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It's one year away from the New Hampshire primary and the start of the 1996 presidential race.

Who looks good?

ONE YEAR OUT

By Steven Thomma
Eagle Washington bureau

WASHINGTON — Republicans, unified and disciplined on Capitol Hill, are about to break into open warfare over the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. Despite some high-profile withdrawals in recent weeks, the prospect of facing a damaged and vulnerable President Clinton is drawing a swarm of Republicans interested in challenging one another for the right to challenge him in 1996.

When New Hampshire Republicans gather today for a dinner to kick off the year leading to their first-in-the-nation primary, nine potential candidates for the 1996 GOP presidential nomination will line up to court their favor. At least four more, all governors, wait in the wings.

Potential candidates

- Lamar Alexander
- Patrick Buchanan
- Bob Dole
- Robert Dornan
- John Engler
- Phil Gramm
- Alan Keyes
- Richard Lugar
- Lynn Martin
- Arlen Specter
- Tommy Thompson
- William Weld
- Pete Wilson

Warm reception but tough questions for Dole: On the campaign trail in New Hampshire. 12A

Some analysts believe that those withdrawals left the competition a two-man race, between Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole of Kansas, who leads in broad-based polls, and Texas Sen. Phil Gramm, who leads in surveys of party activists.

But they will not be alone. By the time the polls open in New Hampshire on Feb. 20, 1996, there could be half-dozen or more names on the ballot.

Given the conservative tide, few will dare to be moderate.

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Bob Dole
Senate majority leader
Appears to be the front-runner but may have liabilities as a candidate.



Phil Gramm
Texas senator
He's a favorite among the influential conservative party activists.



Lamar Alexander
Former Tennessee governor
He's an outsider, but he doesn't stir much passion.

GOP
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Indeed, Ralph Reed, director of the Christian Coalition, has warned that the influential bloc of Christian conservative voters would turn thumbs down on a presidential or vice presidential candidate who fails their litmus test on such conservative social issues as abortion.

Polls suggest that Dole is the front-runner.

He has legions of friends across the country, particularly in states where he has helped Republicans over the years. As majority leader, he has more stature and visibility than any competitor. He is positioned to raise plenty of money.

But he has potential liabilities as a candidate.

Now 71, he would be the oldest president ever inaugurated for a first term. He has hinted he might address worries about his age by promising to seek only one term. But questions linger among the rank and file.

As leader of Senate Republicans, Dole has had to forge compromises with Democrats and with moderate Republicans. The new House speaker, Newt Gingrich, once angrily derided Dole's role in negotiating compromise tax policies by calling him the "tax collector for the welfare state."

While Gingrich himself now finds his new role as a leader forces him to compromise, the mood among young and aggressive Republicans is one of confrontation rather than conciliation.

And, Dole has been rejected before. His run for the Oval Office in 1980 never got off the ground. And the momentum from his win in the Iowa caucuses in 1988 disintegrated when he moved to face the more conservative voters of New Hampshire.

"Dole is a 71-year-old Washington insider who has been in the Senate for decades," said political analyst Stuart Rothenberg. "He talks process."

To soften his image as a dour, aging insider, Dole has recently bantered with David Letterman on television and is pondering whether to host the decidedly irreverent — and youth-oriented — "Saturday Night Live" show.

Rothenberg believes the 1996 GOP nomination will be decided by money, organization and message. He suggests that Dole has the organization and will have the money, but still lacks the hard-core conservative message.

While Dole leads in general polls, Gramm wins in surveys of conservative Republican activists. Most recently, 40 percent of the attendees at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington picked Gramm as their favorite. Only 12 percent picked Dole.

With his in-your-face, take-no-prisoners style, Gramm appeals to conservatives who believe this is the moment to push their agenda to the hilt.

Though he has been in the Senate for 10 years, Gramm comes across as an outsider. That is because he is against almost everything that happens in Washington. He opposed health-care reform back when even Dole said he thought Congress should pass some reform. He jumped out early against the first and eventually failed Mexican bailout plan when Dole and Gingrich were supporting it.

"It's bizarre, but here you have a man who has been a senator for quite a while and yet he appeals to the outside, still-mad-at-Washington groups," said Barbara Sinclair, a political scientist at the University of California-Riverside.

CAMPAIGN SCHEDULE

One reason the race for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination is getting off to an early start is that compared with previous campaigns, more states will be holding primaries and caucuses in February and March. About 70 percent of the delegates to the GOP convention will be chosen in those months. Here's a tentative calendar for February and March 1996.

Feb. 12 — Iowa

Feb. 20 — New Hampshire

Feb. 24 — Delaware

Feb. 27 — South Dakota

March 5 — Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, Vermont

March 7 — New York, North Carolina

March 9 — Nevada, South Carolina

March 12 — Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas

March 19 — Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio

March 26 — California, Connecticut

Some analysts believe the withdrawals have left it a two-man race, between Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole of Kansas and Texas Sen. Phil Gramm.

As an economic conservative, he appeals to many of the people who can write the \$1,000 checks that will be crucial in the compressed primary season.

But Gramm strikes some as mean. Even many Republicans in Congress don't like him. He boasts that he didn't come to Washington to be loved and hasn't been disappointed.

Lamar Alexander, the former governor of Tennessee and education secretary for President Bush, is pitching himself as the true anti-Washington insider in the field.

Alexander started his outsider campaign last year with a catchy proposal to cut the pay of Congress and reduce it to a part-time body. But that message is less appealing to conservative Republicans now that they run the place.

And he may have difficulty energizing voters.

"I don't think he's going to stimulate that kind of gut anger," said Sinclair.

The other six would-be candidates going to New Hampshire are far less likely to catch fire. They are Sens. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Richard Lugar of Indiana, Rep. Robert Dornan of California, former Labor Secretary Lynn Martin, television commentator Patrick Buchanan and former Senate candidate Alan Keyes from Maryland.

Some may be considering joining the campaign to posture for the vice presidential nomination. Others are probably craving the attention for their ideas. And some, of course, are hoping for the bolt of lightning that would catapult them to the front ranks.

Take Specter. A moderate, Specter has gone out of his way to criticize the growing influence in the party of Christian conservatives. Given their hostility toward him, it is almost impossible that he could win the nomination. Yet he continues to make campaign appearances, using the platform to continue his criticism.

Or Lugar. He locked up commitments from Indiana contributors early, helping push fellow Hoosier Quayle out of the race. A thoughtful and effective senator, Lugar's exper-

tise in foreign affairs does little to stir Republican passions. Yet he wants very much to talk about the lingering dangers of nuclear weapons in Russia even though the issue has dropped off the political radar screen with the end of the Cold War.

Then there are the governors. None is scheduled to speak to New Hampshire Republicans today, although any could visit the state at a moment's notice.

Four governors make most lists of potential candidates: John Engler of Michigan, Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, William Weld of Massachusetts and Pete Wilson of California.

All have pushed budget cuts, anti-crime packages and welfare reforms.

Wilson, of course, comes from the state with the most delegates and the most votes, making him instantly credible should he decide to run. He also could raise a lot of money from California Republicans.

And, Rothenberg noted, Wilson is a "very, very savvy politician" who has a "phenomenal ability to smell out winning political issues." Last year, when he trailed in his re-election bid, he signed onto the California proposition to end state benefits for illegal immigrants. The proposition caught fire with angry voters, and so did Wilson. Now, California is gearing up for an anti-affirmative action proposition in 1996.

But Wilson is "off the Republican reservation on moral issues," said Rothenberg. His support for abortion rights and gay rights leaves him unpopular with Christian conservatives.

Sinclair said it is wrong to assume that Wilson would even have California locked up. He may have won re-election last year against Democrat Kathleen Brown, but Republican conservatives would have other choices in a GOP primary.

Weld, who also supports abortion rights and gay rights, has the same problem with Christian conservatives.

Thompson and Engler, both widely respected for their tax cuts and welfare reforms, also are socially conservative. But they are less known, and perhaps less capable of raising the kind of money needed for a national campaign.

There is a wild card in the deck, one whose name will likely not be mentioned at the New Hampshire dinner but whose presence will be felt nonetheless.

Retired Gen. Colin Powell, enormously popular, has not yet indicated whether he will run for president, or if he would run as a Republican, Democrat or independent. Should he appear in New Hampshire in coming months, it is a sure bet the Republican field will watch his every step.

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Dole throws out first pitch to New Hampshire voters

By Richard L. Berke
New York Times News Service

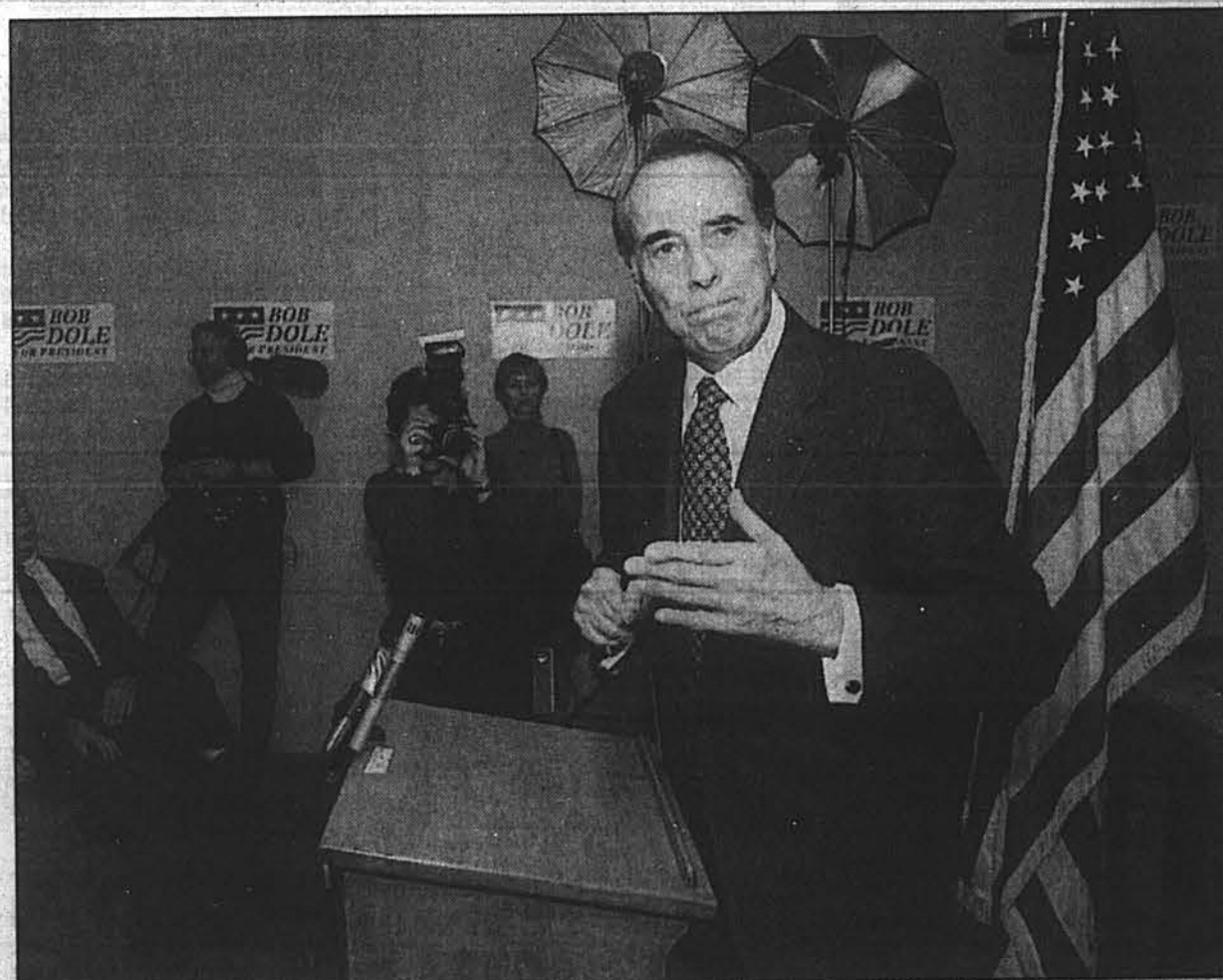
KEENE, N.H. — The audience that gathered in a library auditorium the first town meeting of Sen. Bob Dole's presidential bid had barely taken their coats off when they made it obvious that they would not go easy on him.

The location had been carefully chosen, one of the few parts of the state where Dole had run well in the 1988 Republican primary, and his reception, overall, was warm. Still, the pesky questions came thick and fast, on abortion, legalizing marijuana and school prayer.

The toughest question came from a nervous though determined Norman May, 67, a retired school principal from the nearby town of Rindge. "Are you worried about the age issue? I hate to bring it up because I voted for you the last time. That is going to be a factor and how are you going to address that?"

The 71-year-old majority leader, deftly responded with a quip about a 92-year-old Senate colleague: "I'm not worried about it at all. Some people think I'm too young. I've been willing to put Strom Thurmond on the ticket for balance."

The nation's first presidential primary, in New Hampshire, is not for a year. But a state party dinner that serves as the primary's opening bell is expected to bring as many as nine presidential aspirants to the state, including three of Dole's Senate colleagues, Phil Gramm of Texas, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Richard Lugar of Indiana, along with former Tennessee Gov. Lamar



Sen. Bob Dole entered the fray Saturday in Keene, N.H. with the first full-fledged events of his third attempt for the Republican presidential nomination.

Alexander and Patrick Buchanan, the television commentator who ran strongly in New Hampshire in 1992. However far away the actual vote, the senator from Kansas acted as if there was no time to waste.

With a smile stuck on his face, he entered the fray with the first full-fledged events of his third attempt for the Republican presidential nomination. The meeting in this town near the

Vermont border, and one later in the day north of Keene in Lebanon, were the first of a dozen public appearances he had scheduled over the weekend. New Hampshire voters never

make it easy for politicians. Accustomed to groveling from the candidates trying to win over the first people who vote in a primary, voters in New Hampshire often see themselves as akin to professional jurors who know best who should get the nomination.

Their questions are not just about global and national issues. More than one person asked Dole what he would do about plans to curtail train and air service to the state. (He said he would get on the case without making promises.)

But Dole endured the exercise with good reason. Recent history has shown that Republicans who win in New Hampshire usually wind up with their party's nomination — as Dole learned from his humiliating defeat by George Bush in New Hampshire in 1988.

Dole is far ahead in the early polls in New Hampshire and nationwide. But, as he told the voters in Keene, he was fooled the last time. "All the polls were good," he said. "But then, the people voted."

That is why, Dole assured the voters he met Saturday that he will be back. Again. And again. "I know that about town meetings," he said. "You don't talk too long if you're the candidate because people want to ask the questions."

Ask they did. Dole was ready to be questioned about his age. He said he had endured a round of prostate cancer but feels great. "I'm on the treadmill every time I'm home, if I get my wife off it," he said. "If you follow me around for a day, I think you'd find that age is not an issue."

The answer satisfied May, to a point. "I'm 90 percent convinced it's not a factor," he said. His older brother, 73-year-old Clarence, was not so sure. "That's going to be the battle cry: 'He's too old.'"

Though there was some grumbling by audience members afterward, Dole managed to finesse the abortion question by saying he was against abortion but that the issue should not divide the party. "Our strength is in jobs, welfare reform, cutting back the size of government, less regulation for American business," he said. "And that's where we ought to rally."

Dole did not let his often too-fast-for-his-own-good retorts get the best of him when a woman told him: "I'm addressing the need to at least legalize the hemp plant, which I understand grows quite easily in the state of Kansas."

Rather than let the questioner engage him, Dole turned his answer into something about the importance of a workable crime bill. He also managed to sidestep questions about his competition with Gramm, saying, "I'm not sure the people in New Hampshire want me to get in a fistfight."

The audiences also gave the senator a chance to field-test a message. He put it most plainly in Lebanon, asserting, "The thrust of my campaign is going to be: rein in the federal government."

So far, Dole seemed to be enjoying himself. "There were more people here than I saw in New Hampshire in '88," he told the standing-room-only crowd at a hotel in Lebanon. Just 367 days to go and at least that many more pesky questions from New Hampshire voters.