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Texans look at Bob Dole



CAROLYN BARTA

Bob Dole, Senate minority leader and unannounced presidential candidate, made his first foray into George Bush territory last week before a surprisingly large and receptive audience. Well over 1,000 people tried to cram into a ballroom at Lowe's Anatole to see and hear the "power couple" — Dole and his wife Elizabeth, the secretary of transportation.

Since most political observers have simply conceded Texas to Bush, the question is whether the Dole response means anything.

Dole backers say it means Bush's support is soft (even in his home state) and that some Republicans — and Democrats and independents — are shopping around for a candidate. Not to mention the fact that some showed up to see Dole's wife, frequently mentioned as a vice presidential candidate.

As ever, the master of the quip, Dole began: "I say right upfront, I know I am in Texas. But the bottom line is to elect a Republican in 1988. (pause) If Elizabeth runs, I'll support her."

There's no question that Vice President George Bush is the lead Republican in the 1988 presidential sweepstakes in Texas. He has an extensive organization and name identification.

According to the Texas Poll just released, Bush is recognized by all but 10 percent of Texans interviewed. Despite being Senate Republican leader and a vice presidential candidate (and being on television extensively since the Iran/contras story broke), Dole's name wasn't recognized by 33 percent in that poll.

"Obviously, he is well ahead," Dole agreed. "But he was well ahead everywhere a year ago. Now in some of the early states (such as Iowa)," Dole notes, it's rather close. "He's got to try to hold on. I've got to try to catch him."

Two weeks ago, Dole named a state campaign manager, operating out of Dallas, and began enlisting support so that he will be in a position to capitalize should Bush's support erode in the states that have the early primaries.

Hugh Akin, a Dallas public relations executive who served as an advance man for the Ford-Dole campaign in 1976, says: "Bush's support is two miles wide and two inches deep in Texas." If Bush falters in the early states, there could be an effect in Texas.

In his own right, Dole is drawing support from Republicans who feel he is a stronger leader than Bush, and those who think Bush can get the nomination but can't win in November. He's also drawing support from among the more social-issue (anti-abortion, pro-home school) conservatives. His state campaign manager, James Meadows, is a former state chairman in the ultraconservative Young Americans for Freedom.

Why Dole? "Because he is the most conservative candidate that is electable in 1988," said Tom Pauken, a former congressional candidate and director of ACTION.

Richard Collins of Dallas, one of 100 national co-chairmen for Dole, feels a "lot of people are looking for an alternative to Bush."

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that race, falling on his rapier-like wit. Dole's explanation, however, is that he had to go into the briar patch to allow Ford to stay in the Rose Garden. "Somebody had to get out there and stir things up," because the Ford-Dole campaign began 30 points behind. It finished within 2 percentage points of Jimmy Carter.

The difference in 1988 is that Dole is setting the tone, deciding what to stress and how to stress it. And what he's stressing are these qualities: leadership, hands-on experience in dealing with the issues, competence, a totally different background from Bush, an ability to bring people from both sides to the bargaining table, and an ability to draw Democrats and independents.

At 63, he's spent 27 years in Congress (in both the House and Senate), served under six presidents, been chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, on the Agriculture Committee 27 years, majority and minority leader.

His biggest selling point, when he starts talking about issues like the deficit, is that he's been there and worked out previous solutions. "If we're going to solve the deficit problem, you have to have someone who can work with those on both sides of the aisle. I've been doing that."

Where is the deficit on his priority list, now? "One," he said, simply. "It's No. 1."

Dole and his wife also are trying to stress his "human-ness." He tells about growing up in Kansas, his mother selling vacuum cleaners and sewing machines, his father selling dairy products and operating a grain elevator. Wounded in World War II, Dole spent three years in hospitals and lost the use of his right arm and hand.

Dole also points to the need for a Republican to have support from Democrats and independents. Indeed, there were Democrats and former Democrats in the Dallas audience. A former Democratic county chairman who now votes in the Republican primary and supports candidates in both parties in November said he's supporting Dole. Why? "In a word, conviction," Earl Luna said.

Susan Collins, wife of the national co-chairman, picks Dole because "he's the only one who seems presidential and truly understands power — the only one I felt in his presence I was in the presence of a president." Also, she added, "I think it's exciting that he has a competent wife."

What about the prospects for a Dole-Dole ticket? "We kid about it a lot, but it's not very realistic," he said. Then he added, "Maybe Bush will look that way."

That prospect would depend, of course, on the lapsing of his first course of action, which is catching Bush.

"Texas right now is his. But he won't get all the delegates. It's a big, big, diverse state. There is opportunity for others," he said, "including Bob Dole."

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VIEWPOINTS

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PROFILE

A LONER'S QUEST

AS HE REACHES FOR THE PRESIDENCY, CAN THE NEW BOB DOLE PUT THE OLD ONE BEHIND HIM?

by George Gilder

The white pages of the speech draft were strewn about the carpet of the hotel suite, and Senator Robert Dole, I was fascinated by strange stormy figure who, in proaching the pinnacle of American politics, made little effort to control his temper, relate to staff, research his positions or lift his rhetoric. In this age of glib campaign caterers scores of specialists providing sponges, image cosmeceutics, polling data and fund-raising grease, Dole was a lone ranger. And he surely had fastest draw in American politics.

Dole's mood deteriorated the '76 Election Day approach. Even his wit began wearing thin. He reached his nadir in a debate with Walter Mondale. Against his rival's mastery of issues, Dole essentially eschewed facts and philosophy, tried to get by on one-liners and mean jokes. He said that leader George Meany was "priced by Mondale's makeup" because Dole seemed at last to have out of silver bullets.

In 1980, still a lone ranger grandly announced his candidacy for President and promptly raveled. In the farm state of Iowa, he won less than 2 percent of the vote in the Republican caucus. Then, after a total of 607 votes in the Hampshire primary—behind Lyndon LaRouche—Dole ignominiously dropped out.

I thought he was through. I see that the press has discovered a "new" Bob Dole, running again for the presidency. A man who has "matured in office" receives a "new respect" in Washington from observers across the political spectrum. Indeed, for Democratic national chairman Robert Strauss says Dole "grown more than anybody this town." The hard-nosed conservative activist Paul Weis declares the change to be "overwhelming, almost impossible to describe."

Most important, the new Bob Dole is adjudged by many experts to be the most likely nominee of the Republican party. I wonder...



dered, has Bob Dole really changed? "Of course," says Dorothy Sarnoff, an image consultant in New York who previously worked for Rockefeller family executives. "I changed him. He was the best student I ever had. A nice, nice man. I took away his snide." Dole's willingness to go to Sarnoff revealed to me the intensity of his desire to be President and his recognition that the old Dole would never make it. Moreover, Sarnoff clearly has had an impact. The candidate no longer crouches over the podium to hide the arm withered from his wartime injury, thus calling attention to it. Instead, he stands tall, and no one notices his handicap. There was more to change.

however, than his speaking posture. When I worked for him, there seemed nothing in Dole's psychology so deep as his resistance to intellectual ideals, strategic themes or inspirational rhetoric. He was bored with what he called the "ish-shoes." The undercurrent of his jokes revealed a negativism and pessimism in his politics. The pivotal question of the current Dole campaign is whether he has overcome this hostility to ideas and affirmative visions. He must do more than point to his sterling record in Congress. Political consultant John Sears, the architect of Ronald Reagan's early victories in 1980, has tried to give Dole's campaign a similar inspirational quality. "Mere competence is not going to get you the

nomination," says Sears. "If he can convince people he has a vision that's credible and that's better than the other candidates, he'll be nominated and elected." But for Dole to do this will require a major psychological shift. His self-sufficiency, his cynicism, his gloomy view of the world, have roots far back in his past. An elegantly athletic youth, six foot three, Dole was brought up in the barrens of Depression-era Kansas. In the small town of Russell, he shone chiefly in sports, starting on the high school basketball team, and going on to the University of Kansas to excel in football, basketball and track. In 1943 he dropped out of college and went off to war with the glamorous 10th Mountain Division. Full of sikers and other athletes trained to attack Germany through the Alps, the division never fulfilled its strategic mission. But parts of it ended up charging a ridge in northern Italy, and one platoon was led by the flatlander Lt. Bob Dole. The hill finally fell to his forces. But the heroic Dole was riddled with machine-gun bullets. He lay on the battlefield for nine hours with his right shoulder in smithereens, his neck and spine fractured, a kidney destroyed, his limbs partly paralyzed. After being rescued, he endured infections and fevers as high as 107°, and lost some 70 pounds. For nearly three and a half years he

struggled back to health in a series of hospitals. In talking about his ordeal, Dole tends to use the second person to distance himself from the pain. "You were alive. You didn't feel good about it sometimes," he told LIFE's Marsha Dubrow. "You didn't like to look in the mirror. You didn't like to see anyone with your shirt off. In the whole process you learn how to endure pain and suffering, loneliness, inability to do things for yourself. You're totally dependent." In the first person, he sums up the lesson with a quip: "After the war I decided I wasn't going to be able to use my hands as well as before, so I'd better use my head."

With no use of his right arm, it still is a chore for him to write, cut meat, close his zipper, button his shirt or tie his shoes. George McGovern, his longtime ally and adversary from the farm belt, recalls Dole stumbling in the Capitol subway and crashing to the floor, unable to break his fall. According to Peggy Pinder, an Iowa lawyer who as a student seconded his vice presidential nomination at the 1976 GOP convention, Dole's behavior is typical of handicapped persons. Herself blind, Pinder says that Dole's unwillingness to rely on others—even on his staff—stems from "the impatience of many handicapped people toward outside aid. He wants to do it all himself."

Dole has spoken out strongly on behalf of the disabled. But to become President, he himself would have to learn dependence, including depending on those he would mobilize for his campaign. I set out once again for Iowa, where the Senator would be speaking. Here amid the rolling corn fields, and among farmers and other voters very like those in Kansas, Dole would presumably feel at home.

On his weekend schedule were four town meetings with local Republicans and a major address to a Midwest GOP convention in Des Moines. I caught up with him in Ames. Some 200 people, cheering and waving flags, greeted Dole. The crowd laughed uproariously when he said, "I wanted Oral Roberts to be my finance chairman, but he was tied up." They murmured approval when he denounced the federal deficit, and they clapped when he announced a proposal for a new billion-dollar rural development program that he would be cosponsoring with Iowa's Senator Charles Grassley. He seemed more calm and authoritative than in previous campaigns. But he showed no prophetic fire; perhaps there



In this faded photo from 1945, the wounded Dole languished in a Topeka, Kans., hospital. His weight dropped from 190 to 122 pounds.

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