

Bob Dole talks about leadership, the Iran-Contra affair and his war wounds

'My whole life raced in front of me'

In the living room of his apartment at the Watergate complex in Washington, Senator Bob Dole spoke with David Frost for his television series on "The Next President," presented by U.S. News. In a wide-ranging dialogue, Dole discussed his war injuries, his political odyssey, his leadership role in the Congress and his attitudes toward the Reagan administration, the Iran-Contra affair and the Republican Party. Some excerpts:



Q Who do you think should take the blame for the whole Iran-Contra mess? Well, as the President said, he accepts responsibility. He is the President.

Q That's responsibility; what about blame, which is more uncomfortable?

Blame—I assume the President gets a little of that. Everybody around him gets a little of that. But I don't think he was very well served by some of those who took it upon themselves to make judgments on what the President should know and what he shouldn't know.

Q You once said that the Republican Party was too "country club," not caring enough for the poor or blacks—

I think we do care, but I believe there is a perception [that we don't]. Otherwise, why would so many people be in the other party—because the Democrats promise more spending? Not necessarily. I happen to believe that one way to change that is to reach out—give somebody reason to join the Republican Party. There are good reasons for a lot of Americans—hard-working, real people.

Q Who do you think would be the strongest Democratic candidate?

Well, I've been saying that I don't want to get in trouble with any of my friends on the Democratic side.

But I've been watching Paul Simon. I've watched Simon for many years. Paul Simon is campaigning the same way he votes. He is a decent human being. He's a genuine liberal, old-fashioned Democrat—makes no excuses for it—and it's having an impact.



The minority leader: "Build on the Reagan record"

Q Do you think that you can be as good a President as Ronald Reagan has been?

Well, he's been pretty good. But we each have our focus. I think the President came in as sort of an outsider—after another outsider, Jimmy Carter—and he was not convinced you couldn't do all these things people said you couldn't do, so he did them. He lowered taxes. He dealt with inflation. He put people back to work. And he's done a good job. I think he has brought back respect to America around the world.

You don't stand on the Reagan record; you build on the Reagan record. And I would deal with the deficit. I think that's the one area that we need to focus on.

Q Describe what happened to you on April 14, 1945, the day that really changed your life—

It was two days after the death of Franklin Roosevelt, which was a sad day for all of us. . . . And we had delayed the offensive [in Italy] a couple of days. . . .

We were supposed to cross a hedgerow, and we were pinned down by fire. As a result, I had gone back to sort of drag the radio man into a little shallow hole.

And about the time I got back, I felt this sting in my shoulder. I must say: My whole life sort of raced in front of me . . . and then I don't remember anything for a long time.

Q How many times during the 39 months of battling back from that injury were you written off?

I don't think anybody ever told me. . . . But, you know, compared with a lot of young men, I didn't have much trouble at all. . . . I was healthy and strong and athletic; had good, kind, loving parents and friends. . . .

But I think you go through stages. I think that, first, it's sort of a self-pity. I mean: "Why me? Why should it happen to Bob Dole?"

Q Don't you think there's still something deep down—

Not bitterness, but I think I'm certainly more sensitive. . . . It takes a while. You sort of start over. You learn how to feed yourself . . . and you learn how to let somebody else help you dress. . . . So it's a big, big change for a young man who is 21 years of age.

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Dole: A Lone Wolf

Can this sometimes-brilliant, but often aloof operator pull a team together?

By Margaret Garrard Warner

Darkness was falling as Bob Dole's motorcade sped toward a Nashua, N.H., Republican dinner. George Bush had at first declined and then, after his Iowa loss, agreed to attend and now was to be given the coveted final speaking slot among the six candidates. Dole, in annoyance, made it clear he felt his staff had failed him. "I want to know how it happened, why it happened and what we're going to do about it," he demanded. Dole's chief New Hampshire strategist, 42-year-old Concord lawyer Tom Rath, just stared at him. "You shouldn't be worrying about things like that," Rath said. "You may be the next president of the United States, and you're going to have to start acting like one." Dole, startled by the challenge from an adviser, gave a pained smile and subsided into silence.

The episode with Rath was pure Dole. It revealed the senator's compulsive need to control every detail of his political life and his often icy, peremptory manner toward those around him. These traits haven't inhibited his success as a legislator. But Dole's operating style has already hampered his campaign—and could create problems for a Dole presidency. Dole is struggling to overcome these limitations, but it won't be easy. For one thing he must resolve a career-long paradox: Dole hires bright and aggressive people, and is so demanding of them that they once nicknamed him the Aya-Dole-Ah behind his back. Yet, the aloof and acerbic Dole mistrusts anyone's judgment but his own. "If you're good, he wants you, and after you

leave, he really helps you, but while you're on his staff, it's as if he's saying to himself, 'If this guy's so good, why is he working for me?'" said Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Armitage, a former Dole assistant. Why is Dole the way he is? A war injury that left him with a withered right arm—he must rely on others to cut his meat—made him despise dependency of any kind. And some associates point to his frightful treatment in a veterans' hospital after the war, when doctors let his muscles atrophy for six months without treatment or exercise. That experience bred in him, these associates say, a deep mistrust of others' judgment. "The last time he trusted someone with his life," said a former top aide, "it nearly killed him."

On Capitol Hill, where there are many different legislative styles, Dole is a brilliant independent operator. He has superb political instincts and legendary vote-counting abilities. Soaring solos are possible on the Hill, where legislators can pick their shots. But the demands and drudgery of day-to-day management are something else again. And so far Dole has not demonstrated the executive talents necessary to run a successful campaign—or the presidency.

Interviews with more than two dozen current and former staffers reveal a lot about Dole's executive skills—and his temperament. Dole demands the best from subordinates, then often undercuts



'He puts you in the deep freeze': The senator

and second-guesses them. He will make a deal with a fellow senator, and let his staff learn about it from the other senator's aides. After 27 years Dole still insists on reviewing all press releases and form letters leaving his Senate office, frequently rewriting a phrase or slapping on a new headline. He operates as his own chief of staff, dealing with a half dozen senior aides directly, making the ultimate decision himself on everything from negotiating strategy to scheduling. "Until he gets involved in something, nothing happens," said another former



Memories of war: Veterans who served with Dole in Italy where he was wounded

aide. Periodically there has been deep dissatisfaction on the staff and Dole has tried to deal with it in his own way. "Make my office happy. They're unhappy," he told one new administrative assistant. But most of the time he is impatient with management concerns. When Chris Bolton, a top aide, grumbled about the turf battles fracturing the staff, Dole replied, "What are you complaining about? [You're] a survivor."

Like servants: Staffers think he is simply oblivious to their concerns. One former and one current staff member used precisely the same words to describe Dole's attitude toward his staff. The senator, they said, treats subordinates "the way the newly rich treat servants." Dole is swift to dismiss those he considers incompetent. "If a staff member doesn't measure up to his standard, they are quickly gone," says Jo-Anne Coe, Dole's longtime senior political adviser. But he is sparing with his praise and thanks for those who do make the grade. When displeased, he cuts the offending aide off for a time. "He puts you in the deep freeze," said one former staffer. "It's mid-August and you're walking around Washington in mittens and a muffler."

Dole's staffers see flashes of his charm and legendary wit. But for the most part, said one, "he reserves that effort for those outside the family." Dole is a tough, demanding boss, but he continues to at-

tract top talent drawn by the excitement of working for such an activist senator. He likes subordinates to present ideas succinctly, in brief memos if possible. He replies quickly, and decisively, with a scrawled "Yes," "No" or "Need more." Staffers who want to ask him something learn to catch the busy senator on the fly. "There's an elusiveness about him, a hit-and-run quality," said former aide Stanley Hilton, author of an upcoming unauthorized biography of Dole.

Dole's wintry demeanor does not invite challenges from his staff. "You risk putting him in a bad mood," said a former aide. Campaign press secretary Mari Maseng insists Dole "doesn't respect you if you play the yes man." But some subalterns seem almost in awe of Dole's judgment. When Coe, who's been with Dole 21 years, was asked what she did if she thought he was making a mistake, "I don't think there ever was such a time," she replied.

Dole in the late 1970s did hire a group of high-powered finance-committee aides to guide him through the arcana of tax policy. But the authority of the group, headed by lawyer Robert Lighthizer, was tightly restricted. "They were on a short leash," says a former Reagan official. Dole's most trusted senior aides tend to resemble him. A Dole staffer described Lighthizer—a possible White House chief of staff if Dole becomes president—

as "a cold, aggressive producer, like the boss." Another aide described the tough-minded Coe as "Bob Dole in an Ultra-suede suit."

At the campaign office, Dole is now on his third wave of managers. Despite his stunning success in Iowa, staffers still joke about "the C-word"—chaos. Dole partisans welcomed the arrival in November of the newest campaign manager, Bill Brock, because the former labor secretary and Republican National Committee chairman was seen as a strong figure whose judgment Dole would respect. "We can shout at each other because we're peers," Brock said. But early on, Brock learned what it was like to be undercut. After negotiating for days with the White House about just when and how Dole would endorse the president's proposed intermediate-range missile treaty, Brock got a call from a stunned Reagan aide. The aide had just heard about a Dole speech charging that the administration had managed to "stuff the INF agreement down the throat of NATO." An embarrassed Brock was equally surprised. "Using the words 'Dole' and 'management' in the same sentence is an oxymoron," lamented a Dole admirer familiar with the incident. Dismayed by Dole's continued urge to call all the shots in the campaign, Brock at one point told him: "There are two jobs in this campaign—candidate and campaign manager. You can have one."

His way: Dole's admirers insist that he will grow, that he can adjust his temperament and style to accommodate the campaign and, if he wins the White House, the presidency. In an interview last week with NEWSWEEK, Dole said he was trying to "let go of a lot of things," but in the same breath defended his need for tight control. "You stay out of trouble that way," he said. "I think my instincts are good. I keep telling my staff, 'If I goof up, they're not going to blame you, they're going to blame me.'" Dole was suggesting that whether he wins or loses he's going to do it his way—and only his way.