

Sen. Robert Dole

Kansas' senior senator reflects on issues ranging from U.S.-Soviet relations to his future plans

Editor's note: In the 1980s when Robert Dole was Senate majority leader and Elizabeth Dole was the secretary of transportation, the Doles generally were accepted as the most powerful couple in America.

Mrs. Dole has stepped out of government service, becoming president of the American Red Cross. Dole has seen his party's majority dwindle to a minority.

But are the Doles any less powerful?

The News wanted to meet Dole on his "playing field," the United States Senate. The Senate minority leader consented to a 30-minute interview with Hutchinson News reporter Ray Hemman on May 8 in Dole's office in the Capitol.

The interview was held late in the afternoon. Dole had just returned to his office from the Senate floor. Earlier in the day, he had been in Kansas for the memorial service of a Kansan who was killed in the Persian Gulf.

Even after the long day, Dole was relaxed, obviously comfortable with his surroundings. The Kansas Republican spoke quickly in short, to-the-point sentences.

On his mind that day was a Senate resolution that encouraged the administration to make \$1.5 billion in credit available to the Soviet Union to purchase farm commodities. Last week, the Senate passed the non-binding resolution. House members are expected to act on a similar resolution in the coming weeks.

A transcript of the interview with Dole follows.

Q. It's been a busy five months for you?

A. Well, in a way it's been busy, but we really haven't looked at the legislative list. We haven't passed that much legislation.

We may have a Kurdish refugee supplemental tomorrow, an emergency supplemental for Kurdish refugees. We've got to make sure they are going to take care of tornado stuff, if not in that bill in the next supplemental. I was just meeting with Senator (Robert) Byrd (D-W.Va.) of the Appropriations Committee.

Q. How is the world shaking out? As I was saying to Senator (Nancy) Kassebaum (R-Kan.) earlier, who would have thought in 1979 when she took office that by 1990 we'd lose the Berlin Wall. Where's everything going to shake out? Where do you see the world headed?

A. Oh, I don't think anybody could have foreseen, I mean I don't recall over the years any prophets out there who talked about the collapse of the Soviet economy and the emergence of Czechoslovakia and Poland — the emerging democracies. People tearing down that wall.

You remember Ronald Reagan when he was in Berlin, nobody expected this to happen. And all these things are happening, I think because of the collapse of the Soviet economy. They couldn't hang on to Poland. They couldn't hang on to Czechoslovakia. They couldn't afford it. They cut them loose.

I think the next step will be cutting the Baltics loose. I think that before long, they will be freed. I'm not certain about Moldavia, Georgia and Armenia. (Eduard) Shevardnadze (former Soviet foreign minister) says they don't have any infrastructure. They are different from the Baltic states. Whether they can survive as separate nations, he doesn't think they can without the Soviet Union.

So suddenly, you get all this Soviet cooperation, too. We hope to get more of it on arms control, on nuclear missiles as well as conventional weapons.

We recently got U.N. authorization in Iraq because the Soviets didn't block it, even though they had an interest there. We've got to maintain that relationship, even though they are sort of on their knees economically, they are still a military superpower.

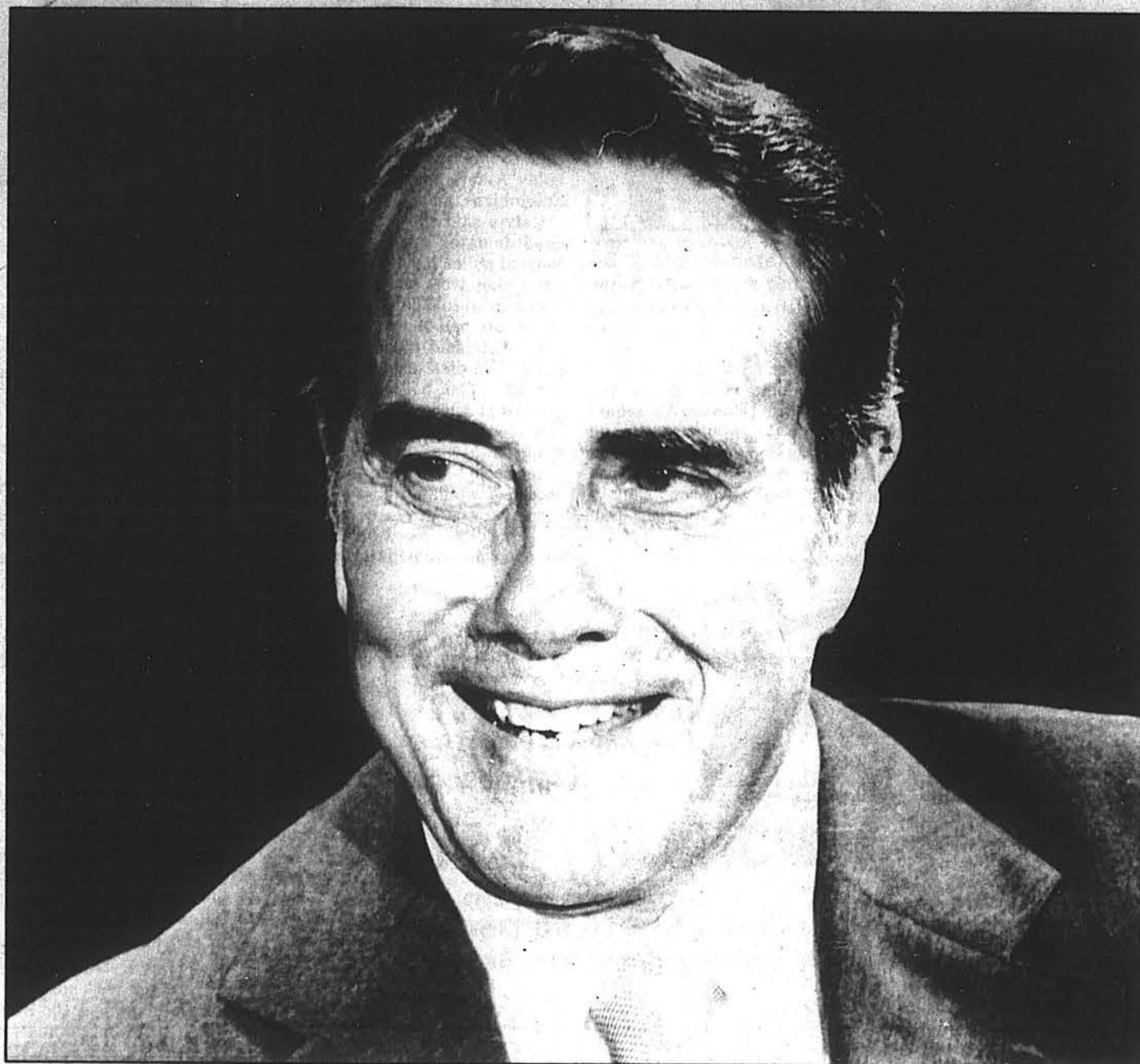
And they are very important in anything we do in the future in that part of the world. That's why I'm pleased (Alexander) Bessmertnykh (the current Soviet foreign minister) is going to Israel, tomorrow, Friday or Saturday. They are still a player over there and they still have supply interests in Syria and other countries.

The important thing now is getting investment in some of these countries like Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, some of the republics there — even dealing, I think, directly with the Soviet republics. We are trying to do that with a bill I've introduced with a lot of co-sponsors.

We meet a lot of foreign leaders — like yesterday I met with the president of Lithuania, the prime minister of Estonia, the prime minister of Latvia and also with Shevardnadze. That's just one pretty good example. Shevardnadze is saying he can't understand why anybody would oppose export credits to the Soviet Union.

The other Baltic leaders are saying, "Well, we would agree with export credits if they would agree to negotiate freedom." Well, that's a pretty big order.

So, it's a big, big change out there.



Q. I know foreign relations have been drawn into this whole issue of export credits. At one level with the foreign relations, aren't the export credits important for stabilizing the Soviet Union?

A. We've got to make that case, maybe tomorrow afternoon. As soon as we finish the bill we're on, we're back up again. We've been trying to accommodate some of the concerns that Senator (Sam) Nunn (D-Ga.) had, that Senator (James) Exon (D-Neb.) had, (Dennis) DeConcini (D-Ariz.) had.

But there are a number of senators who say that if you do not give freedom to the Baltics, you don't get credits. Well, I can't solve that with a resolution. It's going to take the Soviets and the Baltic leaders.

I asked them (senators) if any of them had read the resolution. They already had been speaking out against it, but none of them had read it. So we are working with their staff people ... We're saying, "Send us some suggested language. If you want to change it, give me some ideas. I feel just as strongly about freedom for the Baltics as you do." So we'll see if we can work it out.

What we don't want to do is to have a vote and lose. Seems to me that sends not only the wrong signals to the wheat market, but it's even more significant a bad signal on our relationship with the Soviet Union.

So, we've got a bipartisan group, Senator (Kent) Conrad (D) from North Dakota, Senator (David) Boren (D-Okla.) and myself and a number of Republicans, Senator Kassebaum and others, to try and work it out. It's not easy. It's hard to separate the foreign policy from the agriculture part.

Senator (Richard G.) Lugar (R-Ind.) is sort of lukewarm on it and so is Senator (Patrick) Leahy (D-Vermont). Everybody says, "Put money in there for dairy and I'll vote for it," or "Do this and I'll vote for it."

This is simply a sense of the Senate, not a law. We are trying to give the administration enough cover because we put in the 1990 farm bill this sort of narrow provision on repayment. We want them (the Soviets) to repay.

But Bush had some pretty encouraging words today to say. He didn't say no. He said he'd like to help. So if we can figure out a resolution, pass it and the House do pretty much the same, we might get this done.

We believe that if we do the whole billion and a half (dollars) and if they get 4 million tons of wheat (about 163 million bushels), it would raise the market price 20 to 25 cents and if they paid back the guarantees, you'd have a net savings of about \$800 million because your deficiency payments would be less.

From our standpoint, it seems like good business. We've revised the resolution a couple of times. Maybe we'll have a final draft before you go home. ... It's changing because we are meeting with different senators, trying to accommodate them.

Q. Moving to more of a personal issue, I know you've been asked a thousand times whether you will be running in '92. What are some of the things you are having to deal with in your own mind to make that decision? What's going into that decision?

A. Well, I've been going to Kansas a lot lately, sort of to get out there and visit a lot of my friends and other people in different parts of the state. We were in Andover, Topeka, Nortonville, Chanute, Ottawa, Lawrence, Ark City, Winfield, this past weekend. We'll go out, not this weekend, but the weekend following. We've been all over the place in three or four days, out to Ness City, Hugoton, Hutchinson. Sort of moving around, Great Bend, northwest Kansas.

We had a fund-raiser last night, a big one. It's pretty hard to have a fund-raiser when you are not certain. So I got up and said that if I don't run I'll give it to the Red Cross.

You know, it's not that I don't like what I am doing. I'd rather be in the majority, obviously. I'd like to see how the recruiting is going along. It's hard to get people to run.

You know a lot of House people would like to be in the Senate. But to just go out and pick out somebody who is not in politics, a businessman or farmer or whatever, and say, "We'd like you to run for the Senate." It's not easy ...

So, then you get to a certain point in your life when you decide you've got some good years left in your life, how do you want to spend them? And I've had a lot of people who say, you've been in public service. Money's not a big thing with me; I don't have any.

So, we're not trying to play games or anything. We're trying to sort it out. I know Dan (Glickman) is anxious to find out. He may run anyway.

Q. Does it make any difference who decides to run? Say Dan Glickman decides to run?

A. No, if I decide to run, I'll run. My view is that I must make up my mind fairly soon because some Republicans may not be as well-known as the Democrats in this case. I think probably (Rep.) Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) has a pretty good chance to run. And there's three or four others out there.

Q. Have you talked to them about running?

A. Some. You know, they know I haven't made up my mind to be a candidate. So obviously, they are standing by. And there's probably some out there I don't know about. I've talked to Nestor (Weigand, Wichita businessman and candidate for Kansas governor in 1990). I've talked to Pat. I think at one time, (Rep.) Sam Meyers (R-Kan.) had an interest. Who knows? Dick Nichols with redistricting may decide he'd like to run somewhere. He hasn't said that.

Q. I take it that if you got into a race, you'd like it to be a good race?

A. If we'd run, we'd hope to win.

Q. Would you like a tense race, where there's not just a token candidate?

A. If you had a choice, you'd be unopposed. I don't think that will happen.

No doubt about it, I think we're in a pretty good position. We've put together a pretty good list of things we've

done for Kansas and things we're going to be doing for Kansas. I'm not sure that's enough to drive everybody off.

Then you've got to think about Bush's potential strength in '92. Governor (Joan) Finney, whether she will be a plus for attracting Democrats. Election years are generally pretty good years in our state for Republicans, presidential years. So, I think Bush is going to be strong. I think this heart thing is minor. If the farm economy is pretty good, and a lot this recession is over, I think it will be a good year for Republicans.

From what I pick up in Kansas, Governor Finney is still fairly popular. I've read a lot criticism (of Mrs. Finney) over the weekend in the paper, most of it coming from Democrats. ... It's a tough job, but she's still popular.

Q. How many years have you been in Washington now?

A. Well I was sworn in '61.

Q. How have you changed in 30 years? Has your way of thinking changed?

A. Oh, I think I was much more conservative when I started. I represented a very conservative 6th District at the time. Wint Smith (R-Kan.), my predecessor, was really conservative — rock-ribbed, I guess you would say. Right wing, some people would say.

I'm still fairly conservative. But like anything else, you change with the times. If not, you are sort of left in the dark somewhere.

When you are in a position of leadership, you know sometimes you are going to pay a penalty. You may have to vote (a certain way) when you should be voting the other way. You've got to support the president when it's not totally out of synch with your Kansas interests.

Q. Has your wife been a factor in some of your change? She's been with (the) Labor (Department) and now she's with the Red Cross, very human issues.

A. She likes that. She's really destined, I think, to be Red Cross president. She's sort of inspirational to be doing that.

Q. Do you get to see her much?

A. Yeah, in fact more now. She's been traveling, does a lot of commencement stuff. Red Cross is not like government where she had to go to a lot of meetings. She has a lot more free time. She's trying to raise \$30 million. That's not easy. She's up to about \$20 million — for refugees and for dependents of service people.

And Andover. In fact, they need about \$2 million there and that's in addition. The Red Cross said they needed \$1.9 million, or something like that. Of course, you've got the Salvation Army, too, that's trying to raise money.

You had pretty bad damage near Hutch, but nobody at the time paid any attention to it. At the time, it was kind of isolated. I saw pictures a lady brought back here last week ...

Q. Do you still enjoy the job?

A. Oh yeah. If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it. I enjoy more getting out to Kansas. We were up at Nortonville Sunday afternoon. Not a very large place, but they have a lot of nice people. They had a bunch of homes destroyed.

They made a lot of homemade cookies and we sat around listened to a gospel group for about an hour, playing patriotic songs. They had about 50, 60 people in there. That's the real America out there. That's where the people are.

You know you've been in the job long enough where you used to come in and say "Well, I used to know your mother and father." Now it's, "I know your grandparents." Of course, what happened over the years, you see a lot of those grandparents. You see a lot of their kids.

That feels pretty good. Do I have a real problem in Kansas? I don't think so.

Q. What did being Russell County attorney contribute to you today? What did you learn from that job that you are using today?

A. I served in the state Legislature two years before that. I think this sort of gets in your blood. I mean, some people go into journalism. Some people go into trucking. Some people go into politics. Some move on. Others stay. Everyone chooses.

Being in the state Legislature in 1951, when I ran, I only served one term.

I was eight years as county attorney. I remember I ran against every attorney in town. When I left, they had to draft somebody to take the job. So, I've always had fairly competitive races. I got only one free ride as county attorney.

You've got the 6th District, the Dole (Floyd) Breeding race. That district is so big that once you're in it, you're safe. Some guy thinks about running, gets in his car and drives around four days and he hasn't finished thinks, "Hell, there must be something better than this." And Pat's district is going to get bigger.

I think it sort of starts you down that road. My parents ... were good people. They didn't have any money. They weren't active in politics. In fact, they were Democrats. I got them to switch.

In our little town, we always vote for the person, we don't vote for the R or the D. They (his parents) had changed parties to help a very nice lawyer there, Cliff Holland, who ran for Congress.

In fact, I remember he (Holland) came and wanted me to become a Democrat. Somebody else wanted me to become a Republican. I became a Republican.

So I guess you start somewhere. You started somewhere. And you kind of like it.

The 6th District opened up. Wint Smith had a very close race with Keith Sebelius '58 and won by 50 votes. He decided to quit. We had a pretty tough primary campaign.

I remember Sebelius saying I drowned him in pineapple juice. We served that stuff all over the place. Then we became good friends.

Then Senator (Frank) Carlson (R-Kan.) gave me a little tip that he'd leave and that maybe I ought to be his successor. The race again was in the primary with Bill Avery. We had a little head start on Bill. By the time he decided, I'd already been all over the state.

Q. What would you like to do yet in your career?

A. Well, I don't know. Maybe I want to do what I am doing now. I could make a lot of money if I wanted to be out in a law firm. I see these guys — I'm always kidding Howard Baker that when bell rings, I vote. When the bell rings, he runs down to the bank with another deposit for the day.

Bob Strauss, a good friend of my even though he is a Democrat, I kid him about making this \$8 million on one deal. He says, "I earn it." I say, "Oh."

As long as I can take care of my family, I have family members who need help who live in Kansas, and things of that kind, otherwise I don't have any desire to pile up a lot of money somewhere. I never have.

Despite of what people think, we're overpaid, you don't make a lot of money in politics unless you are doing things you shouldn't be doing.

Q. And it's not cheap to live here.

A. I noticed today (May 8) in U.S.A. Today that the average single-family home in Wichita is \$65,000. In Washington, D.C., it is \$145,000.

It probably would be the same in Hutchinson, maybe a little less. This has got to be one of the highest places.

But you are not going to convince people of that. Right now, we are paid \$25,000 less than House members, senators. I think I'm worth as much as most House members.

You tell the voter that and he says, "Well, you ought to cut their pay. Don't raise yours."

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