

174. 1981

Topeka Capital-Journal, Thursday, June 11, 1981 45

Dole vs. Helms: poor people win

By KEN PETERSON
Capital-Journal Washington correspondent

WASHINGTON — The senator carefully put on his glasses, glanced around the chamber, and worried aloud about what his Republican brethren were about to do to food stamps.

"Not many recipients of the food stamp program show up for fund-raisers for political candidates, so it is a good place to attack... to indicate what a waste it is."

—Sen. Bob Dole

is. But I suggest that there are millions of Americans who, without the food stamp program, would be in deep difficulty, as would their families.

The speaker was not some dying breed of knee-jerk liberal about to be run over by the conservative tide that some say is sweeping the nation, but Republican Bob Dole of Kansas.

Kansas has one of the lowest participation rates of any state in the nation when it comes to food stamps, a paltry 4.7 percent compared with neighboring Missouri's 8 percent or even Oklahoma's 7 percent.

So Dole is not about to gain political points with the folks back home as he plays saviour to the food stamp program. In fact, he expects some criticism.

There are a lot of misconceptions about the food stamp program. There are a lot of myths about the food stamp program. It is suggested by some that those of us from farm states support the food stamp program for merely political reasons for the farmers' benefit, and, if they benefit, we just march right down the line and vote for anything that may benefit America's farmers.

"That is a myth. I cannot recall very many farmers asking me to support the food stamp program."

Dole recalls that he opposed the modest birth of the food stamp program in 1964 when it was nothing more than a pilot project to help the poor and rid the nation of surplus food supplies. He now believes the link between excess commodities and food stamps has developed into the myth about helping farmers.

He supports the program for one simple reason: Over the years, since he has had a chance to see the food stamp program first-hand in field hearings, he has reached a belief the program is worthwhile, although he is not about to deny that abuses, serious ones, do occur.

For the past two days, Dole has been battling the Senate conservatives, notably Agriculture Committee chairman

Jesse Helms, R-N.C., and his minions, who see more abuses than benefits from the program.

In what was basically a replay of committee debate, when Dole thwarted Helms at almost every turn, the chairman took his case to the Senate floor Tuesday and Wednesday where he thought he had a better chance.

Before it was over early Wednesday night, Helms was defeated, standing by himself with his thumbs in his belt, waiting for the virtually untouched committee bill to pass 77-17. He gave a thumbs-down sign for his vote.

Dole had managed to guide a bill through the committee that, he repeatedly stressed, exceeds President Reagan's budget cut demands without harming the truly needy.

Even so, the Senate revisions are expected to remove 1.2 million Americans from the food stamp program and save \$1.8 billion next year and \$2 billion annually in later years.

Helms, with his eye on the federal budget, warned that unless deeper cuts are made, the food stamp program will cost \$12.3 billion next year. Helms made the particular point that costs have doubled in three years, the length of time since Dole and former Sen. George McGovern, D-D., teamed up to push through repeal of a requirement that recipients pay for part of their stamps.

Dole countered each Helms attempt, arguing that reinstatement of the purchase requirement would remove nearly 3 million low-income recipients from the program.

"I have no quarrel with those who want to reduce the cost of the program. We have done that. We have carried out the president's mandate," Dole said.

"But I suggest that before we strike, we should know who the target is. In this program, the target group would be the poorest of the poor — 3 million Americans, the truly needy, the ones for whom President Reagan indicated he would provide a safety net."

Removal of the purchase requirement was designed to help the rural poor, Dole said. He pulled out figures that showed food stamp participation increased 61 per cent in Kansas alone when the purchase requirement was eliminated.

Sensing certain defeat on the Senate floor, Helms began secretly trying to work on a compromise with Dole, saying he would not offer any more amendments if Dole allowed the purchase requirement and indexing amendments to pass without a recorded vote.

Dole would have none of it.

"It looked like we were trading a rabbit for a horse, and we had the rabbit," Dole said in an interview later.

Each defeat for Helms was progressively worse. The purchase requirement went down 66-33, the indexing amendment, 69-30. One Helms-backed proposal to reduce food stamp allotments by the amount of federal help the poor generally the elderly, receive to pay their fuel bills, was thrashed 74-25.

Dole overall was victorious, and he had stopped what he wanted to stop: "... the one group that does not have any lobbyists around the Capitol are the people for the most part in the food stamp category. This senator has been in the Congress over 20 years and I can understand... poor people are very easy targets because nobody is going to be around to object. No one is going to rush in here to protect the poor people."

Indeed, nearly everyone credits her with intelligence, diligence and charm. But there is less agreement about her real influence in the administration. She is viewed by some as suspiciously moderate in her politics. She is the highest-ranking woman on a White House staff that is overwhelmingly white and male. Some staff members say privately that her husband's prominence helped her land the job, a comment that is said to infuriate her.

And, at the daily 8 a.m. meeting of the White House senior staff, she regularly raises the sorts of issues that cause some of the others to roll their eyes. "A couple weeks ago, she said, 'What are we going to do about the infant formula question?' and all these guys just groaned," said a regular participant in the meetings.

Mrs. Dole was referring to a vote, then upcoming, in the United Nations over promotion of infant formulas in Third World countries.

"Three weeks later," he said, "it

Doles thriving on hectic pace of two careers in Washington

By Susan Page
Newbury

WASHINGTON — As the luncheon dishes were being rattled away, presidential assistant Elizabeth Hanford Dole rose to extol the virtues of the administration's economic recovery plan. The Financial Women's Association of New York listened intently.

"President Reagan has really already won the battle on principle," Mrs. Dole said, "because three months ago, no one was talking about how much tax cut. They were talking will there be any tax cut? Will there be any budget cut? And look where we are in the administration line," said the chairman, Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas, "let me tell you what's really happening."

Dole flashed his wife a grin and she laughed.

Dole is a remarkable Washington couple. She is assistant to the president for public liaison, the member of the senior White House staff responsible for "outreach" to blacks, Hispanics, Jews, labor, business and other non-governmental groups.

As chairman of the Finance Committee, he is a key figure on everything from the budget to taxes to Social Security reform.

After six years of marriage, they are in many ways the typical working family, coping with conflicts in schedules, relations with a stepchild, too many household chores and never enough time — the sorts of problems common to less well-known couples.

"We find ourselves going out to dinner a lot," Dole said in an interview, shaking his head. "It gets expensive, but you get home at 8 o'clock or 8:30, and if she has to go out to the kitchen, or if I got in the kitchen, then it's 9, 9:30 before you eat."

When they do cook at home, he said, he specializes in dishes with one ingredient.

"I can heat up Stouffer's," he said, "or put steaks on the broiler."

Mrs. Dole said, "The nicest thing a hostess can do is seat us next to each other these days so we get a chance to catch up."

At the financial women's luncheon, she thanked the group for the invitation to speak, explaining, "It's really great to have a chance to be with my husband."

Mrs. Dole has a sunny office on the second floor of the White House, with a view of the South Lawn and an agenda full of trouble.

She is responsible for selling Ronald Reagan to some of the nation's most reluctant buyers, among them blacks and labor. She is supposed to bring back to the administration the views of those groups, whose concerns often are not among the high priorities of conservative Republicans.

"Basically, my mandate is to provide a means for developing a consensus for the administration's policies and programs," she said. "The way I feel that should be done is to call in key leaders and organizations when policies are on the drawing board, give them a chance to reflect on it and to give their thoughts and ideas. Really, you're building bridges, avenues of trust, if you will."

There are times, she said, when those leaders and organizations flatly disagree with an administration policy. Sometimes she settles not for winning support but for neutralizing opposition — or giving the opposition a chance to be heard.

"I'm high on her," said James A. Baker III, Reagan's chief of staff. "She's got a tough job, and she's doing it very well."

Presidential counselor Edwin Meese III said, "She's a very capable lady who does an outstanding job with organizations outside the White House and maintains a good relationship inside the White House."

Indeed, nearly everyone credits her with intelligence, diligence and charm. But there is less agreement about her real influence in the administration. She is viewed by some as suspiciously moderate in her politics. She is the highest-ranking woman on a White House staff that is overwhelmingly white and male. Some staff members say privately that her husband's prominence helped her land the job, a comment that is said to infuriate her.

And, at the daily 8 a.m. meeting of the White House senior staff, she regularly raises the sorts of issues that cause some of the others to roll their eyes. "A couple weeks ago, she said, 'What are we going to do about the infant formula question?' and all these guys just groaned," said a regular participant in the meetings.

Mrs. Dole was referring to a vote, then upcoming, in the United Nations over promotion of infant formulas in Third World countries.

"Three weeks later," he said, "it

was a big issue that made us look bad."

She is 44 years old and still speaks with the soft drawl of her native North Carolina, where she graduated with distinction in political science from Duke University. During her senior year, she was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, student body president and May queen. Those days, she was registered as a Democrat — "a Southern Democrat," she insists — but later switched her registration, first to independent and finally to Republican.

After receiving both a master's degree in education and a law degree from Harvard University, she worked as a staff assistant in what was then the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. She became deputy director of the White House Office of Consumer Affairs under President Lyndon Johnson. President Richard Nixon appointed her to the Federal Trade Commission, where she earned generally high marks from consumer activists.

She resigned from the commission in 1973 to campaign in her husband's bid for the Republican presidential nomination. After he had withdrawn from the race, she went to work in the Reagan campaign and later the transition office. There was talk that she might be named secretary of the Department of Education or the Commerce Department. Instead, she was appointed to the White House staff.

Now most days begin about 7 a.m., when she arrives at the office to read the newspapers and prepare for the morning staff meeting. Her workday almost always lasts a full 12 hours, with receptions and dinners sometimes scheduled in the evening. Nearly every night, she carries home a briefcase full of reading.

"We're trying to reserve Sundays for things other than work — for family, for church work and of course for a chance to be together," she said.

The couple sometimes see Robin Dole, the senator's grown daughter from his first marriage, which ended in divorce.

Dole remembers the first time he met Elizabeth Hanford.

It was 1972, and the Republican National Convention in Miami was about to begin. Dole was chairman of the Republican National Committee then, and Virginia Knauer, the White House consumer affairs director, came to his Capitol Hill office to make a pitch for the platform.

"I remember writing Elizabeth's name down on the blotter," Dole said. "I think I had some idea, 'Who is that attractive young lady there?'"

Although he saw her at the convention — the consumer plank made it to the platform — they didn't start dating regularly in Washington until 1974. They were married in 1975.

Eight months later, Dole was on the road campaigning as Gerald R. Ford's running mate. After the ticket lost to Jimmy Carter and Walter F. Mondale, Dole decided to try for the presidential nomination himself in 1980, but he never was a contender. After discouraging defeats in the early Iowa and New Hampshire contests last year, he considered quitting politics altogether, friends say.

Instead, he returned to Kansas to run for re-election to the Senate. His easy victory last fall was no surprise, but the Republican takeover of the Senate was — making him chairman of the Finance Committee.

Dole had been an influential political figure for years, first as a defender of Nixon's policies in Vietnam, then as Republican chairman during the Watergate scandal, and as a national political candidate himself. But being chairman of a major committee was something new.

He is 57, tall and dark-haired, with a sharp wit and a bemused view of the world. Some friends attribute that to his experiences in World War II, when terrible wounds hospitalized him for more than three years and left his right arm useless. These days, he has melted from the flashing partisanship that marked his early years in Congress.

He seems to be having a wonderful time.

"Most of the big issues come to the Finance Committee, and I like to visit, negotiate about them rather than confront," he said, swiveling in the chair at his Senate office. He talks with Democrats as well as Republicans. "I don't know that I have any grand designs about what kind of imprint I want to leave on the committee, but I think getting things done and speeding up the process is a start."

For the budget, he devised what he called "a little package of budget cuts" for the committee to consider. The summary alone covered 24 legal-size, single-spaced pages, outlining complex cuts totaling about \$1 billion more than Reagan had proposed. He had done his groundwork with the other members. With less than a day's debate, the package was approved by an 18-3 vote.

For the tax cut, he proposed a modification of the administration's Kemp-Roth plan. Dole's version — similar to a plan advanced by conservative Southern Democrats — offered across-the-board tax cuts of 5 percent, 10 percent and 10 percent in three years (the original version was 10, 10 and 10) with some "sweeteners," such as a repeal of the marriage penalty.

Announced, with White House sanction, at a breakfast meeting with reporters, the plan was intended as a trial balloon to see if a compromise could be reached with the Democratic leadership of the House. Despite two weeks of shuttle diplomacy between the White House and Capitol Hill, no compromise has been reached, and a floor fight on tax cuts now seems certain.

"He's somebody you can always talk to, and he's been a big help," said Meese, Reagan's top aide.

A White House official working on the tax plan added, "Somebody from the administration is on the phone with him every day."

Actually, although Dole has cooperated with the Reagan administration on various issues, he has been careful to stake out his independence. When he had reservations about the straight Kemp-Roth tax cut backed by the president, he said so in public, and he cited committee head counts to back himself up.

When he feared that the president would refuse to continue negotiating prematurely after House Democrats first rejected the conservative tax plan, he talked to his wife.

"We were just sort of visiting about it," Dole said. It was the night of the



Sen. Bob Dole ... asserts his independence of the Senate Finance Committee, who was sitting in the audience, came to the podium.



Elizabeth Hanford Dole ... goes to bat for Reagan Democratic caucus vote, and they were relaxing at home. "I told her if I was the president and the Treasury secretary, I'd be very conciliatory. I'd get the Democratic leaders all down there and kill them with kindness. Then if it blows up, at least the president has done all he can. If he fights for his position, that I think would give him a leg up with the public."

D-12 The Kansas City Times Thursday, June 11, 1981