

Dole courts New Hampshire

GOP hopefuls head to site of first vote

By JOHN KING
The Associated Press
KEENE, N.H. — Bob Dole has been here before and knows New Hampshire activists take their presidential primary pretty seriously, often demanding to meet candidates several times before choosing sides. Still, he's got a shortcut in mind.
"I'm willing to meet each of you three times today," the Senate majority leader joked Saturday as he opened his campaign in the state that derailed his last White

House bid in 1988.
"I would just say on this first day of what is going to be a long journey, I'd appreciate your help," Dole told an overflow crowd of more than 300 people at the Keene library.
And so it began.
A year before the first votes are cast, the Republicans who would be president are busy raising money. Several have already paid multiple visits to the kickoff states of Iowa and New Hampshire.
But not until this weekend had Dole, the GOP's front-runner, hit the trail as a certain candidate. So his arrival, and tonight's state party dinner that is bringing more

than a half-dozen GOP contenders together for the first time, served as the ceremonial start of the 1996 campaign in New Hampshire.
Iowa and New Hampshire are the small states where voter-by-voter contact matters, where an unknown like Jimmy Carter can make a name for himself or where a big name like Lyndon Johnson or Dole can stagger.
Mindful of 1988, when he never recovered from losing New Hampshire to George Bush, Dole served notice Saturday he will not be outworked in this state. Dole was scrambling to nine town hall meetings over three days, managed an impromptu dinner stop

Saturday morning and took out a Sunday newspaper ad touting commitments from more than 20,000 New Hampshire Republicans.
"We're trying to make a statement here," Dole said. "This is for real."
Dole's greeting reinforced the perception he is the man to beat in the GOP field, as have early polls showing him well ahead of everyone else here. But he hardly had the place to himself.
Patrick Buchanan called together veterans of his "Buchanan's Brigade," looking to prove the 37



Sen. Bob Dole tells residents of Keene, N.H., that he planned to meet with them several times before the primary next year.

percent he tallied here in a primary challenge to Bush three years ago was no fluke.
Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar was also campaigning, hoping voters will launch him as a contender.
Due to join them over the weekend: GOP Sens. Phil Gramm of Texas and Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander and Rep. Robert Dornan, a conservative firebrand from California.
Dole has tried to improve his New Hampshire operation by courting old Bush supporters — the very folks whose hard work derailed his 1988 candidacy.
Several candidates approached Vicki Zachos, a 30-year veteran of New Hampshire GOP politics and former Republican National Committee member.
But she settled on Dole "because I think he has earned it. I can't imagine him not going all the way on this campaign."

Dole finds favor as run starts

Big crowds greet him in New Hampshire, where he has had trouble in the past.

By JAKE THOMPSON
Washington Correspondent

LEBANON, N.H. — On a glorious, shirt-sleeve-warm day Saturday, Sen. Bob Dole ran into something equally rare for him in New Hampshire: big crowds.

The Keene fire marshal turned people away from a town hall meeting at which Dole kicked off his 1996 presidential drive. Later, in Lebanon, about 300 people spilled out of a hotel conference room.

To the Lebanon crowd, Dole gave a simple reason he returned to a state that twice before ruined his presidential ambitions.

"You can't get rid of me," Dole said. "I just keep coming back. And I say that not because I'm driven, but I just think I have to do this thing — somehow I have to be president of the United States."

Dole, 71, looked merry, even relaxed, as he swooped around the state on a three-day, campaign-style tour of town meetings and events.

It is no mystery why.
"Clearly, Bob Dole is going into this race as the favorite and the front-runner," said Stephen Duprey, chairman of the New Hampshire Republican Party, who is officially neutral on the candidates. "He's a nationally known figure and he's been up there a long time."

But being the front-runner carries a special burden.

Expectations in New Hampshire and Iowa, which has the first caucus before New Hampshire, will be stratospheric for the Senate majority leader from Kansas.

He must lead in every category: fundraising, polls, grass-roots support and his ability to promote his vision. The

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A town meeting Saturday in a Lebanon, N.H., hotel was a stop for Bob Dole's presidential campaign. "I just keep coming back," he told the crowd. "And I say that not because I'm driven, but I just think I have to do this thing — somehow I have to be president of the United States."

Dole draws New Hampshire crowds

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primary is a year away, and the competition could be tough.

"It's still a wide-open race," Duprey added.

Tonight, the 1996 GOP presidential starting gun unofficially fires as 1,400 Republicans and 100 reporters fill a Manchester banquet room for a dinner billed "A Vision for America."

Dole will lead off nine likely and possible Republican candidates with speeches to be carried live nationwide on the cable television network C-SPAN.

Although New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary is 12 months away, party activists already are dividing into camps behind candidates sure to run: Dole, Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas and former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander.

Also testing the waters tonight will be Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana, Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, conservative commentator Pat Buchanan, U.S. Rep. Robert Dornan of California, and former Bush administration Secretary of State James Baker.

Because most of next year's primaries are condensed into a frenzied seven weeks ending March 26 in California, New Hampshire is considered the make-or-break state.

"The first primary or caucus is a slingshot into the next contest," said Stuart Rothenberg of the Rothenberg Political Report. "If a candidate does poorly in Iowa and New Hampshire and Arizona, then you have to start explaining why, rather than getting a message out."

As he was riding to the Lebanon airport Saturday, Dole acknowledged that he must win Iowa and New Hampshire next winter to grab the nomination.

"Whoever wins Iowa and New

Hampshire is going to have a head of steam," Dole said. "If you win them, my view is you're not going to be defeated."

One factor that could lose New Hampshire for Dole is something he can't change. He would be the oldest president inaugurated for a first term.

"Dole is going to be 73 (in 1996). He's had prostate cancer," said Michael Dupre, a sociologist and pollster at St. Anselm's College in Manchester. "If there's any question of his health, that could be a big concern."

Rather than play it seriously, Dole had some fun with the age issue Saturday.

"I've said to some people who think I'm too young to run I'll put Strom Thurmond (age 92) on the ticket," Dole said, amid laughter. "That'd balance the ticket out."

Yet Dole's dash across New Hampshire this weekend seems designed to allay questions about his vigor as well as his commitment to a state that has caused him great political heartache.

In his longest 1980 presidential try, Dole won 607 votes of nearly 150,000 cast in New Hampshire. Ronald Reagan won that race.

After a resounding Iowa caucus win in 1988, Dole's campaign meandered in New Hampshire. Sharp and focused, George Bush unexpectedly stunned Dole, winning 37 percent to 24 percent of the vote.

This time around, Dole and his backers believe everything is different. Dole is widely viewed as a chief party spokesman. Bush and Reagan have left the national political stage.

Dole's name recognition and stature will bring in the millions of dollars needed to compete next year, and he's building a grass-roots organization early, a top campaign official said.

Dole has some big-name backers in New Hampshire, but he lost former attorney general Tom Rath to the Alexander camp. Rath, who worked for Dole's 1988 campaign, believes Alexander's campaign more closely dovetails with the themes of the 1994 elections: a non-Washington message.

"Lamar's message is to redo the whole state and federal relationship," Rath said. "If the message that works is to simply realign the deck chairs in Washington, we'll pick a Washington candidate. I think we need to look very seriously at a non-Washington candidate."

By the same measure, Gramm, Alexander and others may have more freedom than does Dole, tied to the Senate as majority leader, to capitalize on how one wins in New Hampshire. You must hunt for support among its finicky conservative, anti-tax, pro-environment electorate, vote by vote.

"New Hampshire is still grass-roots," said Dupre at St. Anselm's College. "You'll hear people say, 'Have you made up your mind yet which candidate you'll support?'"

"Nope, haven't met 'em all yet."

Since the early 1980s, Dole has campaigned for and donated to many Republican candidates in the state, down to the town sheriffs.

He promised Saturday, "We'll be back a lot of times." Alexander spent weeks wandering the state last year.

Gramm recently told a New Hampshire luncheon it was his 75th event in the state since he became chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee three years ago.

At the Nashua home of Judy Jenkins, Gramm's New Hampshire grass-roots coordinator, the telephone rarely stops ringing

with calls from people volunteering to help.

"I've heard comments that Dole's too old or he's not as conservative as he used to be," Jenkins said. "From a Gramm point of view, while he's not as well-known as Dole, he's going to give him a run for the money."

Gramm recently has portrayed himself as more conservative than Dole.

The Senate majority leader responded Saturday, noting that an analysis of congressional votes shows he comes out more conservative.

"It's all about leadership," Dole said. "I've been a leader."

Most of all, Dole's campaign is counting on the rest of the nation sharing Ruth Griffin's feeling: "It's his time," the New Hampshire Republican committee-woman said.

After Dole spoke in Lebanon, Norman Porter said he'd vote for Dole.

"He's been in the forefront for a long time," said Porter, a man in his 60s. "We need someone with some age. Age is not a detriment. It's experience."

And while Stephen Duprey, the state GOP chairman, offered a favorable view of Dole's standing today, it is his wife's opinion Dole must worry about.

Susan Duprey, a lawyer and city official in Concord, N.H., is openly enthusiastic about Gramm. Gramm is funny, hard-nosed, "immensely bright," and takes definite positions without later backtracks, she said.

"He can do that better than Dole, who I view as more a compromiser," she said. "And I think I'm just tired out of him."

Come next February, Dole hopes most New Hampshire Republicans think just the opposite, saying instead, "Third time's a charm."