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Looking to lead, Dole takes practical view

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House?
"This is his life," answered Tom Synhorst, a top adviser who helped Dole in Iowa in 1988.

"There really isn't much else he can do. I've always felt the war situation is what forced him into this path. The effect of the wounds and disability make him focused unlike everybody else.

"And it's like that every waking hour."

Walking in the halls of power for decades, working with or against various occupants of the White House, he has long been convinced that he can do as well or better.

"I'm not the least bit intimidated by the challenge," Dole said. "I'm not perfect, but I've watched a lot of presidents, worked with a lot of presidents.

"I hear Clinton say from time to time, 'Oh, we didn't know Washington worked this way, Congress worked this way.' I think I'm prepared for it."

And then there's the competitive side.

"For people in our line of work, it's the ultimate prize," said Sen. Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican.

So he has a mission.

What about the vision?
"The question for him is, 'Where do you want to take this country?'" said John Sears, a veteran Republican consultant of the Nixon and Reagan eras.

"His problem has always been he hasn't come to this with what was called a 'world view' in the Cold War era, but today gets called the 'vision thing,'" Sears said. "He's always been great when he's had a Republican president."

Dole's a master of the legislative branch of government, an essentially reactive, consensus-building role. He's never been responsible for the proactive decisiveness required of the executive branch, Sears said.

"Bob is going to have to decide why he wants this job and express it more clearly than before," agreed McConnell, a Dole admirer.

Shifting around in a wingback chair in his Senate majority leader's office, Dole gives it a try. And once more makes it clear, he's no visionary.

"I happen to believe I have the capacity for leadership and the integrity, the experience that America needs as we end up this century and go into the next century."

It's clear he hates the "vision thing."

Oh, he'll tell the crowds over the next few days about the three Rs — rein in government, reconnect it with good individual and family values, reassert America's leadership in the world.

He's no poet, he's a pragmatist. Just get in there and make things work. Lead.

"If someone walks into my office and says, 'Boy, I've got a great vision for America' and gives me all this stuff, what does it really mean?" Dole asked, disdain creeping into his familiar baritone.

"Is it who can have the most ideas? Or who can have a sensible, credible program that isn't going to frighten the American people?" Ronald Reagan, they say, had vision. Bill Clinton thinks he has one, too.

In the Reagan years, America went a trillion dollars in the red. In Clinton's case, Dole sees a hopeless muddle of priorities.

He returns to 1985, when as majority leader he scraped out a one-vote Senate victory to pass a deficit-reduction bill. When the House Republicans balked and Reagan got cold feet, his victory collapsed.

The bill would have cut spending, felled government programs and capped increases in Social Security spending.

"If that's not vision," Dole declared, "I don't know what vision is."

"We were worried about the deficit, worried about the government and intrusiveness a long time ago."

No problems with C-word

Perhaps it's the calm that comes with age, or his front-runner status. Dole increasingly believes 1996, finally, may be his time.

Reagan is gone. Bush is gone. But he is still here.

"The biggest reason Bob Dole believes he'll be president is this party rewards loyalty," contended Linda Divall, a pollster working for the campaign of Sen. Phil Gramm, a Texas Republican.

Which could be a mistake.

"The face of the party has changed. Many new Republicans have come into the party since 1990. And those who won in 1994 did not get there by waiting in line and waiting their turn."

Indeed, Dole, a Main Street, Rotary Club, budget-balancing Republican, must prove versatile enough to represent a new generation of hard-nosed conservatives



FRED BLOCHER/The Star

A typical day is quite busy for Sen. Bob Dole. On March 29, for instance, his activities included giving six speeches and meeting with

Republican Sens. Jon Kyl of Arizona (left), Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania (second from right) and Spencer Abraham of Michigan.

About the series



THIRD TIME AROUND

The "why" of Sen. Bob Dole's third quest for the White House was examined in today's story. Some other questions that Americans may have the Kansan's candidacy that will be addressed this week:

- **MONDAY:** Is he too old?
- **TUESDAY:** Is he too much of a Washington insider?
- **WEDNESDAY:** Is he too mean?
- **THURSDAY:** Is he conservative enough for the GOP?
- **FRIDAY:** Is he organized enough to win it all?

carrying a social agenda he's never championed.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich is chief prophet for them, a band of fiery Republicans often uninterested in compromise.

Dole, of course, has no problems with the C-word.

"If there's something out there that doesn't involve just total principle . . .," said Dole, what's wrong with compromising if it gets most of what you want? "Do you want me to try to get the 90 percent, or zero? That's what it's all about."

Compromise. You see it in the presidency bid, Dole reaching to the right, doing what he has to do, determined not to end up with zero again.

Last year, Dole at first resisted helping the Senate bid of Ollie North, who as a Marine lieutenant colonel lied to Congress during the Iran-contra scandal. But North was duly nominated by Virginia Republicans. Seeing no option, the Senate Republican leader soon pitched in, stumping and fund-raising for North.

Dole recently called for re-evaluating affirmative action

guidelines, surprising because he previously defended them. Dole's also currying support from Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson.

And yet, Dole, who gets high marks from folks who check for conservative voting records, reminds them again and again he's no revolutionary.

For those who yearn to dismantle the federal government building by building, look up a speech he made in February in Lebanon, New Hampshire.

"The government's very important," Dole said. "It gave some of us the GI Bill of Rights, and we wouldn't be where we are today. So I understand the government does a lot of good things." Such statements make Cory Tilley, communications director of the Florida GOP, worry that Dole is caught in a political time warp, still seeing government much like his hero, Dwight Eisenhower, did, not like the supply-sider Reagan, revered by so many young Republicans. Never mind Dole's surging poll numbers, she thinks a lot of conservatives are holding back.

"Bob Dole's biggest problem is the generational issue. I hear people say, 'Do we want somebody older than George Bush?'"

Others object to Dole the ultimate Washington insider, the big-issue power broker, the unrepentant partisan. To them, he's the politician always plotting for the next vote, not the next generation.

He also must answer to those like John Bird, the former Kansas Democratic Party chairman, reading this year's profiles of a mellow, more seasoned Dole.

"He's still a mean-spirited, too-political curmudgeon," Bird said, dismissively. "There's no happy warrior in him."

Who cares, responded Sen. Alfonso D'Amato, a New York Republican working hard for Dole's candidacy.

"Look! He's not the warmest, most charismatic, the most fuzzy. He's none of those things," said D'Amato.

"He could have surrendered so many times in the crises of life he endured, the physical disabilities or political setbacks. But he has a belief in himself and a belief in his country."

'He has no fear'

For every man or woman who seeks the presidency, the ambition is similar, the origins unique.

It's easy to discern the roots of his workaholicism: The high school star jock watched his father, Doran, struggle to scratch out a living with an egg and cream business in the Depression. The first-born son saw his mother, Bina, raise four children while selling sewing machines on the side to farmers' wives. The popular youngster worked behind the soda fountain while the family moved into the basement of its Russell home so it could rent out the upstairs to oil-field workers.

But that Bob Dole would have been considered a slacker against

the Bob Dole that came out of the veterans hospital.

Barely surviving on an Italian battlefield late in World War II, the young lieutenant nearly died twice during his 39-month recovery. He lived, but his plans of becoming a doctor died.

"Here's this brilliant career with all this potential ending up — in the judgment of most people — a real tragedy," said Kansas Rep. Pat Roberts, who also grew up on the plains.

"No," Roberts continued, leaning forward for emphasis. "Wrong. And he's been doing 65 in a 55 mile-an-hour zone since."

"He has no fear and that probably comes from hovering in a dark V.A. hospital for many months," said Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming, Dole's Senate whip for years.

No fear perhaps, but some of that darkness clung to him. The wound that made him more focused also made him more angry, more withdrawn. Yet, the sentimentality about his past that he's displaying more and more always has been there, friends insist, just buried deep.

With every hurdle thereafter, from simply buttoning his shirt with a button hook to the floor of the Senate, Dole has pushed himself.

"I think I always was fairly competitive, even in school,"

Dole said. "I think it all goes back to the disability, when you really have a challenge. It seemed to me you have to sort of compensate if you've got a limitation, as a lot of people have."

"I hardly notice the disability," Dole said cocking his head toward his right arm, "but I think it has made me drive harder, always in hot pursuit of something."

That hot pursuit can leave many winded.

March 29 was a typical day: Dole started at 8 a.m. with a speech and ended at 9 p.m. with another. In between, he delivered four other speeches, mostly to business groups; gave an interview to ABC-TV's Sam Donaldson for "Prime Time Live;" held a press conference with Iowans Gov. Terry Brandstad and Sen. Charles Grassley, who endorsed his presidential campaign; met with House Republican freshmen; and had several private meetings.

"I don't know that he ever takes a day off," said Grassley. "You see that as just a total lifestyle."

"Total" is no exaggeration. If he has a hobby, it's the knitting of coalitions; if he's interested in an art form, it's the well-placed quip on the Sunday-morning talk show. When he relaxes, it's by watching C-SPAN, while puffing along on his treadmill.

The chairman of the board of what might be called Republican Agenda Inc., Dole shuttles to work via a chauffeured limousine from the Watergate Hotel where he has lived since 1972. Dole's schnauzer, Leader, rides with him.

For weekends, the transportation is usually chartered jets, largely underwritten by corporations who have issues before the finance committee on which he sits.

Dole hit more than 40 states to campaign for Republicans in the 1993-94 election cycle. Former Vice President Dan Quayle joked that when Dole has a day off, he rushes to a fund-raiser.

"That's about right," Dole agreed with a small smile.

His itinerary allows relatively little free time with his wife, his grown daughter, Robin, or family back home. But they speak with admiration of him, and what Robin calls his "burning in the belly."

'Never throws in the towel'

"You have to have the confidence and arrogance to feel, 'I can deal with this better than anyone else in America,'" said Kansas native Marlin Fitzwater, who's familiar with how presidents think after serving Reagan and Bush as press secretary.

He's long been convinced that Dole would join the 1996 contest. "I think it's something in your soul. It's an inner drive that almost defies explanation."

Whatever it is, it's been in there since 1976, when Gerald Ford selected Dole as his running mate in 1976.

The voters went with Carter-See **DISABILITY, A-15, Col. 1**