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Tempo

Dole's wit indicates his eye is on '88

By Hedrick Smith

Sen. Bob Dole is flying home to Washington from a bankers' convention in West Palm Beach, Fla. He has shed his jacket, slipped off natty loafers and stretched his lanky frame onto two facing seats. He glances down at the coastline before answering a question about running for president in 1988.

"I've thought about it a lot—you know, maybe I ought to get organized and get going," he admits. "I've had a lot of letters saying, 'You're the logical candidate for '88. But if I start being very active, everything I do in the Senate is going to be seen as my positioning for '88. I don't want to start being a candidate now. Right now, I want to be a good majority leader.'"

However, he is clearly already thinking ahead to a 1988 bid. He thinks aloud: "I'm perceived as a moderate Republican for all the work I've done on tax reform, voting rights, food stamps, all the stuff for veterans and the handicapped. But we're going to make a play for the conservatives. I think I deserve a shot at them."

As a presidential hopeful, Dole's strategy is to prove himself an effective majority leader who knows how to govern, mold a majority and help fellow Republicans get re-elected. He boldly stakes his political fortunes on a risky effort to cut next year's budget deficit by more than \$30 billion. As a matter of philosophy, Dole believes in protecting major programs for the disadvantaged, but that is balanced by his orthodox, conservative distaste for deficits and a driving urge to bring them under control. When other Republicans voiced fear that they would be hurt in the 1986 elections if popular federal programs were deeply cut, Dole argued that all would benefit if the economy was kept on track. His performance in steering a hefty deficit reduction through the Senate won rave reviews, though differences with the House have raised new problems.

Yet even his friends see long odds against his turning such legislative triumphs into a springboard for the Republican nomination. The witty, likable, 62-year-old senator from Kansas is flying in the face of the received wisdom of modern American politics—that capturing a party's nomination is a four-year marathon that demands the single-minded devotion of a citizen-politician.

Dole's tactical agility has earned him high marks as a superb improviser, but characteristically, his tactics fit into an overall strategy. "He's always improvising, always probing, probing, probing," commented David A. Stockman, former budget director. "But he knows where he is going."

Said another top White House official, "He really knows how to count votes. He has a fine feeling for where his senators will be, when to press, when to back off, when to use persuasion on the facts and when to persuade on the politics of the situation."

Democrats, frustrated by Dole's control of the floor, accused him of railroad tactics. Robert C. Byrd (D., W.Va.), the minority leader, complained that the game "is being played with a velvet glove, but it is hardball."

Dole may not be ready to announce his campaign, but his strong ambition to be president is well known to other Republicans, and his irrepressible wit betrays it. At a family dinner once, he perked up at the mention of people in Nevada who love Bob Dole. "Did you get their names?" he asked. "They might be de-



Sen. Bob Dole (background, center) attends President Reagan's signing of a bill making Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a holiday. Also on hand are two of Dole's potential political foes, Vice President George Bush (left) and Rep. Jack Kemp (second from right).

legates." He cannot resist verbal jabs at Rep. Jack F. Kemp (R., N.Y.) of Buffalo, whom he has marked as a special adversary. They clash constantly over Republican priorities. The Kemp line is that Dole is a throwback to the traditional, tightfisted austerity politics that have kept Republicans a minority party. The Dole rebuttal is that Kemp, with his supply-side economics, likes to preach that tax revision and economic growth are painless cures for the nation's problems, "while some of us do all the dirty work" on budget-cutting.

Dole's relations with Vice President George Bush are more respectful, but there is a rivalry. Two weeks before the final budget vote, Dole fantasized mischievously in an interview about arranging a Senate tie so that Bush would have to cast the deciding vote to kill next year's cost-of-living increase for Social Security. "Don't want George to miss this," he teased. It worked out precisely that way, much to the chagrin of the Bush camp.

Dole's toughness on budget cuts, especially his refusal to combat the deficit with tax increases, won accolades from conservatives who had assailed him as "the tax collector for the welfare state" for masterminding the 1982 tax increase. "He has surprised us all with the strength and openness of his leadership," commented Paul Weyrich, a leader of the right-wing Coalitions for America. "What he did on the budget is remarkable."

Politicians disagree on how that will translate into votes. Some expect to see Dole begin to edge up to Bush in Republican opinion polls, but others, pointing to his eighth-place finish in the 1980 New Hampshire primary, say he lacks a strong political base and cannot fire popular passions.

Dole's first hurdle is to win a fourth Senate term from Kansas in 1986. Rep. Dan Glickman (D., Kan.), a popular, four-term Democrat from Wichita, may oppose him. Dole has raised more than \$1.8 million for his campaign, much of it from Washington-based trade federations, Kansas



Rep. Dan Glickman (D., Kan.) may oppose Dole in the 1986 Senate race.

banks and major agribusinesses such as Archer-Daniels-Midland Co. of Illinois. He also has hired Richard Wirthlin, the president's poll-taker, for a Kansas survey. He keeps in touch with top Republican political managers such as John Sears, Charles Black, Lynn Nofziger and James Lake, all veterans of Reagan campaigns. Some were with Dole in 1976, or when he headed the Republican National Committee in 1971-73. David A. Keene, another experienced operative who helped George Bush in 1980, advises Campaign America. That is the political action committee through which Dole raises funds that he then distributes to the campaigns of fellow Republicans, gathering political IOUs in the process.

But his most potent ally is his wife, Elizabeth Hanford Dole, secretary of transportation since 1983 and before that a White House aide. In Washington, they are called the "power couple." In 1980, she stumped for him in Iowa and New Hampshire. Although she has never won elective office, some politicians think that, with her Harvard law degree, high-level government experience and articulate charm, "Liddy" Dole is



Sen. Dole gets kisses from wife, Elizabeth (left), and daughter Robin (right) on his election as Senate majority leader in 1984.

a possibility for a vice presidential nomination. Some Republican rivals suggest that her candidacy could push Bob Dole to the sidelines, but the senator seems to take that kind of talk in stride. At the Republican convention last summer, his aides passed out "Dole '88" campaign buttons with side-by-side caricatures of both. Now, he deflects the issue with comic patter. When Elizabeth Dole went to New Hampshire for what she said was a non-political appearance, the senator poked fun. "It was just a quirk of fate she had dinner with the '84 delegates," he deadpanned to one audience. "Kemp was there, too. They split the tab."

Elizabeth Dole sees no conflict between her prospects and his presidential ambitions. "I really don't have plans to run, that's not something I have a blueprint for," she said. "And as far as vice president, that's not something you run for. I know Bob has an interest in the presidency. It's absolutely his decision. Obviously, if he decides he's going to go for it, then I would back him 100 percent and I would want to help



Sen. Robert Dole and wife, transportation secretary Elizabeth Dole, arrive at President Reagan's inaugural ball last January. Their combined political potential makes them Washington's power couple.

the anti-abortion amendment. I voted for the balanced-budget amendment."

With many conservatives, his success may hinge on how they perceive his relationship with Reagan. The two men have struck up a political partnership but they never have been close. They rarely meet alone or mix socially.

White House officials do credit Dole with "monumental success" on the budget. "Politically, what he did was three or four times the magnitude of the achievement on the budget in 1981," said Stockman. "This has broken the stalemate on fiscal policy that has existed since August, 1981."

Republican senators have been surprised by his patient optimism, his willingness to consult them endlessly. They applaud the team spirit he fostered among them, but some also worry that his partisan style rubs against the grain of Democrats in a Senate in which fractiousness is already rife. Others, including his friends, comment that, paradoxically, the very qualities that make him a strong legislative leader may impair his presidential chances.

Next to his non-campaign campaign, his biggest gamble is in making the deficit his main issue. Recently, opinion polls have shown the public regards the deficit as one of the nation's main problems, but if deficits should decline through his efforts, so may public concern about them. "Success is counterproductive," lamented Sen. John C. Danforth (R., Mo.), a close Republican ally. "The more he succeeds in reducing the deficit, the harder it will be to make that a big political issue."

Beyond that is the irony that the politics of governing and the politics of campaigning in America are often at loggerheads. To be effective as a leader, Dole must work with both moderate and conservative Republicans, bridging their differences. But that skill robs him of the ideological clarity that fires the passions of Republican activists.

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'Why I'm Hooked on the Sunday Interview Shows'



The Senate majority leader relishes the combat, the occasional news breaks and the chance to catch up on his wife's latest views

By Sen. Robert Dole

Some people get psyched for the NFL on weekends. So far as I'm concerned, Sundays are synonymous with talk. After slugging it out as Capitol Hill all week, you'd probably think I would have had it with politics once the weekend rolls around. But I'm a self-confessed political junkie, and there's only one way to get my fix that's to turn on the tube, sit back and watch the Sunday interview shows.

I'll admit it—I'm hooked on 'em. Anticipation filled the air. Our high-level briefing began. We were informed that a crack special force trained in anti-terrorist techniques—code-named Delta Force—had just left its base and was heading overseas. That's great, I thought, but I had heard the exact same scoop on the network news about four hours earlier. On well, at least the news report was accurate.

Another reason I like political talk shows is the verbal jousting that goes on. Whether it's *Face the Nation*, *This Week with David Brinkley* or *Meet the Press*, there's a real televised contest on the screen. We newsmakers want to score points in the public-opinion polls, while our adversaries—the reporters want to score with their bosses—which means nailing us as often as possible.

Speaking of jousting, Vice President George Bush found himself in a tough match during a June 30 appearance on CBS's *Face the Nation* to discuss the then-unresolved TWA hostage nightmare. You see, this particular Sunday was the climactic day of the crisis, and while the networks were loudly trumpeting the pending release of the hostages, the Vice President could not—for very good reasons—reveal any details of the ongoing negotiations with Amal leader Nabih Nabih and President Assad of Syria.

That fact didn't deter host Lesley—

to keep up with all the latest in that tension-packed affair was to simply keep the TV on. Of course, those of us in Congressional-leadership positions were briefed daily by the White House on the hostage stalemate.

Nevertheless, the media newshounds were sometimes a few steps ahead of even us. For example, when a top Administration official came to Capitol Hill one day to discuss the hijacking with a large number of senators, we moved the session to a so-called "safe room" on the fourth floor of the Capitol. It's an out-of-the-way facility that's bug-proof, off-limits to the press and the public, and permits open discussions of secret and sensitive information.

We filed in. The door was shut tight. Anticipation filled the air. Our high-level briefing began. We were informed that a crack special force trained in anti-terrorist techniques—code-named Delta Force—had just left its base and was heading overseas. That's great, I thought, but I had heard the exact same scoop on the network news about four hours earlier. On well, at least the news report was accurate.

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Stahl from aggressively going for the big score. She wanted to know what guarantees were secured between the United States and Berni. Bush carefully dodged the oncoming lance. Stahl came back strong, pressing for a special answer, but the Vice President countered neatly. "We sit here at a very delicate moment," he said, making it clear he was not going to answer the question.

Suddenly, the interview was interrupted by a CBS news bulletin from Dan Rather in which he reported that the hostages had been released. Bush and Stahl both had photographs. The 39 American hostages are now on the road to Damascus.

When the network cut back to *Face the Nation*, Lesley Stahl and the Vice President were still addressing the issues of guarantees and negotiations, with the Administration still not in a position to confirm what had just been reported to millions of viewers.

The fascinating battle went on for another five minutes before the interview ended in what I called a dead heat. Vice President Bush summed it up succinctly by telling Lesley Stahl, "You've got your job to do, and I've got mine."

Sometimes, however, I've learned that instead of being confrontational it's better to make your point with humor. In October 1984, again on *Face the Nation*, I criticized tax increases proposed by Walter Mondale, then the Democrats' Presidential candidate, by announcing I'd award a symbolic turkey to any Democrat willing to introduce Mondale's plan in Congress. The crack made the newspapers the next day. And no one took me up on my offer: the turkey still resides in my freezer.

Humor aside, another reason I'm such a big fan of the talk shows is that they present a golden opportunity for those of us who do the Nation's business to deal with important domestic and foreign policy issues in depth. It's nice to make the evening news shows but it's seldom—if ever—that you get more than 10 seconds to present your point of view.

Given the Sunday shows' generous time parameters, it's possible to get past the

headlines and actually deal in substance. During the week on the other hand, issues as complicated as the national budget, defense, the deficit and our foreign policy are crammed into one-minute, 20-second segments on the nightly news shows. It's impossible to speak at length—or in depth—within those time constraints.

On Sunday, it's different. You can speak unedited to millions of people in their homes. You can help shape national policy. You can bust the House, nudge the Administration, send a message to allies or adversaries or sell your budget to the people.

Appearing on these shows is usually a pleasant experience—at least until the questions start. You're made to feel right at home. Sometimes they send a car for you. And there's always a spread of food laid out—although many a talk-show guest starts his morning munching croissants and ends it eating crow. But no one I know takes it personally.

As a talk-show fan, it's also a kick to be a guest on the weekday morning broadcasts, although a live appearance just after 7 A.M. makes for a very long day, especially if you've already promised to do *Nightline* that evening. But quite by accident I discovered one way to beat the 5 A.M. wake-up call: travel. In November 1982, I appeared on the *Today* show and didn't even need any coffee. In fact, I felt as if I'd been awake for hours. Truth was, I had been awake for hours. I was doing *Today* live from Moscow, where the time difference put the Russian end of my interview at the humane hour of 3 P.M.

The morning mail just came in and I see I've received an invitation to appear on *Face the Press*. No, that's not a misprint. It's a British TV panel show, and it's looking for guests after 1985. The "Face the Press" panel is made up of some material and it looks interesting in fact I wish I could watch this overseas television regularly.

What do satellite-TV dishes cost these days, anyhow? ☐