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At the beginning of a bus trip to Topeka, Erma Kilian, Russell, passes out Dole buttons.

Russell fans cheer Dole

Hometown residents board buses to hear formal declaration

By KEVIN ANDERSON
Hays Daily News

TOPEKA — As Bob Dole made his way to the platform Monday in the ExpoCentre to launch his third bid for the presidency before a frenzied crowd of supporters, he paused.

Scanning the crowd, his face flashed with recognition as he acknowledged friends.

The Senate majority leader saw hometown friends such as Adolph Reisig, who played football with Dole in high school, and Barney Roberts, a woman who has attended every Dole campaign announcement since 1960.

Reisig, Roberts and almost 70 other Dole supporters, many who had grown up with him, boarded two

chartered buses in the cold and mist at 5 a.m. Monday in Russell to make the three-hour trip to Topeka.

As Dole stood before them at the ExpoCentre, they spilled out into the aisles to try to get a glimpse of their hometown boy.

He pointed to one familiar face after another, before striking a familiar pose, a cool thumbs up, and making his way to the platform.

As a political figure that embodies the values that Russell residents hold dear, rider Del Jepsen said, "We want to support him any way we can."

For Jepsen, having Dole as president would give him a connection to government that he has not felt.

"We would have a friend from Russell as president rather than some distant individual we can't understand," Jepsen said.

And Dole, with an astounding memory to connect a face with the name, has worked to cultivate close ties with his hometown constituents.

Bus rider Blanche Caldwell recalled the last time Dole launched his campaign for the presidency, 1987. That time it was in Russell instead of Topeka.

A man who had lived in California for 20 years returned to Russell for the announcement. Dole "called him by his first name," Caldwell said, and the man "about fell over."

As the bus riders entered the ExpoCentre, the master of ceremonies called out to the crowd, "What city is Bob Dole from?"

"Russell," the crowd answered, starting a chant of "Russell, Russell, Russell."

The master of ceremonies then introduced the Russell High School Band, which had left the town at 3:30 a.m. to arrive at the rally.

Dole campaign officials extended an invitation to the band Thursday to perform at the announcement, according to director Steven Lueth.

In short order, the band had to get their marching uniforms out of storage and line up buses for the trip to Topeka.

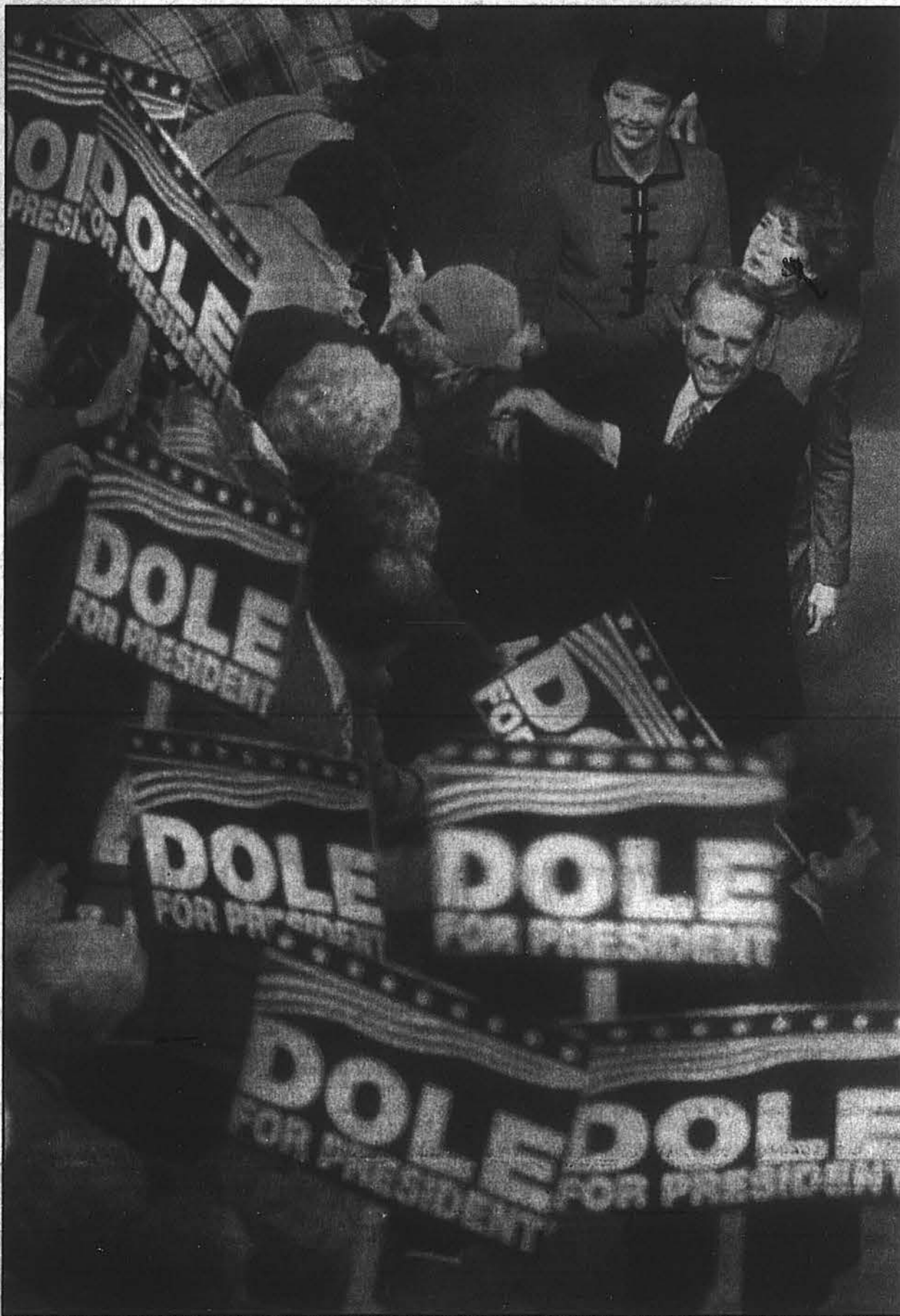
Every time Dole has launched a bid for office since 1960, Roberts — wearing an American flag sweater and red, white and blue elephant earrings — has been there.

"We were Dolls for Dole then," Roberts said, adding, "We're Grandmas for Dole, now."

Her daughter, Lynn Holly, remembers passing out Dole



The buses take a pre-dawn break in Salina to pick up an additional supporter.



Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., his wife, Elizabeth, and his daughter, Robin, greet supporters from Russell Monday in Topeka.



After the ceremonies, an unidentified boy scavenges balloons as the bus entourage poses for photographers.

pineapple juice as a teenager during political campaigns. Dole paused before Roberts and Holly, who, with others, were holding a "Friends of Dole" sign.

For Roberts and Holly, campaigning for Dole is helping a friend. And that is how many of the members of the tight-knit community of Russell view one of the nation's most powerful political figures — as a friend.

"Everybody helps everybody," Roberts said. "That's the kind of a town Russell is."

They don't just like him; they back his platform, too

Dole mirrors region, they say

By KEVIN ANDERSON
Hays Daily News

TOPEKA — Like a basketball team basking in the adulation of the home-court crowd at Topeka's ExpoCentre, Sen. Bob Dole's announcement speech was met with boisterous approval by throngs of supporters.

Among them, more than 70 Dole supporters, many of whom had grown up with the Senate majority leader, who boarded buses at 5 a.m. in Russell to make the trip in the cold rain to see Dole announce his third bid for the Republican presidential nomination.

Dole's speech touched on traditional Republican themes and mirrored the GOP's Contract for America, calling for less government, lower taxes and a balanced budget.