



32

LEFT: VINCENT J. MUSI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. RIGHT: C.

He's not a visionary. He's not an outsider.
He's not even angry.

In this climate, Senator Dole
has begun to look like

UNCLE BOB

But is that what America wants in
a President? By Ruth Shalit

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OFFEE, COFFEE, COFFEE," SENATOR BOB DOLE says, peering into a muddy cup of instant espresso. "One more sip of that good stuff. Ahhh. That's good." It's 6:20 A.M. on the opening day of the 104th Congress, and the soon-to-be Senate majority leader is relaxing in the Capitol Building's television anteroom, cracking jokes and gulping the foul brew from gold-rimmed china cups. Up close, he looks tired. There are

bluish shadows under his eyes, and his striped silk necktie is slightly askew. But as he barnstorms through the morning news programs, explaining in his rumbling bass voice his plans for the new Congress, Dole is on a roll.

In less than six hours, he will be transformed from minority leader to majority leader, from the Senate's critic to its commander; already the tightly coiled, slightly menacing figure of years past seems a changed man: jaunty, self-possessed, aglow with power. "Hope you sleep better this year," he tells the crew of the "Today" show, fixing his tie with a few energetic tugs. "Ought to,

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with Republicans in charge." Not even the news of Kathleen Gingrich's indiscreet disclosure to Connie Chung fazes him. "Too bad about the Connie Chung thing," he muses in the elevator. "That's going to be the big news today." He knits his eyebrows. "Agghh, my mother would have said, 'Off the record.'"

The day's solemn ceremonies won't begin until noon, and as yellowish daylight begins to seep through the windows of the Capitol dome, Dole zigzags across his domain, greeting well-wishers, touching bases. A tall, sharp-featured man, he strides down the columned hallways, head thrust forward, body rigidly erect. Ear-piercing victory shrieks echo all the way down the corridors. "Go

get 'em, Senator!" "Congratulations, Senator!" "Go, Dole! We're with you!" Dole basks in the warmth. To the crowds on the sidelines, he warbles, "Happy New Year. . . . It's a great day for the country." To reporters: "Unhhh, I could whisper to you about '96!"

At 8:30 A.M., Dole eases into the pleated upholstery of his chauffeured Lincoln Town Car and heads over to the Washington Court Hotel for a "Friends of Connie Mack Breakfast Buffet." At the breakfast, the Republican leader shakes dozens of hands, poses for photographs — "Heh, heh, I'm on the far right here" — and signs countless autographs in his large, widely tilted script.

"We did it, huh?" gushes Priscilla Mack, the wife of the Florida Senator. "We put it together. You ought to come down and see us again." Dole drops an eyebrow. "I'll be down there, don't worry," he says. "Something happening in '96."

Back in Dole's office, the mood is languid. The snug sitting room is bathed in the soft light of crystal chandeliers. Carved walnut chairs upholstered in red damask stand along the walls. As Dole sips his skim milk and picks at his cranberry muffin,