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New Dole Lite: less acerbic, more personal

Dole Buries His Hatchet

But the edge remains

His aides respectfully address him as Senator, but out on the road strangers instinctively call him Bob. They are meant to. The Robert Dole who has been zigzagging across key primary states as a loyal son of the unpretentious Midwest is very persuasive. He strides into an Iowa room, folds his arms over his chest and starts off with a low-key joke. Nothing fancy, just a dry, self-deprecating aside that signals that he too knows what damn fools politicians mostly are. His audience always chuckles appreciatively.

Dole's public demeanor is so folksy that it is jarring to hear him privately revert to his more acerbic Washington self. "People out there know I'm working," Dole snaps when asked if his Senate duties detract from his campaign. "They know Bush doesn't have to." Tired, Dole lets his affability slip. "Bush hasn't said word one since the market crashed," he says angrily. "He has nothing to worry about; he can just go out on Air Force Two, using dozens of federal employees, at a cost of millions..." Dole's voice trails off, his flare of resentment spent.

In Washington the urbane and sardonic Senate minority leader may seem like the George Sanders of the Republican race; out in the rest of the country, he comes off like Will Rogers. As he returns to Russell, Kans., this week to make his formal announcement, Dole once again will be tugging at his hometown roots. Arguing that all the Republican candidates are pretty much alike on matters of policy, Dole is running mainly on his newly

minted persona—softer, less biting. The risk of such a strategy is that he will become known as the candidate with the split personality.

Always witty, Dole has been working overtime to keep the sting out of his quips. But the down-to-earth manner of the new, improved Dole does not always mesh with that of the crafty insider. Political Analyst Kevin Phillips complains, "The image you get is that he drinks milk shakes one day and bourbon the next." Though his Senate record sustains his claims of being sensitive to the needy, he is still haunted by the image he earned as Gerald Ford's hatchet-wielding running mate in 1976. Even New Hampshire voters, whose closest encounter with Dole is a handshake at a Rotary Club luncheon, refer knowingly to Dole's "dark side."

His aides concede that if he ever slips and delivers a really vicious one-liner, "it's all over." He is always careful. All smiles and congeniality at the Republican debate in Houston last month, Dole was so bland that even George Bush seemed more spirited. Fretful aides blamed themselves—and one another—for stressing niceness too hard. But Dole insists the low-key approach was his own. "I wasn't coached at all," he bristles. "My mission was to bury the hatchet."

Part of the strategy involves shedding his previous reluctance to talk about himself or his crippling war wound. Now he uses an intensely personal autobiographical campaign speech. "He grudgingly recognized that the personal touch is effective," explains Confidant Tully Plesser.

So far, Dole has done a masterly job of balancing the demands of his Senate position with those of a candidate, using both roles to project an image of leadership and hands-on competence. Last week he was on national news every night of the week, commenting on the domestic summit, Supreme Court Nominee Douglas Ginsburg's prospects, arms control. At an Oval Office meeting, Dole tangled with George Shultz in a quick and quotable way. When the Secretary of State chastised Dole and other Senate Republicans for not embracing the proposed missile treaty, which even liberal Democrats like, Dole snapped, "That's exactly why I want to see it."

Dole has concentrated so intently on "getting people to know who I am" that some friends fear he has neglected to explain what he stands for. In campaignese, he suffers from a "message gap." Dole, who mainly stands for common sense, has always snorted at requests for his "vision." He figures that he has little to gain and plenty to lose by being too specific about programs. But beginning with his formal announcement this week, Dole will little by little flesh out his message of a sound economy and a compassionate society. Without such an effort, he runs the risk of a campaign that focuses mainly on personality. In his case, that can be a double-edged sword.

—By Alessandra Stanley/Washington

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Reluctance to go for it all out: A pensive Senate leader

Dole's Dilemma

For all the public confidence he exudes about his ability to capture—and manage—the White House, Sen. Bob Dole remains haunted by the dismal failure of his 1980 presidential bid, close advisers say. That ambivalence about his prospects is one reason for Dole not resigning his time-consuming post as Senate Republican leader. "He's willing to step out on a limb this time," says a top Dole strategist. "But he's not willing to saw it off." Even though Dole is in firm second place behind front runner George Bush, some aides worry that his reluctance to believe he can win could hamper Dole's effectiveness as a campaigner.

For now, most Dole advisers agree that he should keep the leadership role for its visibility—especially on the evening news. But throughout his kick-off campaign swing last week, they concede, Dole was distracted by the demands of his Senate post. Irritated by staff plans for a hastily called campaign press conference in Atlanta, he gave what one aide called a "flat, dead performance." And he was constantly on the phone—checking with his Washington office on Senate business, not calling local GOP leaders. "His desire for the presidency is palpable," says one frustrated staffer. "But we also detect in him just

the faintest reluctance to go for it all out. And if he wants to win, he'll have to."

■ The GOP race has split the family of Bill Brock, the former secretary of labor and Tennessee senator. Brock is campaign manager for Dole, hoping his Southern ties will help counter Bush's organizational strength in the "Super Tuesday" states. But Brock's son Oscar, 24, a Chattanooga stockbroker, has signed on with Bush in Tennessee. "I'd love to support [my father]," says Oscar. "But I made a commitment to Bush, and I don't back down."

U.S. NEWS
One of Washington's most powerful men announces for the Big Prize

Bob Dole: Ready to lead, but where?

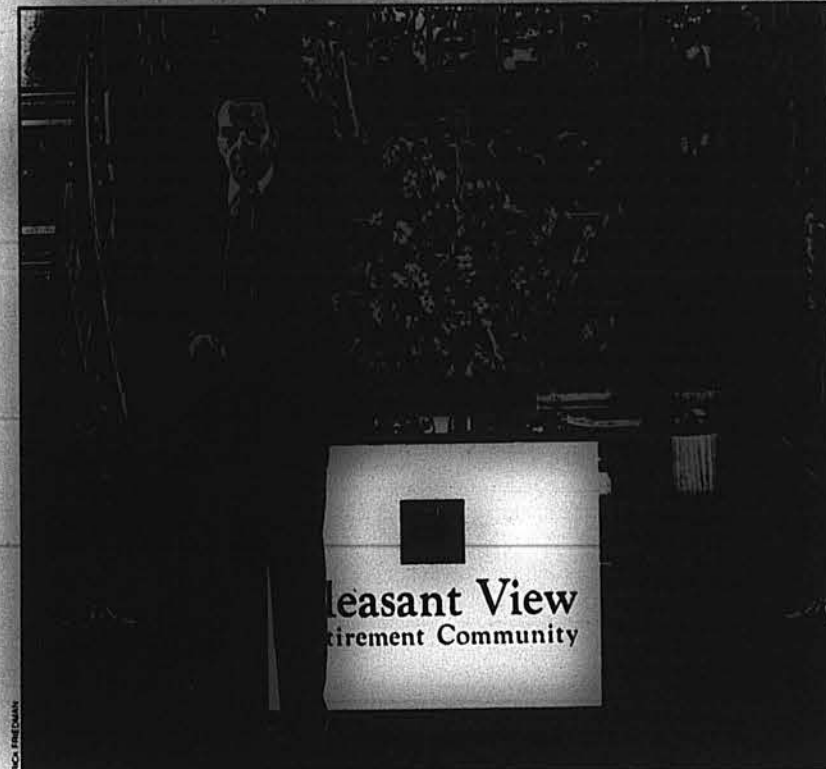
■ Bob Dole, his staff boasts confidently, is not a candidate who needs issue briefings before a debate. Just keep the sarcasm under control, make sure he gets some rest and the natural leader will emerge. But on the eve of the first GOP candidate forum, there was a big glitch: The stock-market crash, followed by a quick convocation of economic summitry. Dole, the Senate minority leader who has made fiscal responsibility his political mantra, had to be at every meeting, leading the way (and, not so coincidentally, the evening news). He arrived in Houston just hours before air time. He was tired, his eyes red with a cold. He kept such a check on his biting humor that he appeared something he usually is not—dull, or, by his own account, "sedated."

But not to worry. After the show, while other candidates offered their own post-mortems—and George Bush hosted a cocktail party—Dole headed back to Washington for the morning budget talks. The next day, he shuttled to Los Angeles for a \$1,000-a-plate fund-raiser. He held a press conference, mingled with famous guests, reaped \$1.1 million and red-eyed it back to D.C. that evening. He was, after all, the Chief Summiteer, and there were more meetings the next day.

It is a schedule only Robert Joseph Dole would keep, or even consider, at age 64. Perhaps, his wife speculates, the energy stems from the war years, returning from Italy to Russell, Kans., completely paralyzed, spending 39 months in hospitals, enduring eight operations—one of four guinea pigs for the antibiotic streptomycin. To this day, Dole's right arm doesn't function: Its gnarled hand always holds a pen as camouflage. There is no feeling in the fingers of his good hand, either, so he dresses in front of a mirror, where he can see his buttons. He asks for no help from his wife Elizabeth, who says it all has something to do with his "independence." Others, who see these same qualities in his work, offer a different explanation. "He is the most obsessively goddamn driven guy I have ever seen," says a close colleague.

An odd soliloquy

In the retail politics of a presidential race, such endurance can only help as Dole announces his candidacy this week. But Dole's problem is to translate his vast energies as a Senate leader into convincing proof that he can lead the nation. When Dole is asked why he wants to be President, the answer is a



In New Hampshire: A proven leader whose time has come?



War wounds shaped a driving ambition

detailed assessment of his chances in Iowa, not a soliloquy on the direction of post-Reagan America or a disposition of any finely honed political philosophy. It is as if he has earned the right, in a sometimes painful, sometimes calculating way, to become the maximum leader. "You look around, you see the other people who think they want to be President," Dole admits. "You have to be honest about this and you say, 'Well, if

that guy wants to be President, what about me?'"

In some ways, Dole has a point. "His record as a leader is demonstrable," says uncommitted GOP strategist Eddie Mahe. "He can say, 'I'm a leader, and I'll lead.'"

But the real question, as Mahe puts it, is "Just where will Dole lead us?" Other than to something called a "new diplomacy" and deficit reduction—through spending

cuts, with neither Social Security nor taxes off limits, as he suggests in his announcement—the answer is unclear. Dole's deficit stance is brave, says one budget lobbyist, but his general political style is to "watch the way people are going, then get in front of them." By Dole's own bottom-line standards, questions about leadership and vision—the "V-word," he calls it—are dumb: You can't know where you're heading unless

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you know what the problems are. But advisers also know that Presidents have to be human and Dole, says one GOP detractor, "comes across as an efficient, coldblooded politician who wants to be in the highest position he can."

Some larger vision, or at least a dose of humanity, was clearly in order. The candidate typically arranged his own epiphany last May at the Grafton County, N.H., Spring Fling. Dole had been up most of the night before tending to a sick terrier, and pitched his prepared text. Instead, he told his story—small-town boy, working-class family, war wounds, rehabilitation. When staffers compli-

years," he says. "Well, I've been out there working for him." And while Bush explains he lost an Iowa straw poll because supporters were "at their daughters' coming-out party," Dole pointedly recalls his modest roots. Still, he accepts corporate campaign contributions from the folks he describes as the "Gucci lawyers." His attitude, says one former Senate staffer, is "I'll take their money and screw 'em." Questions have been raised about his relationship with Dwayne Andreas, chairman of Archer Daniels Midland, who, some charge, gave the Dole preferential treatment in their purchase of a Florida apartment.



With wife Elizabeth: Tough-mindedness and twin ambitions

mented him, he laughed it off. But his text has since become the standard stump speech—with about as much personal vision as Dole can stand. Now, argues confidant Bob Ellsworth, Dole has hit his stride with the themes of competence, electability and compassion—he created a nonprofit foundation for the disabled and has raised \$3.5 million for the cause—allowing him to rattle off a résumé long with accomplishments while softening the rough edges.

The Bush factor

To many who have worked with him—or against him—the real Dole is the rougher version. The stories may be more personal, the humor more self-deprecating than in his 1976 hatchetman days as Gerald Ford's running mate, but the candidate is no less calculating. While refusing to criticize Bush's hands-off role in the Iran-Contra affair—or to speak freely on the cultural warfare in the GOP—Dole slyly manages to capitalize on both, waiting for Bush to stumble. "Bush says [he's] been standing by the President for seven

No one disputes that Dole, an LBJ-like deal maker, is practical. "He's not a friend of anybody in the Senate," says one GOP colleague. "He is someone who looks for opportunities." Dole grabbed one last year: He did not discourage conservative Jesse Helms from challenging moderate Indiana Senator Richard Lugar for the ranking minority seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—and Helms won. "Dole the candidate knew he would be coming at Bush from the right," says a former Senate GOP staffer. "And he knew it would be nice if Helms owed him." (While Jack Kemp received the endorsement of Helms's rich Congressional Club, Helms remains neutral.)

Now Dole is also angling to win over the Pat Robertson acolytes. His I-won't-sign-it-until-I-read-it stance on the pending treaty over medium-range nuclear weapons makes one senior administration official guess "he wants to be the key, visible player," while keeping conservatives happy. The same theory applies to the economic summit, al-

though the longer the talks go on, the more Dole risks—and that accounts, in part, for his push for an early agreement.

Such political judgments come easily to Dole; the chore of delegating responsibility does not. "If it all explodes, I at least like to know what happened," he says, pointing to the chief campaign appointment of a peer, former Labor Secretary William Brock, as evidence of his new power-sharing abilities. Still, Dole was recently fuming over a Kansas newspaper column in which an old ally complained he couldn't even get a thank-you for his campaign contribution. "It just drives me up the wall," says Dole. "You don't have to go out of your way to tolerate all the incompetents in the world just because you're in politics." When all goes awry, Dole lets his staff know—without much compassion. Says one GOP Senate staffer, "being a senator means never having to say you're sorry."

More to lose in Iowa

But Dole now wants to be President, and since his campaign handlers want to portray him as a "President-in-training," that is how he will conduct himself. And it could all fall into place, especially with assets like his politically adept wife—a former Transportation Secretary—Brock and Reagan pollster Richard Wirthlin. Campaigning in the early farm states gives Dole, the Kansan, a natural advantage. But he also has more to lose if he can't win Iowa, South Dakota and Kansas against Bush, who now holds a narrow lead in Iowa polls. "He has to be perceived as winning," says campaign consultant David Keene. And the Bush operation is very strong.

Given the career of Bob Dole, a come-from-behind victory in Iowa would be no great surprise. When the GOP lost the Senate in 1986, all expected that development to hurt, but it only seemed to raise Dole's visibility. So did the Iran-Contra affair, during which he managed to criticize the administration while seeming to defend the Presidency. And though he threw his full support behind the Supreme Court nomination of Judge Robert Bork, he quietly tiptoed away when all was lost—and has been conspicuously inconspicuous on the controversial nomination of Douglas Ginsburg.

Now, he presides over a wealthy campaign—with \$7.9 million raised, or just \$1.5 million less than Bush. But the driven candidate is not ready to rest, or even pause. No one has to remind Dole he received 1,576 votes in Iowa and 607 votes in New Hampshire in 1980 before withdrawing in disgrace. In the political world of Bob Dole, such defeats do not happen twice. ■

by Gloria Borger with Donald Baer

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