

# RUMBLE ON THE RIGHT



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## Republican presidential candidates scramble to prove they deserve to carry on the conservative mandate they read in last November's elections.



Richard Lugar



Arlen Specter



Pete Wilson



Lamar Alexander

By Steven Thomma

Eagle Washington bureau

WASHINGTON — Before he died last year, Richard Nixon issued some advice about the coming contest for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination.

"You have to run as far as you can to the right because that's where 40 percent of the people who decide the nomination are," Nixon said in a letter.

"And to get elected, you have to run as fast as you can back to the middle because only about 4 percent of the nation's voters are on the extreme right wing."

As always, the man who worked his way onto the Republican presidential ticket five times proved his insight into the U.S. political scene.

Though the letter was written to one candidate, Sen. Bob Dole, it is proving to be a road map that most of the GOP candidates are following. With few exceptions, the Republican candidates are tripping over one another in their rush to paint themselves as the most conservative in the field, the most deserving to carry on the conservative mandate they read in last November's elections.

Democratic President Clinton appears to be running toward the right as well. Not as far as the Republicans, to be sure, but definitely to the right.

If the Republican Party was already hospitable to a conservative candidate, it seems all the more so in the wake of last November's elections.

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### Tomorrow

The GOP-controlled Congress has been setting the national agenda instead of the White House this year.

## DOLE

### Other campaigns try to foster skepticism

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other groups.

To tap that rich vein of doorbell-ringers and envelope-stuffers, Dole recently hired Judy Haynes, the 48-year-old former North Carolina beauty parlor owner who for the past five years has been a top field organizer for the Chesapeake, Va.-based Christian Coalition. Members of the coalition and other religious conservatives are warming to Dole because "his issues are our issues," Haynes says, citing in particular abortion, education and the degradation of the culture.

"He's concerned about the family, and it's working," she said this week at Dole headquarters in Washington, where she now serves as deputy political director. "As long as he stays on those issues, he can't lose."

But Haynes concedes that while she and other leaders of the religious right are increasingly comfortable with Dole, many in the movement's rank and file are still tentative, having been burned before by politicians like former President George Bush who courted them during his campaigns but, activists argue, abandoned their concerns once in office.

"I think there are still a lot of open minds about the race as far as religious conservatives are concerned," Haynes said. "They are a much more sophisticated voting bloc than before. They're not the gullible lambs they were at one point. They've been bruised over the years."

Dole's recent speeches have won plaudits from prominent conservative spokesmen like Ralph Reed, director of the Christian Coalition, and Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council, but, as Haynes noted, skepticism continues at the grass roots about whether Dole, the ultimate government insider, deal maker and political pragmatist, has genuinely embraced their cause.

While Dole may never be able to convince such voters that he is truly one of them, his real motivation is to "prevent another candidate from building a candidacy around this constituency," Reed said, citing in particular Patrick Buchanan and Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, who are also aggressively courting the religious right. "It's the same as a major league team in a pennant race drafting a star shortstop so another team doesn't get him."

So far, that approach appears to be working. "One of the real surprises of our data, starting last fall, was how strong Sen. Dole is with that chunk of the electorate," McInturff said. Partly as a result, Gramm, who had hoped to establish himself as the conservative alternative to Dole, has had considerable difficulty in recent weeks.

At the same time, however, many conservatives remain somewhat skeptical of Dole — a skepticism that other campaigns have sought to nurture.

"There is a short-term effect that he is benefiting from right now, and that is that his Hollywood speech and Foster and so forth have prevented social conservatives from coalescing around any of the alternatives," said Bauer, who was a mid-level policy adviser in the Reagan White House.

"But in the longer term, my sense is that the pro-family movement is still looking for somebody who will make their heart beat faster. Dole is becoming more and more acceptable to them, but there's still the possibility that they might gravitate to another candidate," he added.

Some conservatives are concerned that Dole might move to the left after securing the party nomination.

## CANDIDATES

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ber's conservative election results.

Dole rushes to shore up his conservative credentials, working to cut taxes despite his earlier misgivings about the effect on the federal deficit. Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas says he was "conservative before conservative was cool." Former Gov. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee lambastes the others as captives of the "arrogant empire" of Washington. California Gov. Pete Wilson moves to cut taxes he raised just three years ago. And television commentator Patrick Buchanan dismisses the others as "leap-year conservatives."

This rush to the right is producing a bidding war for the hearts and minds of conservative voters.

Thus, when Gramm says he will end affirmative action as president, Dole and Alexander jump in within hours to say they, too, will end it. Within weeks, Wilson says he, too, and ups the ante by moving to end affirmative action in his state's government.

Dole works to balance the federal budget in 2002; Gramm says he would do it by 2000.

Another sign of the rightward shift of the party is the debate over taxes.

The last time the GOP nomination was up for grabs, in 1988, the debate was over whether to raise taxes to curb the deficit. This time, the debate is over how much to cut them.

Those who simply favor income tax cuts risk being left behind, as Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania pushes a flat tax and Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana calls for abolishing the income tax and the dreaded Internal Revenue Service and replac-

ing them with a simple national sales tax.

Off to the side during this skirmish is Clinton.

Safe so far from a primary challenge, Clinton is positioning himself to take on the eventual Republican nominee. And he is doing it by moving toward the political right, back to the centrist position he occupied during his 1992 campaign.

After promising a middle-class tax cut in his campaign and then abandoning it in the face of huge deficits, he now proposes one again. After lambasting congressional Republicans for a budget plan that would cut the growth of Medicare and other popular programs in order to balance the budget, Clinton also proposes to cut Medicare growth and balance the budget.

But if the Republicans are largely following the first half of the Nixon script for their party's nomination, the second half poses great risk.

Some, like Alexander, Dole and Gramm, have one eye firmly focused on the second half and the prospect of having to run back to the center to face Clinton in a general election. Thus, they seem hesitant to run too hard to the right. For example, all say they oppose abortion, yet none is willing to rule out an abortion-rights advocate as a running mate.

Others, like Buchanan and radio talk-show host Alan Keyes, bluntly dismiss the prospect of running to the center for a general election campaign.

That pleases the most ardent conservatives, and explains why Buchanan has edged into second place in New Hampshire polls and first place in a recent Virginia straw poll. But it also explains why few experts give them any real chance to become president.

## Dole's wooing of far right is winning points for now

By John M. Broder

Los Angeles Times/Washington Post Service

WASHINGTON — Sen. Bob Dole's assiduous efforts to curry favor with religious and social conservatives — a major theme of his campaign for the past several months — appear to be paying off, yielding warm words of praise from leaders of the conservative movement and preventing any of his Republican rivals from monopolizing the support of this key GOP primary voting bloc.

In the past several weeks, Dole engineered the defeat of surgeon general nominee Henry Foster because he supports abortion rights, assailed Hollywood for polluting the culture with depraved movies and music and hired the former deputy director of the Christian Coalition as a top campaign official. He speaks often on school choice and tax breaks for families — both subjects near to the hearts of social conservatives.

Dole's support among conservatives could melt over time — particularly if he begins to show signs of moving back to the center later in the campaign, as aides to his rivals predict

he will. For now, however, Dole appears to be succeeding in wooing them — a major mission for several reasons.

Dole's chief pollster, Bill McInturff, thinks that religious conservatives make up 25 percent of the Republican primary electorate, economic conservatives about 45 percent and moderates 30 percent. Simply to start an effective challenge to Dole's early lead, one of his rivals would have to capture a majority of at least one of those groups. But for now, Dole wins a plurality of each of them, McInturff contends.

Dole has yet to appeal directly to social conservative voters for money, in part because he's having no trouble meeting his fundraising goals with big-dollar donors and in part because targeted direct-mail campaigns — the only reliable way of reaching the religious right — are expensive.

But the real benefit of conservative activists is that they can bring to a campaign a level of enthusiasm and organization matched by few

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