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fighting to stop government-run health care and move to a market-based system." He says things like, "The Democrats don't have the votes." He gives you the play-by-play, totally detached from any sense that he is rooting for one team or another.

Even supporters suggest that Dole's immersion in legislative detail has narrowed his vision. "He has to break through 30 years of training and thinking to be able to talk about what he wants, rather than how to do it and mechanics," says a Dole campaign strategist. "He was up in New Hampshire recently, and someone asked him about something, and his response was: 'We have a bill about that. We can handle it. We'll work it all out in conference.' The voter was thinking, 'What is this guy talking about?' Getting him to change from legislative tactics to strategic thoughts about where he wants to take things is clearly going to be our biggest challenge."

Dole will have to walk a thin line in the primaries. If he moves too far right, he risks alienating moderate suburban Republicans and — should he get that far — swing voters in the general election. Equally dangerous, his advisers say, is his tendency to backslide into an all-too-comfortable moderate mode that is anathema to movement conservatives, who vote heavily in Republican primaries.

Dole's Jan. 21 speech to the Republican National Committee was sprinkled with right-wing crowd pleasers. "Let me repeat what Ronald Reagan said a few years ago, because it fits the day: 'In this present crisis, Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.' ... It's called the message. Limited government. Rein in the Federal Government. Give more power to the people." He promised to cut taxes and asked the audience to keep in mind that President Clinton "passed the single biggest tax increase in the history of America."

Alas, the speech drew un-

basically understands it, who's been engaged in it for a long time, who's met all these foreign leaders, as I have."

On first look, his proposals seem disconnected. He wants a "peace powers" act to curb the commitment of troops and dollars to U.N. peace-keeping operations. "Haiti, Rwanda, Somalia," he says scornfully. "Add them all up, it's over a half billion a year." This January, Dole introduced legislation to end U.S. participation in the U.N. arms embargo on Bosnia, and also pledged that Congress would examine the Administration's pledge of economic aid to North Korea.

The connective thread, Dole says, is a pragmatic assessment of American interests. "In the Clinton years, there's been all this multilateralism. Gonna turn it over to the U.N. Not enough U.S. leadership. Clinton didn't really want to spend any time on foreign policy, and said so." In Dole's more muscular view, multilateralism is a myth. "We don't need that anymore."

In addition, Dole's military service could be extraordinarily helpful in the general election. "I thought, at first, I feel sorry for this guy," he says of President Clinton. "Veterans are very — I don't want to say selfish, but they're very proud of what they did. Then when you have someone who just sort of actively tries to avoid the draft — I mean, that's a no-no. I will assume that if I'm the candidate, I will have a lot of support from veterans groups. Got some lined up already."

The most immediate threat to Dole is the Contract With America, which will pose an early test of his loyalty to the Republican revolution. "Here's what worries me a little," he says wearily. "Let's say the House passes all these things and they get dumped in the Senate. Well, what's going to happen is we're not going to get everything. Democrats in the Senate are going to kill some of it. And the larger question is, do I get blamed for that? I mean, most people don't understand how the Senate works. Some people are going to say,

kind reviews from the party faithful. "He's communicating as a candidate of 1988," lamented Tony Fabrizio of the G.O.P. polling firm of Fabrizio & McLaughlin & Associates. "This is not the anti-government rhetoric of the 1990's. When Gingrich talks about dismantling government, he talks in terms of Washington being destructive. He describes the whole system and what it's doing to ruin the country. It is very direct, very stark and very moving. Bob Dole's rhetoric comes across more like George Bush. There's no emotion, no passion there." He continues: "The politics of the 1990's on the conservative side involves passion, emotion; it involves people who are taking their country back. These are the people who are voting in primaries. I don't see that passion in Bob Dole."

IT WILL TAKE MORE than speeches to endear Dole to the movement conservatives. "It's interesting to watch Bob Dole try to intuit his way into this new political arena," says Jeff Eisenach, head of Newt Gingrich's Progress and Freedom Foundation and a close adviser to the Speaker. "I don't know how you persuade anybody that he's a plausible leader of the revolution, given his role in creating the current system." Frank Luntz agrees: "If I want to understand the institution of Congress, I'll sit down with Bob Dole. If I want to change America, I'm going with Newt Gingrich."

Conservatives still remember Dole's role — with Senator George McGovern — in strengthening the food stamp program and in his heading up the Senate fight for a holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr. They are still angry that Dole, as Senate finance chairman, pushed a \$98.3 billion tax increase in 1982 and a \$50 billion hike in 1984.

In fact, it seems inevitable that the moderate core of Bob Dole will emerge in the campaign despite the best efforts of his handlers. While Dole may be as tongue-tied as George Bush in trying to describe the American future

Bob Dole couldn't get the contract through the Senate. It's all Bob Dole's fault. He couldn't get it passed. That's just sorta hanging out there."

Focusing, in typical Dole fashion, more on mechanics than outcome, he suggests that it ought to be enough merely to bring the contract items to the floor. "Say we pass the balanced-budget amendment. Or say we try and fail. Line-item veto. Try and fail. The House will pass all these things, of course. As long as we get a vote one way or the other, we'll still be in pretty good shape with the American people."

SUCH NONCHALANCE may not satisfy the Senate's new generation of Republicans, a younger crowd who model themselves more on Gingrich and Gramm than Dole. In December, the Senate's new 53-seat G.O.P. majority voted out Dole's long-time deputy, Alan Simpson of Wyoming, and installed a Newtsonian (and former House member), Trent Lott of Mississippi, in his place. Already there are other rumblings of revolt — particularly among the 11 freshman Senators, most of whom are staunchly conservative. And if Dole can't handle his own members, his claims of leadership skill will ring hollow.

"Among those of us who came over from the House, there is frustration with the pace and the rules of the Senate," says Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma. "The question is, has the leader been entrenched so long in the old ways of doing things that it's difficult or impossible for him to conform with the revolution? Well, that's still an open question."

As an example, more symbolic than substantive, Inhofe cites a recent scuffle over the Senate's procedure for office selection. "We had a system in place where you had to wait 24 hours between selections," he says. "In the House, it's 20 minutes. That's a disparity that had to be investigated. So we took that to the leader. He brought it down to six hours. Well, that's not far enough."

Inhofe seems to speak for

under his stewardship, he is a man with settled principles. On issues ranging from welfare reform to dismantling government, he is at odds with his more conservative Congressional brethren.

Though his crusty streak has earned him a reputation for mean-spiritedness, his support for the less fortunate is genuine. He opposes efforts by House conservatives to slash anti-poverty programs to help finance tax cuts. "I don't care what kind of welfare program you have," he says. "Somebody's out there with no mother, no father, whatever. Something's gonna happen. We're not going to let kids starve. This is America." He is uncomfortable with the conservative attempt to link welfare dependency to frayed morals. "You can't wrap all these things up in neat little packages," he says. "Every family's different."

Indeed, as a county attorney Dole found himself authorizing his own grandfather's welfare payments. "My grandmother passed away at age 47," he says. "My grandfather was a tenant farmer. He couldn't find work. Times were tough. You don't forget those things. Now that doesn't mean you ought to support everybody. But there are some people who can't find work. Maybe as a last resort there ought to be some government job or some subsidized private sector job." Dole's eyes are clouding over. "It's really sad," he says slowly. "You drive home. You see the people on the street, the homeless people. Well, you can't let your emotions dictate everything. But you have to be at least a little bit sensitive."

Dole also remains eager to dispel his party's reputation for social intolerance. "There oughtn't to be discrimination," he says. "Everything ought to be based on potential. Everyone should be treated alike, whether they're black or brown or disabled or homosexual."

On other Republican red-meat issues, Dole makes all the wrong noises. Slashing government? "The government does a lot of good things. I mean, lookit, I'm a

many in the Congress when he says that, in his view: 'Newt has been a little too strident, and has turned off people who ought to have been supporters. Dole has not been strident enough. The solution might be to take Dole and Gingrich and put them in a Waring blender.'

Generational tensions were very much in evidence at a breakfast meeting with the freshmen in Dole's leadership office the day after the Senate opened. Things went smoothly enough at first. Seated at the head of the table, Dole reigned over his charges with paternal solicitude. With a glance, he shamed Senator Fred Thompson of Tennessee out of appropriating all the fresh raspberries for himself. Then the discussion got under way.

"In the early days, we have to demonstrate that we run this place," Dole explained. "There are going to be a number of motions made by the Democratic leadership. They're going to try to tack a gift ban onto the Congressional coverage bill. They're going to try to tack on lobbying reform. They're going to bombard us. And we're going to need your support. We need to demonstrate here that we do have authority, that we're willing to exercise authority, that we're willing to exercise leadership. We're not going to address the gift ban, and lobbying reform. Have the principle to stick with us in the early stages. Why get in a big debate with Paul Wellstone? Why give him any ink?"

The freshmen cooed in veneration. Dole was speaking their language. Then things got a little dicey. "Unnnh, I know some of you have *committees* on your mind," he said, spooning Rice Krispies into his mouth. "How many here want to be on the Budget Committee?" Eleven eager hands went up. "How many for Appropriations?" The flock of hands flew up again. "Indian Affairs?" Silence. No volunteers. Finally, Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania spoke up. "Well," he said, "why not abolish it?" Another moment of silence. "Pardon?" Dole said finally. Senator Rod Grams of Minnesota cleared his throat. "If

product of the G.I. bill." Gay rights? "Well, you watch some of these programs. You read some of the material. And you say, well, they don't have any choice. Something else happens. Somewhere in the genes, or whatever. ... I don't know whether it's involuntary or choice. But either way they have, obviously, civil rights. No discrimination. This is America." Gays in the military? "I haven't made a judgment on that. The big mistake there, whatever the answer is, was that Clinton brought it up so early."

Dole, who is anti-abortion, has countered religious conservatives who say they will bolt the party if a member of the '96 ticket supports abortion rights. While emphasizing that he opposes abortion, he has said that to reject a running mate who might favor abortion rights would be like "saying you are not going to have anybody who is right-handed or left-handed. My view is that we are all Republicans, good Republicans."

More interesting is Dole's response on the totemic issue of tax increases. During the 1988 New Hampshire primary, a frantic George Bush sought to spear Dole where he was most vulnerable. Dole "just won't promise not to raise taxes," proclaimed a mournful announcer in the now-famous "Senator Straddle" ad. "And you know what that means." The ads, which chastised Dole for refusing to sign a pledge not to raise taxes, arguably cost him the primary in the taxophobic state.

"I got in trouble, I remember, when I wouldn't sign that pledge," Dole says, still fuming seven years later. "What they tried to get me to do was to abandon principle. I said, 'If you'll just let me amend it, so I can put in that you can close loopholes.' ... They said, 'Nope, that would be a tax increase for a company.' I said, 'Well, that's crazy.' But oh, no, you gotta be simon-pure, you can't raise anybody's taxes. Well, I'm not gonna do it!"

With his good hand, Dole grips the velvet armrest of his chair. "Then, Pete du Pont violates the debate rules. Pulls the pledge out of his

no one wants on the committee, I mean, can't we abolish it? Can we do that?" A cheer went up around the table. "Yeah!" "Abolish it!"

Dole looked exasperated. "Well, it's not quite that simple," he told the group. "We can't just abolish committees. ... Certain members have large populations. ... There are staff questions. We might be able to make some recommendations." The freshmen, let down, clinked their spoons against their coffee cups.

Meanwhile, Dole has bigger problems. At any moment, he and Gramm are likely to crash through their present veneer of Republican brotherhood and turn into snarling adversaries. Dole has enraged his rival by maneuvering to keep him off the powerful Senate Finance Committee. Fumes a Gramm aide: "The insider's view in Congress has always been that you deal with the problem of Phil Gramm by pushing him outside, so he has no inherent power base from which to operate. That's a terrible, terrible mistake. Go ahead and throw Phil into that briar patch. He has always been underestimated."

Privately, Dole staff members fret that Gramm is the one person who could cause their boss to violate the new be-nice rule. "I don't think Dole respects Gramm at all," says one Republican Senate staff member. "Gramm is the kind of guy who's always cutting to the front of the line, always big-footing. Dole has some respect for the process and the system. And there's just no decorum in Gramm."

Indeed, it is only when discussing his Republican rival that Dole's legendary testiness surfaces. "Everybody says the most dangerous place in the Capitol is between Phil and a TV camera," Dole grouches. "He's very aggressive. You know, he comes to me now and then, and says, 'If I go too far, I want you to tell me.' Well, I'm not going to tell him! He oughta know when he goes too far." Dole shakes his head, perplexed. "I remember a couple, maybe three years ago, he started introducing me as the best legislator he'd ever known. As if he had nothing else in mind

pocket. Might as well give the whole ball of wax, I don't know. Would he sign that pledge this year? Dole barks a rueful little laugh. "Well, I did get killed on it. I guess you don't commit suicide twice." Then, stubbornly, he continues to straddle. "I guess I'd want to read it," he says. "If Bill Archer or Bob Packwood takes a look at the budget and finds some stuff in there that's an unintended benefit for someone who doesn't deserve it — well, they ought to fix it. Somebody's paying taxes so somebody else can get a windfall."

It's principled statements like these that keep Dole's advisers up nights. "He can't run as a conservative and say he's unwilling to foreclose the possibility of a tax increase," wails one Dole adviser. "Doesn't he know the New Hampshire primary is run by anti-tax activists? How can he stand there in the face of what George Bush did to him and say he's not sure about a tax pledge; that he'd have to look at it? That's the insider talking, not the ideologue."

On the campaign trail, Dole may escape such quandaries by retreating into his life story, stressing his background as a son of the plain-spoken Midwest. Says Dole: "A Democratic pollster not unfriendly to me said: 'You know what Bob Dole needs? He doesn't need all these "issues." He needs a little spot on his bio, so that people really understand who this guy is. He's not gonna be able to get to the right of Phil Gramm on anything. The man's always going to be one step further to the right.' Well, that seemed like a pretty good suggestion to me." In the Congress, however, such intraparty spats can't be finessed so easily.

He may also stress foreign policy, the one area where he enjoys an undisputed advantage over his all his potential rivals save Lugar. "If you ask people about foreign policy, their eyes glaze over," he says. "They don't really care. But if something happens where we play some critical role, then the American people care. That's why it's an asset to have somebody who for me, other than being a legislator. Well, I'm not naive about this. All this fulsome praise about Bob Dole, the greatest Senator in the world. In other words, he oughta stay there. I thought, 'This guy is running for President!' Three years ago! I couldn't believe it."

But Dole's greatest worry seems to have been removed, at least for now — Gingrich has declared that he will not seek the nomination in '96. But that doesn't completely relieve Dole of his Gingrich problem, nor rule out a Gingrich reversal. The Speaker, as Jeff Eisenach of Gingrich's foundation observes, "is at the moment more than any other single person, defining the Republican Party. And there does come a point at which if there is no one who shares his definition of the party who's plausible as a Presidential candidate, and the Republican Party has redefined himself in terms of him. ... Eisenach's voice trails off. "Then does it become almost inevitable? Does he have an obligation? Is the party going to say, Look, being Speaker is fine. But the truth is that our leader is going to be in the White House — and you're our leader."

Gingrich's leadership would be the antithesis of Dole's. Compared with the dignified Kansas, Gingrich seems to lack maturity, Presidential stature. "There has to be a little mystery about the President," muses Dole. "The American people, when they think about the President — and again, I'll find out after the election if I'm anywhere near accurate — don't want to see you popping up everywhere with 15 different programs. There has to be this sort of mystique, or mystery."

Suddenly, we are talking not about Gingrich but about President Clinton. "He'll go out and have a press conference at 10," Dole frets. "Then he'll go out and step on his story all day long with four or five other things. Well, Reagan had a message, and he stayed right on his message and never wavered from it, win or lose. Clinton has the line of the day — and then he goes around stepping on it."

The Clintonites claim they

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couldn't care less what Dole thinks of the President. They have written him off as a negative obstructionist, temperamentally unsuited for the nation's highest office. "I don't sense that people here are quaking about Dole," says an Administration official. "Winning Presidential candidates tend to be sunny, and upbeat, and hopeful and forward-looking. Dole is going to have a much harder time getting through."

In fact, in this age of empty third-wave optimism, it is precisely Dole's brooding, almost Nixonian opacity — his wound, his dark side, his aversion to self-display — that give him a kind of dignity. Compared with the loquacious emotionalism of Clinton and Gingrich, Dole's reserve gives him an appealing mystery — not only to reporters but to many Democrats. "He's like the mean old guy in the murder movie who everybody thinks is a killer," says one admiring Washington Democrat, "until five minutes before the end when the plot twists, and you find out he's not that bad after all."

Dole, for his part, makes it clear he has revealed as much of himself as he cares to. "Bill Clinton said, 'I feel your pain,'" he says. "Then we all felt the pain." The fire in the fireplace sputters and flickers out, and Dole gives a gentle, perplexed shake of his head. "I've watched the backslappers. I've seen people who've pushed the envelope too far," he says. "They're trying to curry favor with this group or that group. I think I don't want to be like this person. I listen to all these politicians. They were all born in a log cabin. Give me a break."