

swapping wisecracks with David Letterman ("Thought it went pretty good. Guy's easy, though"), helping to raise more than \$6 million for the disabled through the Dole Foundation.

"He's a very tender, loving man," says Elizabeth Dole. "He always has been. But that's not what people see." She is sitting in her tidy, chintz-covered office at the American Red Cross, wringing her manicured hands in wifely dismay. Now 58, Liddy Dole is an attractive, engaging woman with bright brown eyes and sharp chin. Perched in a stiff armchair, she defends her husband's often-dour demeanor.

"I guess the phrase I'm looking for is frontier spirit, or pioneer spirit," she says. "Does that say something to you in terms of his ability to take the hard knocks of life without cringing?" The real Bob Dole, she continues, has not been captured. "Why, just last month, Bob invited our whole apartment building for a party in his office. Then he was unhappy, because none of the employees of the building showed up. Well, it turned out they hadn't gotten invitations! So we had to have another party inviting all the employees. Now, these things are going on all the time, but people don't know them. He never talks about them. He's just a private guy."

When Dole finally announces his candidacy, she will quit her job as president of the American Red Cross and work full time on the campaign. "I look at the way he's doing things, quietly and effectively, whether it's his public service career or whether it's privately, and I realize, this is Bob Dole," she says. "This is the part of him that needs to be told."

She leans forward in her chair. "Did you see the '60 Minutes' tape, where he teared up? Or at former President Nixon's funeral? He teared up there too. And there have been other little glimpses. He's letting his guard down a little bit. Maybe he's mellowed a little bit." Part of the strategy, she says, has been to persuade him to shed his reluctance to talk about his war wound. "You look at the three years he spent in the hospital, fighting his way back from total paralysis. It affects your whole life, in terms of the way you approach things. Sometimes, I forget he has this disability, and I may ask him to hang a picture. And he says, 'Now, Elizabeth, how do I hold the nail and hammer it with one hand?'"

His packagers are presenting him as an improved if not quite a new Bob Dole. "You really do mellow with age," insists David Keene, a G.O.P. consultant and close Dole adviser. "But it's not just age. He's different than he used to be. Maybe it's just sort of a long conversation with himself. He really does seem more comfortable in his own skin than he has in the past."

Displaying on this day no grand new talent for introspection — or no new willingness to share the results of his introspection — Dole merely says he is working to keep the sting out of his shafts. "I'm much more relaxed now," he



says. "I've learned about the sharpness. Part of it, I think, is that it's just a more pleasant time for me." Can a softer Bob Dole find the national base of support that has eluded him in the past? "Every-

On the inside track: Dole with his chief of staff, Sheila Burke, and Trent Lott, the majority whip.

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LEFT AND RIGHT: VINCENT J. MUSI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. TOP: NI

thing at the moment is going in his direction," says Frank Luntz, a Republican pollster. "In mid-1993, he was seen as being overly partisan, unnecessarily divisive and a dark spirit. Today, all three of those attributes no longer exist. He is now seen as being an effective leader and someone who is very stable and secure. In the eyes of the American people, this is not the same Bob Dole they saw 18 months ago or six years ago."

Dole claims to see no deep meaning in the rehabilitation of his image. "If I had to say what it was caused by, it's people watching Clinton and Gingrich, and I sort of got a weekend pass," he muses. "People are saying, Bob Dole's sure looking good. But compared to what? There's a sense that this or that person may be too partisan, too strident, too acerbic, whatever... If you go back to the morgue and look at the old stories, I was called the sheriff of the Senate. I was the tough guy, I was Nixon's point man, I was this, I was that. Everything's one day at a time around here. Sort of like A.A."

MIKE MURPHY IS A 30-SOMETHING REPUBLICAN adman who produced spots for Dole in the '88 campaign. This year, he has signed on with Lamar Alexander. "I wish Dole weren't running," sighs Murphy, between bites of a soft chicken taco. "I do hate being against him. And in fact, I told Lamar that I will never make an untrue, vicious, negative ad about Bob Dole. Gramm is another thing. And I will gut him like a catfish. But I will not do a cheap shot on Dole. Because Dole's weakness in politics is that he tells the truth. And you just can't be punished for that." Delicately, Murphy wipes his mouth with a napkin.

"Nonetheless," he says, "there are things in a campaign that are fundamentally true. And what's fundamentally true is there is an ongoing distrust of Washington. Lamar has spent most of his career doing stuff outside of Washington. And Bob Dole's been in Washington since I've been born." Murphy orders fried ice cream for dessert. "There's just been this fabulous new revolution in Republican politics," he says. "There's this whole new debate going on. I love Bob Dole, but this just isn't his moment."

Back in Dole '96 headquarters, the campaign manager, Scott Reed, begs to differ. Today is his first day on the job, and his sleek corner office is piled high with boxes. His desk is bare except for a yellow legal pad and a copy of Dole's daily schedule. "The '94 election was a revolutionary election," he says. "The Republican Party gained so much up and down the ticket. And the question is, Is Bob Dole positioned to fulfill that revolution? I think he is."

Dole on Gingrich: 'I wonder, ... Why can't I think like this guy? Is there something wrong with me?' Then I think, 'Well, maybe not.'

we have change." Jo-Anne Coe, Dole's campaign finance director, is comfortably ensconced in the next office. A thick-set woman with bowl-cut dark hair and hexagonal glasses, Coe has been with Dole for 27 years. "If you look back in history, you see that nominations are won consistently by the front-runners," she says. "This worked against us in '88. It works for us today. All these other candidates are very well qualified. But they're up against the same kind of problems we had with George Bush." Coe leans forward, genuine emotion in her voice and face. "We're not yet in the mode of picking curtains for the White House," she says. "But this is his time. He's worked hard for this. He deserves it. He's earned it. It's his turn."

But is it? As flame-throwing Newtoids turn Washington upside down, Dole remains unreconstructed, an old-stripe Republican moderate with little interest in ideological revolutions. He disdains Reaganomics: "If you're looking for ideology — well, there's Ronald Reagan. Then you see how the debt went up during those years." He seems equally unenthusiastic about the Contract With America. "If you look back at 1994, people say it was won because of the Contract With America. Well, surveys show, what, 10, 12 percent of voters knew what it was all about." He sees no vast ideological meaning in the Republicans' recent electoral landslide. "The American people were voting for change," he says. "Just as I assume they were voting for change in 1992. If anybody could tell me precisely what the message was, I'll eat their hat."

He knows his insider's reputation is unlikely to play well in a nation fed up with the Capitol elite. Nevertheless, he thinks the problem is surmountable. "I guess you have a series of 30-second spots,"

Reed elaborates. "There are three qualities that people are going to be looking at. Leadership, trust and good strong conservative values. Dole has all three of these." This perception is backed up by the polls, says William Lacy, deputy campaign chairman. "When you look across the board a large number of primary voters say that Bob Dole is their second choice. What that tells us is that he's someone everyone is comfortable with."

Asked if Dole is too much a creature of Washington, Reed stresses his candidate's outside-the-Beltway bona fides. "Washington isn't where he came from," he says. "He came from real, grass-roots America. He came to Washington to try to change things. It's been a long, hard struggle. And now, finally,

he says. "Who is this person? Why would you want to vote for this him? Otherwise, it's just Bob Dole, the guy who's been here forever." Anger slips out around the edges of his voice. "It's Bob Dole, the insider, you know, the insider, the insider. Or the partisan, the partisan, the partisan. Or the deal maker, the deal maker, the deal maker." He sputters out the final word, wrinkling up his nose and raising his left hand with his fingers cramped in horror. "They think: Bob Dole. He's out there just cutting up everybody."

With Senator Phil Gramm, a hard-core conservative, raising millions in campaign funds and Gov. Pete Wilson of California and Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana lurking in the wings,



What do the President and Newt Gingrich have in common? Each has helped rejuvenate Dole's image.

the Republican contest is certain to heat up. For Dole, the temptation to veer hard right will be strong. Can he resist it and still be elected President? Dole insists he can. "You have to put your stamp on the party," he says. "You've got to be able to stand up and look people in the eye and say: This is America. Otherwise, your party's going to be going one way. And you'll be going another."

First and foremost, advisers say, he must not allow himself to be sidetracked by the demands of his Congressional leadership post. "His biggest problem as a candidate has been and is that he's a Senator," says Keene. "The more he fits into one category, the more difficult he finds it to operate in the other."

Dole's legislative outlook eats into his time and attention, and tends to define his candidacy. "Bob Dole's problem is that he does not come across as a conviction politician," says Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform. "He acts and talks as if he's giving color commentary in a football game, rather than being a participant and quarterback. When you ask him, 'What about health care?' he doesn't say, 'We're

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