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Mr. Fairness Doles It Out

Bob Dole sits back in the big brown leather chair behind his desk in the Hart Senate Office Building and says, "I don't like to criticize the President or the White House, but they don't exactly appreciate me." Dole repeats the story told to him by Budget Director David Stockman: the White House called a meeting of the Bob Dole Fan Club and nobody came.

Dole laughs; his brown eyes sparkle with cutting humor. His six-foot-two-inch frame, neatly proportioned at 190 pounds, displays a self-confidence and commanding bearing that he lacked when he ran for Vice-President in 1976 with Gerald Ford. The senior senator from Kansas is one of the most attractive mainstream Republicans, and he is carefully building a base for the presidency in the future. Next to Ronald Reagan, Bob Dole looks like a liberal, and he's taking advantage of that image. In fact he is a very conservative Republican who does not believe in sitting back and waiting for the prosperity to come from Reaganomics.

Dole is neither a theoretician nor a populist. He is an ambitious, practical politician with thirty-three years of experience. (He was first elected to the Kansas legislature while still in law school.) Dole was brought up to deplore budget deficits, and unlike Reaganite radicals, he cannot swallow them. He is trying to shift the leadership inside the Republican party from the far right of Ronald Reagan to the center—traditional Republican conservatism.

Dole needs to keep the Republican party strong in the Senate to stake out his claim on the presidency in 1988. In the White House Dole has won the dubious reputation of being a dangerous gadfly. His relations with White House Chief of Staff Jim Baker are cordial but formal. Baker has a fine-tuned sense of Dole's political realism, but the President has his own strategy, which includes blaming Congress for

big spending and deficits. Dole fears this tactic will backfire in November, hurt the Republican party, and damage his own chances to succeed Reagan. By carving out a position that separates him from the Reagan "radicals," Dole has been transformed from a "snarling, slashing, unfair ideological gut-fighter" into the statesmanlike flag bearer of the traditional Republican middle. The same journalists who attacked his rapacious style today hail Dole as the "new lion" of Capitol Hill.

"I think he's the most effective committee chairman in the Senate," said Senator Russell B. Long, Democrat of Louisiana, Dole's predecessor as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. Also co-chairman of the Joint Committee on Taxation, Dole can initiate or halt legislation.

Dole is a war hero who was critically wounded during the Italian campaign in 1945. It took him more than three years of hospitalization to recover. He was near death three times and it was only treatment with a then-experimental wonder drug, streptomycin, that saved his life the third time. Dole's determination and stoicism grew during his painful recovery period. He still has only limited use of his right arm—he shakes hands left-handed—but he is so poised that he makes the old war wound seem like a minor inconvenience. When former Interior Secretary James Watt made his remarks about having a black, a woman, two Jews, and a cripple on his coal-lease commission, Dole was so outraged that in a press conference two days later he said, "I haven't heard the word cripple used in twenty or thirty years. I am offended by his language and I told him so." At age sixty, with his sleek black hair, he looks at least ten years younger.

In the past three years Dole's skills have become sophisticated. He has lost his reputation as the Republican hatchet man, gained first as GOP national chairman under Richard Nixon and then as Jerry Ford's running mate. (Dole blamed the last four

years on the Democrats in his debate with Walter Mondale.) The Democrats' slogan against him was, "If you like Richard Nixon, you'll love Bob Dole. Dole is still tough and sly, but he makes his acerbic wit and reserves hardball tactics for behind the scenes.

Depending on what happens in November, Dole will be in the running for either Senate majority or minority leader. He is challenging Ronald Reagan in setting the priorities for the Republican party in an election year. Republicans and Democrats alike praise Dole's leadership abilities and his willingness to seek a consensus. The press began to call him "the new Bob Dole" when he managed the passage of a tax bill in 1982 that won presidential approval. So skillful was Dole's handling of the bill that he got the support of both the President and Senator Edward Kennedy, ostensibly by making it appear that tax loopholes were being eliminated rather than that taxes were being raised. Actually, the bill did both and removed many of the tax abuses responsible for the first flush of Reaganomics. Dole was praised as a "great persuader" and a "champion of fairness."

This year Dole has had a much harder time trying to get the White House to buy his scheme to raise taxes and cut spending. The nation's budget deficit could reach about \$280 billion by 1989, according to the Congressional Budget Office; Dole has proposed a package that combines spending cuts and tax increases to trim the deficit by \$150 billion. His plan calls for one dollar in reduced spending for every dollar in new taxes to raise revenues.

The White House is unhappy with Dole's proposal, as is the Treasury Department. Raising taxes is anathema to Reaganomics. The President insists that he was promised three dollars in spending cuts for every dollar of tax increases. Dole smiles and says, "That must have been between the President and his speech writer." Actually, there was no such promise. *—Jerrold L. Schecter is our Washington editor.*

being carried out by some part of my system which I understand even less now that I've had a chance to look at it than I did before. Kind of a mystifying experience. But it had less meaning when I thought about it."

Again I ask why.

"I don't know. I just took it for granted that somebody else is running that affair. It reinforced to some extent the feeling I wrote about in one or two of my essays earlier on that if I were really told that I was now in charge of one of these affairs—go run your own liver or look after your immune system—I would feel lost. I'm delighted to learn that it runs itself, allowing for the odd mistake, as well as it does."

We're running out of time—the secretary has buzzed twice already for the next appointment. So I ask some of the things I've been wondering. I know he wrote poetry in the 1930s, when he was in medical training, and was published in *The Atlantic* and other magazines, and that he began as an essayist for *The New England Journal of Medicine* in the 1970s, writing without any idea that the general public would be even mildly interested in his work. But how did he discover the essay form? Were there any similarities to his scientific writing?

Thomas laughs. "Probably not. If you ran across some of my scientific papers—relating to a particular set of experiments on mycoplasma or streptococci—it's the worst reading I've ever had to go through. His friend the late Franz Ingelfinger, editor of *The New England Journal*, once gave a lecture on scientific writing. "He wanted to illustrate how awful prose is in scientific papers, and he used several of my papers as examples."

Thomas sits back, looking amused.

Aren't his essays, though, a type of experiment in his mind?

"I never thought of that. That's a nice idea. I think writing essays, especially writing short essays, is kind of like that. Although I usually think I know what I'm going to be writing about, what I'm going to say, most of the time it doesn't happen that way at all. At some point I get misled down a garden path. I get surprised by an idea that I hadn't anticipated getting, which is a little bit like being in a laboratory. Including, in fact, that the outcome in writing essays, like the outcome in a laboratory, often enough turns out to be a dud."

Back to medicine. What are the big revolutions in medicine that he anticipates?

To my surprise, he doesn't talk about the curing of disease. "Two big areas," he says. "One of them surely is the operation of the human brain, and the other is surely the process of development, of embryogenesis. It's a very strange business of cells sorting themselves out into tissues, and certain populations of cells getting into place and dying off to allow for the emergence of a new kind of tissue—these two problems, I think, are related."

I ask how.

"It's the interaction between populations of cells rather than the specific activity on the part of single cells. In both cases, the operation of a system, rather than the governance of one single controlling mechanism, seems to be involved."

The type of tissue that cells develop into—brain, liver, kidney, thyroid—depends on "messages exchanged among populations of cells and on the environment cells find themselves in. I think it is generally suspected that the brain works in somewhat the same way. There are vast populations of cells in close communication with one another, rather than a single cell, a chairman of the board, who sits and does the thinking."

Will we ever figure out what thought is?

I ask.

"I doubt it. I think we'll probably get some good ideas and some interesting ones, and we'll be able to keep at it, engrossed in the problem, for some centuries ahead."

That is what seems to interest him the most: the idea that life is almost infinitely complex—but that it can be figured out. In a way, Thomas has almost written off disease—he feels that many of the problems, including cancer, may be solved in the next few decades. But life, healthy life, is much more complex: it may take centuries to unravel. And so, though we talk more about medicine, how greatly it has evolved since the time of his father (changed almost entirely from one kind of profession into a quite different one; I suppose, on balance, for the better) and how there seems to be an increase in fraudulent research ("I cannot understand how any of the people who have been found out for scientific fraud thought they were going to gain anything from it; everyone knows the system works by repetition and confirmation, and it's sure death if you're found falsifying data"), we keep drifting back to the laboratory.

Despite its difficulties and frustrations, research has continued to hold Thomas's interest since the time he decided not to follow his father into clinical practice.

"Most of the time it doesn't go anywhere," he says. "But you always think it's about to go somewhere. Just wait around and tomorrow I'll nail whatever it is to the wall. Most of the questions which you think of as the most brilliant questions are going to be answered sooner or later with something like a maybe. That's not even as gratifying as a flat-out no. You don't really move the problem more than once, I'd say, in a hundred tries. But it's a very entertaining way to spend time."

He had a laboratory throughout his career, including during his years as an administrator, but he doesn't have one now: he gave it up when he became chancellor.

"I miss the...miss the laboratory," he says, looking a little sad. "I'd rather be

in a laboratory than in an office. I didn't realize how hard this was going to be for me until I'd already done it. If I can figure out how to do it, I'd like to get back in the laboratory."

The secretary buzzes again. We stand. Thomas talks about the labs at Yale and Stony Brook, where he's collaborating, kibitzing, going over data; he might be able to sneak back in. I gather up my things. He mentions that he's working with WGBH in Boston for a possible PBS television series on biological sciences and medicine.

"What I would like to see done," he says, "is correct an attitude—or affect an attitude—in the public's mind that science has almost run out its string. That we've learned so much that we've flattened out the world and there are no mysteries left. That the world is basically a machine and that we are as well. I think it's nonsense. What we've learned in this century mainly has been how little we know, and how strange it is, how odd it is. The generations in this century may be the first ones to be confronted by an awareness of human ignorance. For most of the centuries before, we thought we could explain everything about everything or reason our way through, or let the Church explain life. In the twentieth century it is turning out that we really don't understand life—ourselves or any important aspect of it. That side of science needs more open discussion. There isn't any doubt in anyone's mind that the scientific method does work. What I'd like to see more widely appreciated is the fact that we're just beginning, and there's a long way ahead, so much still to be learned, if we can keep from killing ourselves in warfare."

I'm reminded of a line in the title essay of *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony* about the possibility of nuclear war: "My mind swarms with images of a world in which the thermonuclear bombs have begun to explode, in New York and San Francisco, in Moscow and Leningrad, in Paris, in Paris, in Paris."

He sees me to the door. "I'm certain that either I've hardly begun to figure him out, or I understand him completely—I don't know which."

The chairman of neurology comes in as I'm on my way out; Thomas says a single word that I'm not sure is directed either at me or at the neurologist.

It isn't until I'm all the way down the hall, standing in front of the elevators, that I really hear the last word he said to me. There are laboratories on either side of me, and in the hall, a machine with stickers warning of radiation hazard, and carts of glassware, and piles of cardboard boxes, with Styrofoam corn spilling across the floor: new equipment must have arrived. Then I hear it:

"Puzzlement."

The elevator arrives. **Q**

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ILLUSTRATION: DAVID LEVINE

THE PRESIDENT SAYS that he was promised three dollars in spending cuts for every dollar of tax increases. Dole smiles and says, "That must have been between the President and his speech writer."

ise. The three-dollar number came from David Stockman. Dole believes that the best that can be achieved is one dollar in spending cuts for every new dollar in taxes.

Unless Congress acts to reduce the deficit this spring, Dole believes, the issue of deficits "will boil over by November," despite the strong recovery of the economy. For the recovery to last, says Dole, the deficit, estimated at about \$200 billion for 1984, must be reduced. "It's a very strong recovery. I want it to last," explains Dole, hinting at his differences with Reaganomics. Unlike the President, Dole believes there is a link between big deficits and high interest rates that can choke the recovery. When the government enters the capital markets to compete for funds, it drives up interest rates and leaves less money for investment, stifling growth.

"There will be elections after '84," says Dole. "The White House looks at '84 and says, 'Oh, we're in good shape for '84; we'll address the problem in '85.' But it may be that the economy will start to stagnate then and we won't be able to address it in '85 with either spending or revenue changes." It is a lot harder to cut deficits in a downturn than it is during a recovery.

Calling for tax increases and spending cuts in an election year is hardly the platform for a winning ticket. Dole blames both the President and House Speaker Tip O'Neill for the deadlock. "Unless we have the two giants on board, we're not going to put together a deficit reduction package. The President doesn't want to put his foot on that land mine a second sooner than Tip O'Neill does. That land mine is called Social Security." Neither party wants to be tagged with reducing Social Security benefits in an election year, or even with freezing the cost-of-living allowances, or COLAs, as they are known in Washington. Dole argues that the best way to resolve the problem is to change the way the formulas are calculated for cost-of-living allowances. With 36 million people affected, the sums would be substantial, and so would the fallout at the polls in November. To ease the political sting, Dole promises to take the money gained and put it into Medicare, which he says will be bankrupt in the 1990s.

Dole's deficit reduction package calls for spending cuts to be made through a "compromise" between congressional and administration budgets. Revenues in creases would come from a 2.5 percent

energy consumption tax, a surcharge on high-income individuals, a slight adjustment in tax indexing, and a 2.5 percent tax on corporate economies. Treasury curbs on tax shelter and accounting abuses would add \$56 billion to the \$150 billion deficit reduction over three years.

Last year, before the recovery took hold, Dole acknowledged that the Republicans were responsible for the perception "that we were being unfair, that we were hitting people at the bottom who were helpless and vulnerable, that we were just helping the people at the top." Now he feels that "the assessment has changed a bit because we are in a recovery period and a lot of the complaints that we heard about unfairness are going to disappear if somebody gets their job back." The Achilles' heel, as he calls it, of the recovery is still the deficit.

The business community has turned to Dole to keep the recovery rolling beyond November. At a recent meeting Philip Caldwell, chairman of the board and chief executive officer of the Ford Motor Company, told Dole, "I've got to have a thirty-six-month recovery minimum." The fear is that the recovery will not last more than twelve to eighteen months. Cutting the deficit, says Dole, will give businessmen the confidence they don't have now to make long-range investments.

Dole is emerging as Mr. Fairness on the deficit, and he is gaining support in new quarters. "I have a growing admiration for Bob Dole," says Alice Rivlin, former director of the Congressional Budget Office, who is now at the Brookings Institution. "He uses his leadership position and he is being very courageous. We can argue about the details, but he has the right ingredients for raising taxes and cutting spending." That may not exactly be Reaganomics, but businessmen crave stability, and some of them are beginning to think Bob Dole offers it for the long pull. **Q**

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CURRENT PROFILE

BOB AND ELIZABETH DOLE Power Couple on the Potomac

She is a wheel in the cabinet; he is a heavyweight in the Senate—together they are Washington's power couple.

Never before has a capital marriage straddled two branches of government so conspicuously—with each spouse holding such a high post. As Secretary of Transportation, Elizabeth Dole runs an agency with a 28-billion-dollar budget and 102,000 employees. As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Bob Dole heads a panel that shapes the nation's tax laws.

"I'm in charge of loopholes; she's in charge of potholes," jokes the third-term Republican senator from Kansas.

The Doles are "the most spectacular political couple I ever saw," declares Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker (R-Tenn.).

Elizabeth Dole first served Ronald Reagan as a White House liaison in charge of contacts with special interests, including women's groups who are among Reagan's strongest critics. At Transportation for the last 14 months, she has stressed priorities ranging from doubling the capacity of the air-traffic-control system to turning Conrail back to private ownership.

Bob Dole makes headlines by being at odds with his wife's boss, urging the White House to do more this year to reduce the huge federal deficits.

Upward bound? Elizabeth Dole is seen as a vice-presidential possibility in 1988. "I don't have a blueprint as such," she says. "It's nice to know there are options out there."

Senator Dole ran for Vice President with Gerald Ford in 1976, was a presidential candidate in 1980 and may make another White House bid in '88.

"Who knows, we could even have a Dole-Dole ticket," quips Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.).

In the near term, Bob Dole makes no bones about wanting to become the majority leader after Baker retires at year's end. "I'd be less than honest if I didn't say I was interested," he says.

Secretary Dole, 47, called "Liddy" since her childhood in Salisbury,

N.C., is a Harvard-trained lawyer who served on the Federal Trade Commission from 1973 to 1979. Though her manner is low key and affable, she has proved she has the grit to get ahead in Washington and become only the seventh woman to serve in a cabinet.

Prairie roots. Senator Dole, 60, is a Russell, Kans., native who was so severely wounded in World War II that he largely lost the use of his right arm. Elected to the House of Representatives in 1960, he quickly established himself as a rock-hard conservative and a sardonic wit with an instinct for the jugular.

That trait was seen most memorably in a 1976 debate between vice-presidential contenders, when Dole lashed out, decrying the 1.6 million Americans "killed and wounded in Democrat wars in this century." The thrust made even many Republicans wince and, in recent years, a much mellower Dole has emerged. He has toned down his partisanship and moderated his stance on social and economic issues.

The Doles were wed in 1975—it was his second marriage, her first—several years after they had met on business.



Senator Dole and Secretary Dole.

Aware of potential conflicts of interest, they watch for times when careers must be kept separate from private lives. "There are certain things where the White House is involved that are not to be talked about," says Mrs. Dole. "I find it not that difficult."

They describe themselves as a typical two-career couple so busy that frozen dinners are the usual fare for their infrequent evenings at home in their Watergate apartment. Though pressed for time together, says Elizabeth Dole, "there's a real closeness because we speak the same language and we take pride in each other's career." **Q**