

Is Dole too old to be president?

By NANCY ROBERTS TROTT
The Associated Press

DERRY, N.H. — At 78, Ralph Bonner doesn't consider himself old. He still finds time to go line-dancing with his wife every Friday. But ask Bonner if he has the stamina to be president.

"Oh, no," the Derry man says. "Presidents seem to serve a few years and look beaten up."

Bonner, like many others his age, wonders whether someone like Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, who is 72, could handle the stress and strain of the Oval Office. "It wears men down," Bonner says. "He probably could handle it for a while, but would he serve just one term and end up like Ronald Reagan with Alzheimer's? Who knows?"

While Dole — considered the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination — gets much of his support from the elderly, many of them express concern about his age, drawing comparisons with their own abilities and, in some cases, limitations.

Dole will be 73 after the election, which would make him the oldest person to become president.

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Reagan was 73 when re-elected but entered the White House at 69. Bonner, a Republican, has not decided who he will vote for, but his wife, Phyllis, says she has stuck by Dole in the past and plans to cast her vote for him again in New Hampshire's Feb. 20 primary.

Phyllis Bonner, 74, says she's concerned about Dole's age but shrugging her shoulders, she adds: "I listen to him. I like him."

Dole tried to diffuse the age issue early in his campaign, releasing medical records that depict him as a man in excellent shape for his age.

A nationwide Times-Mirror poll conducted in September found 25 percent of people 65 and older said there is a good chance they would vote for Dole if he is the Republican nominee in 1996. That compares with 11 percent of people under 30. The poll's margin of error is 3 percentage points.

Dole's active role in the Senate leadership combined with his aggressive campaign schedule convince many that he is healthy enough to take on the presidency.

"The man's been very active, in the throes of the battles in the Senate," said Arthur Pomerantz, an 81-year-old retired real estate salesman living in North Miami Beach, Fla. "At least for the foreseeable future, the next four or five years he should be all right. He seems to be healthy, and he's used to the stress."

Ethel Hammer, 96, of Des Moines, Iowa, agrees that age affects people differently.

"I know some people at 72 get Alzheimer's, and they're all mixed up. If they've got the right mind, like me, (their age) wouldn't bother me," she said.

Chris Gikas, 75, of Bedford, a fellow World War II vet, said he trusts Dole because of his lengthy experience in Washington. Dole has served in Congress since 1960. However, Gikas said the presidency can take its toll on a man his age.

"Can you see Dole travel to Moscow and Bonn, Germany? That can be terribly wearing," Gikas said.

But Naomi Stack, 69, a widow and retired teacher who lives at Point East condominiums in North Miami Beach, Fla., says she sees no reason that a 72-year-old couldn't be president.

"I don't believe the age would be an asset or a disadvantage," she said. "It depends mainly on his health. I know people who are 92 and 93 who are more alive than some teen-agers. It's your positive attitude. You can vegetate or you can live."

Budget rift widens between president, Congress

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Hours later, the Republican leaders of congressional budget committees rejected the White House's request to include their Democratic counterparts in any meeting, and none was scheduled.

Still later, Clinton told House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole of Kansas he would not meet with them until they agreed to drop a proposed increase in Medicare premiums from legislation that would keep the government running through the end of the month. In a news conference the Republican leaders dismissed that offer out of hand and testily blamed the White House for the stalemate.

"He, in effect, said on the telephone, you know, 'Get lost,'" Dole said. "That was sort of the tone of it. If we can't even talk to the president of the United States, and we're the leaders of the Congress, how are we going to resolve this? I know when somebody is pulling my leg on the telephone. I wasn't born yesterday."

Gingrich said: "The conversation was entirely one-sided and had nothing of practical usefulness."

So instead of negotiating, the White House outlined its plans for shutting down many government functions and sending home about 800,000 federal employees Tuesday after current spending authority expires at midnight Monday. Essential services such as national defense, meat inspection and air traffic safety would be maintained, said Budget Director Alice Rivlin, but military recruitment offices, passport offices and government museums would close.

"If you're a government contractor, you will not be paid," she said. "You can go on doing some work, I guess, but you won't be paid for it."

By midnight Monday then, the Senate is expected to give final approval to a measure giving agencies money to spend through Dec. 1 but only with restrictive conditions Clinton has said would prompt an automatic veto.



The Associated Press

House Speaker Newt Gingrich talked Saturday about the budget impasse as Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole looked on. Unless a compromise is reached, a government shutdown will occur at midnight Monday.

For similar reasons, the White House has vowed to veto a separate measure to extend until Dec. 12 the government's authority to borrow money in the bond markets — given final passage in the House on Friday — the moment the president receives it.

"We're doing our job. We're passing the bills," Gingrich told reporters, seeking to blame the White House squarely for any disruptions of a government shutdown. "If the president wants to sign these bills, the government will be open."

For his part, Clinton put the burden on the Congress, offering a spirited defense of his own record in reducing the deficit and of his own broad support for balancing the budget with fewer cuts.

He accused the Republicans of placing unprecedented restrictions and conditions on the temporary spending and borrowing bills and said they were trying "to force us

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—Bob Dole

to accept extreme budget measures that would violate our basic values as a nation and undermine the long-term welfare of the American people."

In all, it was a day of heightening tensions and rising stakes. Clinton canceled a long-planned fundraising trip to Boston on Monday

to be in Washington for any last-ditch talks. But by midday, hopes for such talks faded after the White House and Republican leaders tangled over who should even be in the room.

Rep. John Kasich, Republican of Ohio, chairman of the House Budget Committee, said congressional Democrats had such "a fear, a paranoia," that Clinton would make a deal with the Republicans they would not allow Panetta to be alone in a room with Republican leaders.

But Rivlin said, "To say that only Republicans can be in the room is simply not acceptable to us."

The sharpness of such exchanges showed the depth of mistrust and disagreement prevailing on both sides. The latest round began Friday evening when Gingrich and Dole invited Clinton to Capitol Hill for talks Saturday afternoon. The president responded by offering to dispatch Panetta, the Republicans first said he could meet with their staff chiefs, then offered up Kasich and the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, Pete Domenici of New Mexico.

Panetta accepted that, but asked to include the ranking Democrats on both committees, Rep. Martin Olav Sabo of Minnesota and Sen. James Exon of Nebraska.

At 11 a.m., Domenici said he had no objection but emerged just over an hour later from a meeting with Dole to say it was unacceptable.

"This is a struggle between the Democratic White House and the Republican Congress, and we ought to be able to settle it without additional players," Dole said.

In midafternoon, Dole and Gingrich telephoned Clinton in the Oval Office for what White House

aides described as a call of about seven minutes, in which the president informed them he would hold no discussions with them on the budget until they dropped a provision on Medicare premiums from the stopgap spending bill that would keep the government running.

The measure would continue to have beneficiaries of the federal health plan for the elderly pay 31.5

percent of the costs for doctors and laboratory tests, instead of letting that contribution drop to 25 percent as scheduled.

The White House contends that would amount to an unfair, and unexpected premium increase, and is using the issue to buttress its claims that the Republicans' overall plans to slow the growth of spending for Medicare and Medicaid would hurt the elderly.

Payments to farmers will fall, Dole aide says

GARDEN CITY — Government payments to farmers are going to decline, a spokesman for Sen. Bob Dole told a farm group. "It's just a question of how much," said David Spears, Dole's Kansas director.

"You're going to feel a pinch, but as a tradeoff, you're going to have more flexibility and a simpler program," Spears said Monday night to a southwest area meeting of the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers.

Spears explained why farm bill funding is being cut \$13.4 billion in a seven-year phase-down of government programs; why there is no promise from the federal government to stay out of the upcoming market-oriented economy; and said producers are getting more flexibility in their operations in return for less net income from Uncle Sam.

It's all in a farm bill expected to wean farmers from government programs into a market-oriented economy. But it contains no promises that Washington will refrain from embargoes or other controls if grocery bills skyrocket.

That uncertainty bothers Vance Ehmke, Healy farmer and president of the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers.

"We've got to have no embargoes or market intervention," Ehmke said. "The consumer had better let the market rule."

Federal impasse will affect state, Prosecutors, Coast Guard to feel pinch

By MUNEEERA NASEER and STEVE FRY
The Capital-Journal

If the anticipated federal funding gap rolls forward this morning as anticipated, less than half of U.S. Attorney Randy Rathbun's staff will work today, a spokesman said Monday.

That means more than half of the 72 employees in the federal prosecutor's three offices in Kansas will be placed on furlough, starting today, said Chris Watney, spokesman at the main office in Wichita.

Employees in the U.S. District Court and clerk of the court office aren't going to be affected by the funding gap.

Employees in the U.S. attorney's offices in Topeka, Wichita and Kansas City, Kan., will report to work as usual today, then find out specifically who has been classified as essential personnel and continue to work, Watney said.

Rathbun, the first assistant U.S. attorney, the administrative officer,



Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole met with other GOP leaders Monday. They kept the House and Senate in session into the night in case a deal was struck with President Clinton.

—Associated Press

the criminal prosecutors, their secretaries and their paralegals, and a few federal prosecutors assigned to civil cases will be the essential staff, Watney said. Anyone who's deemed not to be essential staff will get a letter of furlough, she said.

Working or not, employees in the federal prosecutor's office will get paid the same on Tuesday. Nothing. No one gets paid anything because there's no money, Watney said.

What about Watney? Is she essential staff in the fiscal emergency? No, Watney said.

Ken Holleman, commanding officer at the Coast Guard Pay and Personnel center in Topeka said he spent at least 15 minutes Monday signing 100 furlough letters for employees who may be affected by a federal government shutdown.

He said he had no idea what would take place today, but was signing the

letters to speed the process, if the situation arises. The center employs 220 people, 100 of whom are civilians. Military members will be working today, Holleman said.

Agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, law enforcement and courthouses will also be in operation today, according to Bond Faulwell, deputy regional administrator for General Services Administration in Kansas City, Mo.