling a fellow strategist exactly the opposite. "I think we're only hours away from a decision to pull out," he declared.

Bob Dole's campaign seemed to be ending the way it began: in chaos. The confusion between Messing and Wells, who are confidants, was typical. Remote and aloof as ever, Dole had listened impassively or made cryptic remarks while advisers debated whether he should fight on or quit. Left guessing at the candidate's intentions, aides came away with conflicting impressions, which they passed on to Washington insiders and the press. In the end, Dole decided to hang on through the Illinois primary. But by then, speculation about an early withdrawal had ruined his admittedly slim chance of staging a comeback.

Bob Dole should have been a formidable contender for the GOP nomination. The Senate Republican leader had plenty of money, experience and name recognition. His record of strong, hands-on leadership could have played well against George Bush's yes-man image. But his campaign has been a series of blunders for which Dole blamed everyone but himself.

Slow to start, Dole hired campaign aides, lost confidence in them and hired some more. His final campaign chief, William Brock, didn't come aboard until last fall, long after the Bush juggernaut had begun to roll. Though he rarely trusts the judgment of others, Dole believed pollster Richard Wirthlin's prediction that he could coast to victory in New Hampshire after winning in Iowa. Bitter when he lost, he began referring to Wirthlin mockingly as "Doctor Dick." Heading South for Super Tuesday, he reached out not to Brock but to a pair of his rivals, consultants David Keene and Donald Devine, who countermanded the campaign chief's decisions. Outraged, Brock fired them in plain view of reporters. Mean-

time, the funds had fizzled away. After wasting money on staff and overhead, the campaign could only budget \$1.3 million for Super Tuesday ads.

Dole railed at Bush's royal progress toward the nomination. He did not try to conceal his resentment of the vice president's advantages, in life and in the campaign. Dole's frustration erupted on the eve of Super Tuesday, when he arrived in Tulsa to find he couldn't make a call because the telephones didn't work. At a press conference minutes later, Dole began ranting about Bush's built-in edge — "the millions of dollars in subsidies he gets from the government — the helicopters, airplanes, White House advance, personal staff, limousines — All those goodies! Plus the mansion." On the sidelines, his aides winced.

Yet as the dimensions of his defeat became clear, Dole was oddly chipper, wandering back in the plane to crack off-the-record jokes with reporters. The poor boy from Russell, Kans., who lost his youth and athletic grace to a stray German shell, can be a fatalist. The morning after Super Tuesday, as Dole in a suburban Chicago restaurant, he said simply, "Nothing's ever easy in life — for me." What he failed to acknowledge was that in this campaign, at least, he had made life harder for himself.

MARGARET GARRARD WARNER with Dole



"Nothing's ever easy in life." After his defeat, a sense of fatalism

TIME, MARCH 28, 1988

Sailing Against the Wind

Like Captain Ahab, Bob Dole seems driven by his quest

"What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it... I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time..." — Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, by Herman Melville

Robert Dole would not give in. Looking ghastly, his eyes glittering behind a shallow mask of TV makeup, Dole began a last-ditch 30-min. appeal to the voters of Illinois. Minutes into the live broadcast, the screen went black. Like Captain Ahab, who laughed when a freak storm reversed his ship's compass, Dole remained eerily serene. Adversity and bad luck had become so familiar they were almost old friends. He kept on going.

Dole's personality has always been the real problem underlying his candidacy: his complex presence overshadowed his policies and views on issues. Even before George Bush trounced him last week, Dole's campaign had become a psychodrama: How far would he go in his relentless quest? In Washington, Senate colleagues delicately urged him to be "positive"; they didn't want the brilliant and witty minority leader to come off like an obsessed sea captain stalking the Great White Whale.

Dole had never been able to break his anger: his valid arguments against Bush kept getting ensnared in personal discontent. Advisers who implored him to stop missed the point. He couldn't. On the campaign trail, he had trained himself to describe his crippling war injury so matter-of-factly that people forgot how deep a psychological scar it had left. His all-consuming political drive had been forged in hardship, pain and solitude. Fiercely independent and iron-willed, Dole really trusted only his own judgment. Not surprisingly, he failed to assemble a first-rate

organization. "It's not that we're falling apart now," said a veteran last week. "It's that we were never together."

When Dole came close to carrying New Hampshire, he briefly seemed transformed. For one week, he wore the radiant, goopy smile of a young man in love. His campaign badly miscalculated, and Bush prevailed instead. Neither Dole nor his shaky organization recovered. Soon after, Dole mocked himself, joking that he had worked on his Inaugural Address instead of strategy. Along with his sense of humor, Dole regained his fatalism, resentment and mistrust: those instincts, at least, had never let him down.

Dole began teasing the press corps about David Owen, the friend who resigned after questions arose about Elizabeth Dole's blind trust. He developed a comic riff, joking that Owen was secretly dividing up his wife's trust fund with General Noriega. There was an edge. Dole was brooding that he had been forced to sacrifice his friend while even after Iran-contra broke, the Vice President had held on to staffers with alleged links to the scandal. The comparison became another haunting symbol of life's unfairness.

After the crushing Super Tuesday defeat, several senior aides prepared for a dignified withdrawal. Dole wasn't ready to quit, and he fought it furiously. "Others may be advising you," he snarled to reporters in Madison, Wis., "but they haven't been advising me." No one dared tell Dole directly to get out. He is not a man to be confronted.

Last Wednesday morning, after his defeat in Illinois, Dole returned to the Senate floor, too proud to appear vulnerable or idle. When colleagues warmly welcomed him to their fold, he snapped, "I'm not back." Serenity has never come easily to Dole. "If you're out there and you've been twisting in the wind for six or seven months and you start to smell a little," he said in Chicago, "then maybe somebody has to cut the rope." — By Alessandra Stanley/Washington



Seeking the lee shore: the candidate moves on to Wisconsin

For one week, the radiant smile of a young man in love.