

Dole wins Florida but not convincingly

Gramm says 'it's a two-man race'

By The Associated Press
ORLANDO, Fla. — Bob Dole cemented his status as the Republican presidential front-runner Saturday by winning a major Florida straw poll, but his closest rivals said the margin proved Dole far from invincible.

In balloting by 3,325 GOP activists, Senate Majority Leader Dole was first with 1,104 votes, or

33 percent. Texas Sen. Phil Gramm was second with 869 votes, or 26 percent, followed by former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander at 749 votes, or 23 percent.

Pat Buchanan was well back in fourth place, with 9 percent, hurt by a strong performance by another anti-abortion candidate, radio host Alan Keyes, who had 8 percent.

The "Presidency III" contest was the last competition between the candidates this year, and, given the diversity of Florida's Republican Party, was viewed as a

credible barometer of support heading into the heavy campaigning for next year's early contests, beginning with the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary in February.

Coming on the heels of pushing the balanced budget through the Senate, "it is a big, big win for Bob Dole," said Dole campaign manager Scott Reed. "The bottom line is that Bob Dole is the overwhelming front-runner," said Dole deputy campaign chairman Bill Lacy.

Gramm and Alexander suggest-

ed otherwise.

"This cannot be good news for Bob Dole — 67 percent voted against him," said Gramm. Still, Gramm competed hard here, too, and Dole aides were quick to recall his pledges to rout rivals in the South.

Dole, Gramm and Alexander courted the delegates for weeks with letters, videotapes, visits to the state and phone calls to their homes. "It has been overwhelming, bordering on ridiculous at times," said delegate Darin Pierce.

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Dole's in driver's seat for GOP nomination

By JOHN KING
The Associated Press
NASHUA, N.H. — Even in victory, there was cause for Bob Dole to worry after Florida's weekend Republican straw poll: 33 percent isn't a particularly strong showing for a front-runner.

And some voters who broke from the Senate majority leader at the end raised troubling questions about his commitment to the conservative cause.

Analysis

But as the campaign moved quickly Sunday to the site of the first presidential primary next year, there were plenty of reminders that as front-runners go, Dole may be fragile — but he is also quite formidable.

For starters, there was word the field isn't likely to have a final, dramatic entry: House Speaker Newt Gingrich indicated he would announce shortly after Thanksgiving that he

won't run for president next year.

And, with 85 days to Iowa's caucuses and 93 to New Hampshire's primary, there was compelling evidence of the organizational advantages Dole is counting on in next year's busy stretch of early primaries: the Republican governors of those two states, and 13 others, are behind Dole.

"This organization is deep and it is motivated," said New Hampshire Gov. Steve Merrill, who endorsed Dole two weeks ago.

"It is absolutely crystal clear that Dole is going to be nominated," said Mississippi Gov. Kirk Fordice, who is likely to back Dole soon.

Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, who is neutral in the presidential race, wouldn't go as far as Fordice but said: "Dole has got to stumble badly before anyone else will have a shot."

Dole's rivals predict he ultimately will stumble, and suggested Saturday's Florida results proved him vulnerable.

Texas Sen. Phil Gramm, who placed second, noted that 67 percent of the Florida GOP activists voted against Dole, hardly a ringing endorsement.

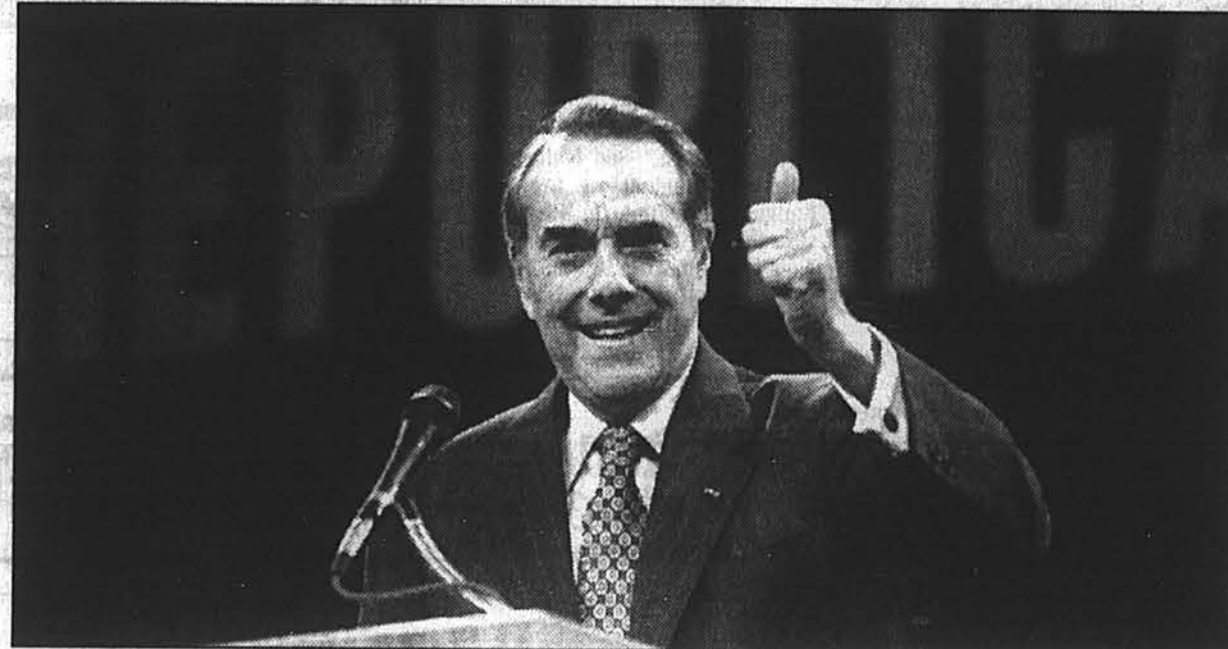
Former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander noted Dole has slipped behind President Clinton in head-to-head polls, and predicted GOP voters ultimately would turn to someone from outside Washington as a stronger challenger to President Clinton.

Dole had hoped for a big Florida win to create the aura his nomination was inevitable, and to convince GOP donors to give up on Gramm and Alexander. But his final total was below what aides had predicted, even below the campaign's count of solidly committed delegates, suggesting his pitch wasn't very convincing.

Handicapping the results, Gingrich said on ABC's "This Week with David Brinkley" that Dole "didn't do quite as well as he wanted to, but he's still the front runner."

Dole is first in Florida straw poll

Associated Press
ORLANDO, Fla. — Cementing his status as the Republican presidential front-runner, Bob Dole won a major Florida straw poll Saturday after vowing to "return sanity and morality" to the policies and programs of our government.



Sen. Bob Dole gives a thumbs-up as he addresses the delegates at the Florida straw poll on Saturday. In his remarks, Dole took credit for pushing tax cuts, a balanced budget and welfare reform through the Senate.

Texas Sen. Phil Gramm placed second and former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander third. Pat Buchanan was well back in fourth place, hurt by a strong performance by another anti-abortion candidate, radio host Alan Keyes.

In balloting by 3,355 Florida GOP activists, Dole placed first with 1,104 votes or 33 percent; Gramm had 869 votes or 26 percent; Alexander 749 or 22 percent.

"It is a big, big win for Bob Dole," said Dole campaign manager Scott Reed.

As the Dole campaign celebrated its victory, Gramm and Alexander suggested the front-runner's margin hardly proved him invincible. They predicted the results would define the race as a three-way battle heading into the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary, the leadoff contests less than three months off.

"If I were Senator Dole I would be worried about the friendly tortoise," said Alexander, who predicted he would gain steam as the race was framed as a choice between a former governor and two insiders.

Dole, Gramm and Alexander invested heavily in the event, courting the delegates for weeks with letters, videotapes, visits to the state and phone calls to their homes. Buchanan didn't have the money to match their efforts, but was banking on support from Christian Coalition members and other social conservatives well represented in the diverse collection of GOP activists.

His 301 votes left him a distant fourth with 9 percent. Keyes was next with 266 votes, or 8 percent, after winning last-minute support with a fiery speech in which he said Republicans were foolish if they believed tax cuts and balanced budgets would cure America's social ills without also outlawing abortions and promoting two-parent families.

Before the voting, the candidates

got 15 minutes each for one final pitch to the delegates, who were also in the convention hall Friday night to watch the White House hopefuls debate. In the debate, the candidates mostly took issue with each other. But President Clinton was the favored target Saturday as eight GOP hopefuls offered themselves as the party's best hope of retaking the White House next year.

Making his case, Dole took credit for pushing tax cuts, a balanced budget and welfare reform through the Senate and said it was time for "a conservative Republican president whose vision and values and character make him fit to lead the people of the United States of America."

Gramm presented himself as the candidate most committed to balancing the budget, a task he said would be dedicated to average families who often have to anguish over their own spending choices. "I intend to stop the government from squandering their money and raising their taxes — so help me God," Gramm said.

Alexander said Clinton was "licking his chops" at the prospect of running against a Republican senator. "The

answers to our most serious problem are not in Washington, D.C., and neither is our best candidate against Bill Clinton."

Buchanan also took sharp aim at Clinton, too, vowing if nominated "to take that hollow man apart."

The event was dubbed "Presidency III" because Florida Republicans have conducted straw polls twice before: in 1979, Ronald Reagan won with 36 percent early on his path to the GOP nomination. In 1987, then-Vice President George Bush won handily, and religious broadcaster Pat Robertson's second place showing was early evidence of the growing strength of Christian conservatives in GOP affairs.

It was that history that had the major candidates fighting so hard here — Dole to protect his lead; the others to prove it was hardly insurmountable. It was also the last major competition of the year, and as such a barometer of support heading into the heavy campaigning for Iowa, New Hampshire and the crush of early primaries that follow those February contests.

"The bottom line is that Bob Dole is

the overwhelming front-runner," said Dole deputy campaign chairman Bill Lacy.

There were nine candidates on the ballot, but one was declared ineligible at the last minute for failing to show up: Pennsylvania Sen. Arlen Specter. His campaign is nearly out of money, and aides said Specter decided it wasn't worth the trip because he hadn't campaigned for the event.

The "Presidency III" proceedings had all the hoopla of a national convention as candidates entered the hall to music and videos and supporters staged placard-waving rallies in Orlando's convention hall. For weeks the diverse group of delegates has been inundated with mailings and phone calls from the major candidates and supporters.

"It has been overwhelming, bordering on ridiculous at times," said delegate Darin Pierce.

The campaigns were in agreement that the results would go a long way in establishing the favorite for Florida's March presidential primary. There was more of a debate over the national impact.

Dole riveted on securing Republican nomination

By THOMAS OLIPHANT
The Boston Globe
WASHINGTON — For those willing to acknowledge the primacy of timing in politics, consider the following:

On Friday evening, Senate majority leader Bob Dole led his Republican leadership colleagues in spurning President Clinton's first search for a compromise to reopen the government for a few weeks.

On Saturday afternoon Dole jettied in and out of Florida to strike a combative pose before the GOP activists and big shots assembled in Orlando to cast the last straw poll of the pre-presidential campaign, vowing that this will not be an autumn of compromise.

WHEREUPON, ONCE safely back here with another ho-hum victory under his belt, he proceeded to arrange a compromise.

Connecting these latest Dole dots is easy on the surface, but beware: The only certainty in the Dole world is more dots.

According to senior advisers, their guy has come through spring training with his road to the nomination still smooth and lacking an obvious obstacle.

His opposition, they add, remains balkanized and lacking a clear cause. He has, they sum up, come through the fits and starts of the pre-campaign with gobs of money, governor-based operations in nearly all the early-voting states and not a single crumpling embarrassment after more than six months of activity.

Just as important, the pre-campaign has ended with no opposition from a Republican figure of potentially equal institutional stature:

not Colin Powell from the middle; not Jack Kemp from the futurist, New Ideas world; not Dan Quayle from the social issues world of right-wing Christians; and probably not Newt Gingrich from the congressional revolutionaries (though Dole himself will believe it when he hears it definitively from Gingrich himself).

ON THE surface, this might appear to be the moment when a front-runner begins to shift his attention from the ideology-driven activists of the pre-campaign to the broader, less right-wing universe of Republicans and conservatives who will actually vote next year, not to mention the much broader universe of voters who will decide the general election itself.

More specifically, the temptation is to seize on the budget compromise that will temporarily reopen the government and posit the return of Dealmaker Dole — the bridging figure from a partisan base who helps make big things happen around here.

It's possible, but don't count on it. More than all his pals and advisers, Dole remains riveted on a strategy of concentrating on securing the Republican nomination above all else; his memories of his 1988 collapse almost on the brink of victory over George Bush are consuming.

All this year — whether he was crudely insulting gay people, junking long-held civil rights convictions or carrying Gingrich's water — Dole has given his opposition not a millimeter of substantive running room to his right.

Last weekend's budget maneuvers didn't substantially change things. It is easy for Dole to give an opponent like Sen. Phil Gramm of

Texas an opening to oppose the compromise that re-opens the government; that clear prospect caused not a second's hesitation upon Dole's return here Saturday evening.

For one thing, Dole's right flank is covered for the moment by the more-than-ample flanks of Gingrich. For another, the Dole view of the world strongly prefers that Gramm be the senator's principal rival and foil in the primaries.

Nonetheless, the Dole view is also grounded in the cautionary conviction that eventually a front-runner has to face at least one near-death experience and that he will be no exception.

IT WAS simple to arrange a short-term compromise, but the negotiations with President Clinton on balancing the budget for real will be both arduous and dangerous. To understate the point, the idea that Dole would do anything that risks Gingrich's opposition, much less his candidacy, is far-fetched; so far he's even happy to let Gingrich upstage him in front of TV cameras.

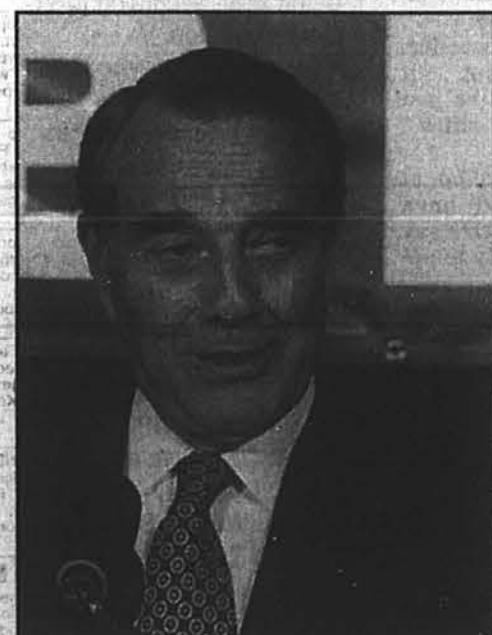
The irony is that once again the tactics that help get Dole the nomination make his ultimate task of beating President Clinton more difficult. And the worse Dole looks in the polls, the more Republicans wonder if they're being led off a cliff.

Dole's Merle Haggard response — it's not love, but it's not bad — is at least accurate. But it understates the instability of the Republican world and ignores the extent to which his pandering has harmed him among moderate and independent voters.

Better, like the almost-Beatles, to be free as a bird.

A DRY RUN

'Charismatically challenged' GOP presidential field doesn't exactly wow 'em



Sen. Bob Dole
"I'm here. I'm a survivor. I work hard. I've been a conservative all my life in the Congress. I believe in strong family values."

By TOM RAUM
The Associated Press
WASHINGTON — Sen. Phil Gramm likes to tell how he was turned down the first two times he proposed marriage to his wife Wendy. "I don't always make a good first impression," Gramm says. "But I do wear well."

Like the spurned marriage proposal, the Texas Republican and GOP presidential candidate likes the story so much he keeps repeating it.

Along with telling audiences his "mamma prodded me every step of the way" to success. And how he was a "foot soldier in the Reagan revolution." Over and over.

And Gramm isn't the only presidential candidate to keep repeating things.

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, a septuagenarian, reminds audiences he's younger than nonagenarian Strom Thurmond.

And the word "values" appears in Dole political speeches almost as frequently as it does in ones by President Clinton.

"I'm here. I'm a survivor. I work hard. I've been a conservative all my life in the Congress. I believe in strong family values," Dole says.

At least Clinton and Dole, by virtue of being president and Senate majority leader, can exhibit leadership beyond rhetoric.

Clinton could announce a peace accord in Bosnia, for instance, as he did Tuesday from the Rose Garden. And Dole can an-

nounce a budget deal.

But, for most of the others, there are just words. And more words.

All candidates end up repeating what they say. But this is only November 1995, just under a year before the election.

Publishing millionaire Steve Forbes speaks on and on about his plan to replace the income tax system with a flat tax.

Conservative radio show host Alan Keyes says the nation's problems are due to the breakdown of the "family-based marriage" — and he says it in every speech.

Former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander talks at length about the importance of his being an outsider. "We need a real president," he says.

Wealthy Illinois tire manufacturer Morry Taylor tells audiences: "I am not a politician. I am not a lawyer. I make things." One of the things he makes is the same speech.

"Many of our candidates — God love them, all of them way above Clinton in character and integrity — they are charismatically challenged," asserts Rep. Bob Dornan, R-Calif., also seeking the GOP nomination.

Now that both retired Gen. Colin Powell and House Speaker Newt Gingrich have announced they won't run, Dornan may have a point. Powell or Gingrich would have enlivened the GOP race, to be sure.

Gramm is the worst offender in the same-speech category.

From his announcement in May to

speeches around the country, Gramm repeats the same homilies and statements.

How many times, for instance, do audiences have to hear Gramm tell them that "I failed the third, the seventh and the ninth grades. ... But my mother didn't give up and I didn't either."

"Most Republicans have been addressing the nation more like accountants than leaders," Arianna Huffington writes in this week's issue of the conservative journal, the "Weekly Standard."

Huffington, a senior fellow at the conservative Progress and Freedom Foundation, said in an interview that Republicans "could easily lose both the White House and the House. Right now, Clinton has the high moral ground ... The problem is not charisma, it is message."

And why do the GOP candidates say they want to be president?

That was the question then-CBS correspondent Roger Mudd once used to trip up Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. But some of the answers this time around are almost as mundane as was Kennedy's grasping, inarticulate response.

Gramm: "I was a foot soldier in the Reagan revolution and as president I want to finish that revolution."

Dole: "If I get elected at my age, you know ... I'm not going anywhere. I'm just going to serve my country."

Maybe charisma is too much to expect, but at least these guys could get some new material.



Sen. Phil Gramm
"I failed the third, the seventh and the ninth grades. But my mother didn't give up and I didn't either."