

Search for a leader

As the campaign trail heats up, one pollster offers his opinion of four likely candidates.

By BILL BLANKENSHIP
The Capital-Journal

Reservations from the right aside, Colin Powell represents the Republicans' best shot at the White House. That's the assessment of an expert on public opinion polling, Dr. Everett C. Ladd, who recently visited Topeka to deliver the annual Glead Lecture at Washburn University.

President Clinton is vulnerable. "You've got a president about whom a third of Americans say deserves to be re-elected," said Ladd, executive director and president of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

"That's a low 'deserves to be re-elected' rating, but he's shown beating every Republican in the announced field," said the political science professor at the University of Connecticut, where the Roper Center is based.

"In an environment where the out-of-the-presidency party has a darn good chance, I haven't seen as weak a field as this one," said Ladd, who included Kansas' favorite son, Sen. Bob Dole, in his evaluation.

"There's a great demand — and I don't think that's too strong a word — for an end of politics as usual and what that connotes," he said.

"Contemporary national politics is seen as a morally debased enterprise," said Ladd.

Polls show Americans are hungry for candor among politicians.

"Say what you mean. Say it clearly and cleanly. Stick with it. Let people know where you are, have confidence that that's where you'll be five years from now," was how Ladd described what Americans are asking of office-seekers.

In such an environment, Dole suffers from being an insider.

"The mood of the country is profoundly different than the tone that a Dole candidacy strikes," he said. "It's the worst possible time for a person whose whole career is inside politics, who has the tone and style of inside politics, who is a master of inside politics."

Ladd said the best-financed in the GOP field, such as Dole and Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, haven't been able to reach out and tap this mood.

Ladd drew parallels between what is happening in 1995 and what happened in 1980.

"In one way it seems like an unlikely comparison, because Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton in personal terms are so different, I mean, wildly different human beings. But there's certain similarities in their public profiles at this stage," he said.

"Carter was not disliked in 1979 in personal terms. In fact, he was rather liked and respected, but he was considered a failed president, an inadequate president. Clinton is rather well liked in personal terms, but he's considered an inadequate president by a majority of Americans.

"But it wasn't certain that Carter was going to be beaten in 1980," Ladd said.

Ronald Reagan emerged as the GOP candidate and tapped into the public sentiment with the leadership qualities the public was seeking.

"I think we're in that same kind of situation. There's an opportunity for the Republicans, but right now they don't have a horse," Ladd said.

Presidential ballot



President Bill Clinton

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Gen. Colin Powell

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Could House Speaker Newt Gingrich, the architect of the Republican Revolution, be that horse?

Ladd said he doesn't think so.

"There are certain forms of behavior and characteristics the public will tolerate quite fine, thank you, in U.S. senators and representatives, but not in presidents," he said.

"The public is not unhappy on the whole with Gingrich being speaker, but the idea of Gingrich as president doesn't go anywhere. He doesn't fit our picture of what a president should be."

So how about Powell, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

"You find some folks on the right in the party who say Powell is the one person who could stop the revolution," said Ladd a couple of days before a litany of conservative criticism of a potential Powell candidacy.

"I actually think it's the case that Powell is the one person who might permit the Republican Party

to significantly strengthen its position, to significantly enlarge its base," he said.

So what happens if the general decides to sit out?

"If Powell stays out, we've got enormous pressure in '96 for a vigorous third party run, and just how strong that effort will be will depend in part on whether they can find a horse."

Ladd quickly added Texas billionaire Ross "Perot is not the horse. He has a limited appeal. He's got enormously high negatives."

Which brought the discussion back to Powell.

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Taking his crystal ball-gazing a step forward, Ladd suggested Gingrich as a leader of the GOP would come to a similar assessment of the political terrain.

"I think if Gingrich endorses Powell, Powell will be the Republican nominee. For what it's worth, so you can call me up and say, 'Hey, you said this and boy did you mess this up.' I think Gingrich will endorse Powell."

N.H. governor's support big boost for Dole

By RONALD BROWNSTEIN
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — With today's expected endorsement from New Hampshire Gov. Steve Merrill, Republican presidential front-runner Bob Dole continues to build an institutional wall of support against his nine announced competitors — and the formidable figure looming over the race from the shadows.

As the popular conservative governor of the critical first-in-the-nation primary state, Merrill was perhaps the most aggressively courted Republican elected official in the country. His decision to endorse Dole — scheduled to be announced at a news conference in Manchester this morning — offers the Senate majority leader a potentially substantial boost.

MORE ON PAGE 3-A

Colin Powell to announce plans today or Thursday

In addition, some party figures said Tuesday they viewed the governor's endorsement as the first sign of conservatives coalescing around Dole in an effort to head off a potential candidacy from retired Gen. Colin L. Powell. Indeed, some Republican sources who have recently spoken with Merrill believe he decided to back Dole partly for fear that the moderate Powell might carry New Hampshire and change the party's direction if he entered the race.

Merrill has already signaled that he would be willing to confront Powell in a state that most observers agree would be essential to any Powell candidacy. In a television interview Monday night, Merrill complained that

Continued on page 10-A, col. 1

New Hampshire governor's support a big boost for Dole

Continued from page 1-A

Powell's boosters in New Hampshire "have been quite on the liberal side here — some of them don't even support me. So if he did become a candidate, I would have a lot more trouble supporting Colin Powell than I originally thought I would."

The Dole campaign has been shaken by polls showing that the former general would run even or ahead of the Kansas senator in Iowa, New Hampshire, and among Republicans nationally, if he entered the race. Merrill's endorsement, which was avidly sought by all of the leading contenders, provides Dole a badly needed psychological boost.

"The Merrill endorsement, as it happens Wednesday, shows the fact that conservatives around the country recognize that Dole is the only candidate in the race who can beat Clinton and carry on the conservative revolution," says Scott Reed, Dole's national campaign manager.

Added a prominent Dole supporter: "When people say, 'I don't want Colin Powell as the nominee' and ask who is the only one who can stop him, they are gravitating to Bob Dole."

For all of Dole's rivals, the expected endorsement underscores the organizational and financial advantages systematically accruing to the front-runner. Dole has raised more money and garnered far more political endorsements than any of his competitors.

As the race gathers speed in the coming weeks, Dole's opponents are likely to try to turn these advantages against him — arguing that he is pursuing endorsements so aggressively because he lacks a message that would win him voter support on his own.

"The problem with the Dole campaign isn't that they need one more senior endorsement; it's that they don't have a message," says Tom Rath, the chairman of Lamar Alexander's campaign in New Hampshire.

With the announcement today, Merrill will become the 14th Republican governor to endorse Dole. On Friday, Dole is expected to be endorsed by moderate Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge. At that point, Dole will have secured support from fully half of the GOP chief executives around the nation.

In addition, Dole has won endorsements from 23 of his fellow senators and 80 members of the House of Representatives.

Dole is expected to name Merrill as general chairman of his national campaign — the highest-ranking position in his organization.

Merrill's endorsement helps Dole strengthen his position in at least three different respects. In the most conventional sense, Dole can draw on Merrill's political organization around the state. Secondly, an endorsement from Merrill offered the best opportunity for any of those chasing Dole to energize their campaigns in New Hampshire.

Perhaps most importantly, Merrill offers an impeccably conservative imprimatur to Dole in a state where his conservative credentials are under constant attack — not only from his rivals, but from the Manchester Union-Leader, the fiercely right-leaning newspaper. The Union-Leader has endorsed conservative columnist Patrick J. Buchanan, who has fallen to third in recent New Hampshire surveys behind magazine mogul Malcolm S. Forbes Jr.

Dole, Powell tied in Iowa

By Mike Glover
Associated Press Writer

DES MOINES, Iowa — A new poll shows front-runner Bob Dole and retired Gen. Colin Powell in a close race among Republicans in a state where caucuses next February launch the GOP nomination battle.

In a hypothetical matchup, the survey showed Dole with support from 15 percent of those questioned, while Powell was backed by 13 percent. That's well within the poll's 3.7 percent margin of error.

Without Powell in the race, Dole is backed by 29 percent of those questioned, while the other announced can-

See IOWA, Page 8

Iowa

Continued from Page 1

didates are in single digits. In either case, the number of undecided voters is huge — 46 percent, according to the survey.

The poll was conducted Oct. 30-31 by the Davenport-based Personal Marketing Research Inc. The poll is another piece of bad news for Dole, a Kansas Republican, who had been expected to cruise to an easy victory in the state's precinct caucuses.

Those caucuses in February mark the first in a string of caucuses and primaries that will yield a Republican nominee to oppose President Clinton. Dole, the Senate majority leader, won the caucuses in 1988.

When only announced candidates were included in the survey, Dole's 29 percent was a clear lead over his rivals. His standing in the same poll in August was 34 percent.

The latest poll showed Texas Sen. Phil Gramm at 6 percent and commentator Pat Buchanan at 5 percent. Businessman Steve Forbes also had 5 percent. He wasn't a candidate when the earlier poll was taken in August.

When Powell and House Speaker Newt Gingrich were added to the poll, however, the results were sharply different.

Dole's standing in that matchup drops to 15 percent, and Powell is at 13 percent.