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Back on top, Dole keeps his hopes in check

But with the Republican landslide, the political equation is in his favor

By KATHARINE Q. SEELYE
N.Y. Times News Service

WASHINGTON — The world has flipped upside down, and suddenly Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., is on top. But with the low-key Dole, it can be hard to tell.

"S'pretty good," he muttered into the telephone Friday from his office in a standard Dole growl of understatement.

His miniature schmauzer, Leader, picked up no vibes that anything had changed. As photographers circled his master, the dog was flopped on the floor, unmoved.

Tuesday's Republican tide may have rescued Dole, 71, from the minority sidelines, elevating him, once more, to majority leader and holding out the promise of front-runner status if he runs again for president.

But Dole is one to keep his hopes in check. After all, he grew up poor in the Kansas dust bowl and was so grievously wounded in World War II that he was not expected to live, when he did survive, all he looked forward to was an Army pension.

"He never gets too high, and he never gets too low," said his long-time friend, former Sen. Warren Rudman, R-N.H. "That's very important, whether you're in the infantry or in the Senate. When everyone else is jumping around, he's very steady."

One clue to his new stature is his reading material.

"I'm going to read the Truman book," he said, slightly amused. "Everybody's reading

it." He was alluding to White House aides who were rifling through David McCullough's biography to see how Harry Truman, a Democratic president, dealt with a Republican Congress.

In the first two years of Bill Clinton's presidency, Dole, as minority leader, was already the most important Republican in Washington. In the next two he will not only have more power but also a lot of reinforcements. The whole political equation has tilted in his favor.

"Bob Dole has spent much of his career measuring himself against presidents and finding that he measures up," said Norman Ornstein, an analyst at the American Enterprise Institute. "He sees this election as a triumph for himself, and that gives him a springboard."

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RELISHING VICTORY



Flanked by Kansas GOP officeholders on the state and national levels, Sen. Bob Dole took part in a news conference Thursday at Forbes Field to discuss Republican election victories Tuesday. Dole, who will become Senate majority leader, said the election results sent a strong message.

—Chris Ochsner/
The Capital-Journal

Dole buoyed by Republican gains

By ROGER MYERS
The Capital-Journal

Flush with victory, Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., said he is ready to start doing things the way the American people want.

Calling the Republican capture of Congress in Tuesday's general elections a "sea change in politics," Sen. Bob Dole said Thursday the sweeping GOP victory "sent a powerful message from the American people everywhere."

The Kansas Republican, who will become Senate majority leader as a result of the party's big congressional gains, said he is ready to start doing the things the people of the

country and Kansas want.

"We didn't lose an incumbent Republican senator, House member or governor," Dole said during a news conference at the Forbes Field terminal. "So it wasn't an anti-incumbent year, but it carried a strong message."

All the members of the Kansas congressional delegation, including two new Republican members, and all the GOP candidates for state office, including two who lost, took part in the news conference.

It was preceded by a private 15-minute meeting of Dole and the con-

gressional and state office Republicans.

Sen. Nancy Kassebaum and Rep. Jan Meyers, the 3rd District congresswoman, agreed the election results sounded a loud call for change in Congress.

"I believe it was a message the people have sent that they want government to work better," Kassebaum said.

Said Meyers: "I think we've heard a powerful message from the American people that they think the fed-

eral government is too big and they would like us to address the problem of deficit reduction.

"I'm particularly interested in the problems of small business, and I think they would like welfare reform addressed."

Meyers will become chairwoman of the House Small Business Committee as a result of the Republican takeover of Congress.

Dole said he will be able to work with Rep. Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., the probable new speaker of the House, to carry out the Republican agenda.

The Senate GOP leader said Gingrich "used to lob bombs my way" back in the old days when Gingrich was a new congressman, but added, "I think that's past."

Dole said Congress is scheduled to debate the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade when it reconvenes for a lame duck session later this month.

Dole said he thinks the controversial trade agreement is close to having enough votes to pass.

But he said House and Senate leaders will need help from President Clinton, who supports GATT, to get it approved.

"We need some help because we have people, especially in the Wichita area, who are really upset by the World Trade Organization that the GATT would establish," Dole said. "Maybe they don't understand it. They

think some banana republic will have as much of a vote as the United States, and they think we're giving up our sovereignty."

He said changes have been made in the GATT to prevent that.

Dole also said he thinks the Republican victories were a mandate for term limits on members of Congress.

"I think the American people have spoken on term limits," Dole said. "I don't support making them retroactive, but I think term limits are probably going to happen."

He said he hopes the American people will give Republicans longer than two years to pass and implement their programs, then added, "If we don't do any better (than Democrats), then out we go."

Dole said the Republican takeover of Congress handed Kansas a golden opportunity.

He noted that Rep. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., the 1st District congressman, will become chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, which will write a new five-year farm plan next session.

Meyers' chairmanship of the House Small Business Committee will be helpful "because there are a lot of small businesses in Kansas," Dole said.

"We're going to talk about defense, too, and I think it's going to be better because we think some of (the defense cutbacks) have gone too far and too fast," he said.

That should benefit the aircraft industry in Wichita.

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Republicans eye more than Congress

By Stewart M. Powell
and Vic Ostrowdzki
Herald Newspapers

WASHINGTON — After Republicans captured the House, the Senate and gained at least seven governorships last week, many party leaders began thinking the White House is next.

Republican presidential aspirants took a fresh look at President Clinton's strengths and vulnerabilities within hours of last Tuesday's GOP landslide, even though New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation presidential primary is still 15 months away.

"They can hardly control themselves," observed analyst Stuart Rothenberg. "They regard Tuesday as the beginning of the presidential campaign and the public's judgment that Bill Clinton is a loser."

Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., the two-time presidential candidate due to lead the GOP-controlled Senate in January, barely opened his post-election news conference before talking about 1996.

"I've thought about it," admitted the five-term senator, a World War II combat veteran and, at the age of 71, the oldest of the prospective GOP candidates. "I didn't reach any conclusion. But (the GOP success) elevates your interest for a while."

Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, 52, who collected a host of IOUs heading the organization that helped Republicans retake the Senate, said the repudiation of Democrats signaled Americans' appetite for "less government and more freedom."

Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., 64, the former prosecutor and pro-choice Republican, abruptly announced that he would unveil an exploratory committee for a presidential bid. Specter should gain the national spotlight while heading the Senate intelligence committee's upcoming overhaul of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Most prospective candidates have spent months quietly courting support in states with early caucuses or primaries, such as Iowa and New Hampshire.

Former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, 53; former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander, 54; and former



Associated Press photo

Sen. Robert Dole, who will soon resume his post as Senate majority leader, gets his portrait taken in his office on Capitol Hill. Dole is in good shape to hold the frontrunner's position among his fellow Republicans who will seek to oust President Clinton in 1996.

Vice President Dan Quayle, 47, have raised money and started the laborious process of knitting a web of loyalists into a nationwide organization.

Alexander has inaugurated the Republican Neighborhood Meeting, a monthly satellite television program that now reaches GOP activists in 40 states. Quayle has crisscrossed the country on behalf of his best selling memoir, "Standing Firm."

Presidential campaigns are "essentially entrepreneurial efforts generated by individuals," says Sidney M. Milkis, a political scientist at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass. "You don't have an existing fabric that will organize the campaign so each individual has to start early."

Candidates are mindful that the race for the GOP nomination will likely be decided within the first 90 days of 1996. Now that Ohio and California have shifted their June presidential primaries to join comparable contests in Texas, Illinois, Michigan and a variety of smaller states in March, more than 60 percent of the delegates to the Republican National Convention will be chosen by the end of March.

The schedule works against any late-blooming candidates. For example, if Colin Powell, 57, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were to become a candidate in mid-1995, he might find his natural supporters and contributors already committed to other candidates.

On the other hand, this fast-start timetable could boost the prospects of candidates with built-in political bases. Examples include governors who enter — and win — early influential primaries as favorite sons in their home states.

Potential candidates in this category include California Gov. Pete Wilson, 61, a former senator and mayor of San Diego; Michigan Gov. John Engler, 46; Ohio Gov. George Voinovich, 58; Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, 52; and Massachusetts Gov. William Weld, 59.

Dole has a ready-made national podium as Senate majority leader to enhance any presidential campaign. His hard-driving bid for the GOP nomination in 1988 against then-Vice

DOLE: Victory won't make job any easier

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But there are complications. Can he switch from his role as minority leader, effectively thwarting Democratic legislation, to the job of forging a viable Republican agenda? Can he serve as both majority leader and run a presidential campaign — especially when two fellow Republicans, Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas and Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania also have their eyes on the White House?

And what of the feisty new speaker of the House, Rep. Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., who once called Dole "the tax collector for the welfare state?" Gingrich's incendiary pronouncements in the post-election frenzy all but eclipsed the understated Dole and will egg him further to the right than he might want to move?

For a while, at least, Dole and Gingrich will try to work in tandem. "They are both serious people who understand they are yoked together," said William Kristol, a Republican theoretician. "The success of each is linked to the other, and the Republican Congress needs to succeed."

But this is an odd pairing. Where Gingrich is expansive, verbal and visionary, Dole is laconic, flinty and tactical.

Where Gingrich delegates authority, Dole is stringently self-reliant.

Where the boyish Gingrich is exuberant over his newfound power, the darker Dole is stepping gingerly, casting himself as the cooler head, profoundly aware that the impatient voters who gave them strength can just as easily snatch it away.

"He knows this is a test," said Sen. Alan K. Simpson, R-Wyo., a friend of Dole. "Anytime he flunks it, it will be magnified into criticism of any presidential aspirations."

In contrast to Gingrich, who will likely become the speaker with the blueprint in the "Contract With America," Dole appears to be improvising. His vision, it seems, is whatever works.

"He has an ideology, but he is not an ideologue," Ornstein said. "He does not have the sharp set of priorities that Phil Gramm or Newt have. He is more skilled in legislating, but this is not prized by his more confrontational colleagues."

Dole used to say that his dream was to be majority leader with a president of the opposite party. But now that such an opportunity presents itself, he hesitates to specify what he wants to do.

"Obviously, I'm getting all these suggestions from new members," he hedged in the interview. "But until we coordinate everything with the committee chairmen and the governors, it would be too early to say 'This is Bob Dole's agenda,' because it may not be anyone else's."

What, then, is his goal as majority leader? "To try to give people some feeling that we can get something done other than appropriations bills," he said. "There ought to be some way with this modern technology — we do nothing all day and don't start voting until dark. Members should be disciplined enough to work in the daytime."

Dole, who was elected to the House in 1960 and to the Senate in 1968, has served longer as a Republican in Congress than anyone else. He said he knew that the institution was scorned. "People consider us part of the problem," he said, but he cannot mask his skepticism about overhauling it.

"If we do lobbying reform, ethics reform, congressional reform, make all these laws apply to us, is that enough?" he asked. "We did some things two years ago, and I didn't see anybody ride in here and say, 'Boy, this is great!'"

Dole said he would decide by mid-February whether to run for president.

"He has to sort out how he can manage the running of the Senate as well as manage a campaign," Rudman said. But he added that Dole also had to learn, contrary to his nature, to be less controlling. "This is a totally self-made man who had to fight every inch of the way," Rudman said.