

Has Bob Dole's time come, or has it already passed?

Has Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole's time finally come or has it already passed?

Monday Dole officially entered the contest for the GOP presidential nomination in his home town of Kansas, his last symbolic link beyond the loathsome Washington beltway to the ordinary folk of small-town America.

Of Dole it cannot be said that he peaked too early. But such is his resilience and political skill that he is the frontrunner, at 71, for a shot at the White House that has escaped him for decades.

He gets his chance in an era when his strong suits — experience, a sense of responsible moderation and an instinct for compromise — are scorned by aggressive religious fundamentalists and young GOP congressional know-nothings who have none of them. Ironically, his position as a political father figure is both a strength and a weakness.

"I'd be a stabilizing force," Dole told CNN. Not an exciting message but potentially a reassuring one in a party struggling with a sudden lurch to the right.

This won't be easy, but nothing has come easily to Bob Dole. He can perform ably as a showhorse, but he has always been a workhorse as well.

In a career of more than 40

WASHINGTON VIEW



Marianne Means
HEARST NEWS SERVICE

years, he has outdistanced or made uneasy peace with other first-class Republicans prepared to step on him. Survival has required a delicate balance among what was practical, what was politically possible and even sometimes what was principled.

It still does. The traditional Republican mainstream that provides him his basic strength is not thrilled with his recent embrace of selected hot-button, right-wing issues — promises to reverse the assault-weapon ban, destroy affirmative action and irresponsibly chop taxes for the rich. But he dare not appear to have been left behind, like an old man out of touch, as his party moves rightward.

Yet the tart tongue that betrayed him too often in the past now merely seems wickedly clever compared to the heavy-handed insults hurled by some of his less experienced GOP competitors.

His consistent efforts to reduce

federal deficits resonate well in the current climate, while he has avoided plunging into the prickly thicket of just how much he would deprive the elderly and poor to do this.

Political history is replete with presidential candidates who entered the primary as popular favorites with formidable establishment endorsements and failed to go the distance. Dole's initial show of strength may or may not mean much. Had he been unable to produce it, however, it would certainly have meant much, none of it favorable.

The condensed primary season next year should work to Dole's benefit, if he can repeat his 1988 victory in Iowa and reverse his loss to Vice President George Bush that year in New Hampshire. The subsequent electoral rush should favor the candidate with the early momentum.

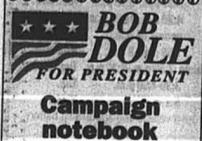
Meantime, Dole must play a dual role that leaves him vulnerable to his GOP rivals not only in his campaign mode but in his Senate performance. So far, he has refused to step down from his post and has insisted he can both lead the Senate and run for president.

With the burden of leadership, he must produce legislation or at least make a smashingly good stab at it. His presidential rivals in the Senate — Phil Gramm of Texas, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Richard Lugar of Indiana — have no such responsibility.

They can grandstand and take potshots whenever they want. The GOP gubernatorial candidates, Lamar Alexander of Tennessee and Pete Wilson of California, have even fewer complications. They don't have to cast controversial votes that can be used against them later in the campaign.

If our national focus should shift from domestic issues to some international crisis, however, Dole is in the strongest GOP political position. Lugar, a former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has credentials there, too. But his recent remark that we ought to consider a military response to free two American civilians in jail in Iraq suggests he may not have sufficient judgment for the presidency. A call to battle that risks American lives over a minor provocation is not a political winner.

And so it goes, pros and cons. Dole is the man to beat. He's older than Ronald Reagan when he took office at the age of 69. But Dole is smarter, full of vinegar and altogether a candidate for all seasons.



Campaign notebook

■ Texas, Florida stops yield money, endorsements — Sen. Bob Dole traveled to Florida and Texas Wednesday to rake in money for his front-runner GOP bid for the presidency. He accepted a bushel of congressional endorsements in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Dole's fund-raising event in Fort Lauderdale included some of Florida's best-known Republicans. Dole has a vacation condo in nearby Bal Harbour, Fla.

All four Republican congressmen from South Florida endorsed Dole during his brief stop, said Dr. Zack Zachariah, Dole's state financial chairman. "I think Florida is for Dole," said Zachariah.

Dole's campaign could raise up to \$500,000 during the visit and hopes to raise several million in the state during the campaign, Zachariah said.

Dole campaigned at a Dallas luncheon earlier Wednesday. A Dole spokesman said the senator raised \$500,000 there. Today, he heads to Columbia, S.C., Raleigh, N.C., and then home to Kansas.

■ Change in plans — Plans have changed for Dole's second visit to his home state in five days.

Dole's plane will land shortly after 5 p.m. today in Hays. Earlier plans had Dole landing at Great Bend. After landing in Hays, he travels on to Russell, where he will spend the next two days.

A community pancake breakfast is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. Friday, and organizers said they are planning to feed 5,000 people. Dole also will attend private Good Friday church services at

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Advisers criticize NRA letter

By JACK NELSON
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole's promise to the National Rifle Association that he will work to repeal the law banning assault weapons has created a rift among his supporters and some associates say the senator realizes he made a major political mistake that could damage his presidential campaign.

Dole apparently didn't consult many members of his expansive circle of advisers before he made the vow in a letter to the NRA a month ago in which he referred to "the ill-conceived gun ban."

One of Dole's major contributors, calling the senator's letter to the NRA "just terrible," said: "Unfortunately, he always has some persons representing the extreme right around him and they get him in trouble. He tolerates them to try to get the nomination."

Another longtime Dole adviser who opposed the letter described reaction this way: "We all climbed up and down on him about it. Everybody gave him a bad time. He realized it was a big mistake."

"I don't know what drove him to do it," the adviser said. "He could have just let the thing come up naturally on the floor, let someone introduce an amendment, instead of taking the lead on repealing the ban."

Both Dole's decision to take an active role in the fight against the assault weapons ban, which prohibits the manufacture and sale of 19 kinds of semiautomatic weapons, and the unhappiness his action provoked among many of his supporters reflect the conflict inherent in Dole's position as he seeks the GOP presidential nomination.

By today's standards, the Senate leader is a moderately conservative or traditional Republican — a position on the political spectrum that may have broad appeal among voters but doesn't satisfy the conservative activists who play a disproportionate role in choosing the GOP standard-bearer.

As a result, Dole's strategy for winning the nomination includes bolstering his appeal to the GOP right wing, even at the risk of alienating less conservative supporters.

That strategy, both on gun control and on

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Dole details foreign policy goals during Texas visit

The Associated Press

DALLAS — Republican presidential hopeful Bob Dole, describing Wednesday what he called "an agenda to make America strong at home and respected abroad," outlined his foreign policy goals.

Dole stressed at a fund-raising luncheon that American interests should be the overriding factor in all foreign policy decisions, especially those involving force.

"When we have no interests at stake, it is folly to risk American lives and foolish to squander American resources and prestige," he said. (The use of force) is a decision that must be made at times, but it is a decision that should always be made by Americans and for American interests."

Dole, in the midst of a whirlwind campaign trip that took him to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., for another appearance Wednesday night, also called on the government to reassess its relationships with some third-world nations and to continue the crackdown on illegal immigration.

Saying the United States "shouldn't become a fortress," Dole said expansion of border control programs and a more efficient deportation process are necessary to curb illegal immigration.

Dole said the United States must also isolate "rogue regimes" such as Iran, Iraq, Libya and North Korea, maintaining a vigil and using "any means necessary" to prevent them from obtaining nuclear arms.

Countries that consistently stand in the way of the United States' interests in United Nations votes shouldn't expect to receive funds from American coffers, he added.

A Dole spokesman said the senator raised an estimated \$500,000 with the Dallas luncheon.

The visit was Dole's first as a candidate to Texas, the home of rival Republican presidential contender Senator Phil Gramm. Dole said after his address that the trip had no underlying intentions.

"Phil Gramm is a good friend — all the other candidates are good friends," he said.

Before the fund-raiser, Dole visited a Dallas diner and introduced himself to voters. Workers at the Market Diner presented the candidate with a pie.

Dole, 71, announced his candidacy in Topeka, Kan., on Monday. His weeklong cross-country campaign will end in his hometown Russell, Kan., on Friday.

In Florida, Dole was planning to rake in more money for his front-runner GOP bid for the presidency and accept a bushel of congressional endorsements.

Dole, who has a vacation condo in nearby Bal Harbour, scheduled a fund-raising event that includes some of Florida's best-known Republicans.



Campaign notebook

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noon Friday.

■ Texas is big enough for the two of them — Dole ventured into rival presidential candidate Sen. Phil Gramm's territory Wednesday. Dole, speaking at a Dallas fund-raising luncheon, said he has no personal squabble with the Texas senator.

"Phil Gramm is a good friend — all the other candidates are good friends," he said. "Texas is big enough for the both of us."

■ Clinton, Dole in dead heat, but look out for Powell — President Clinton was preferred over all announced Republican presidential candidates except Dole in an Ohio Poll released Wednesday.

Clinton and Dole were in a statistical dead heat. But the most popular choice was a man who is not a candidate: retired Gen. Colin Powell.

In a race between Clinton and Dole, 47 percent of the people surveyed said they preferred Clinton, 44 percent preferred Dole, 6 percent liked another candidate and 4 percent had not formed an opinion.

But with a margin of error of 4 percentage points, a Clinton edge was not statistically significant.

But Powell — who has not declared a party affiliation — beat Clinton by 10 percentage points among people questioned.

■ Dole's GOP lead holds — Dole continues to hold a commanding lead over other GOP presidential hopefuls in a USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll published in Tuesday's USA Today.

Among Republicans and those who say they are Republican leaners, Dole is supported by 46 percent; Phil Gramm, 13 percent; Pat Buchanan, 8 percent; Pete Wilson, 6 percent; Richard Lugar, 5 percent; Lamar Alexander, 3 percent; Arlen Specter, 2 percent; Bob Dornan, 2 percent; Alan Keyes, 1 percent; and other, none, 14 percent.

■ On-line insights — Dole's week-

The numbers are based on a national telephone poll of 373 Republicans conducted April 5 and 6. The margin of error is plus or minus 6 percentage points.

■ And the race is on — Dole is the sixth Republican candidate to formally declare a 1996 bid, joining Sens. Phil Gramm of Texas and Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander, commentator Pat Buchanan and radio talk host Alan Keyes. Conservative California Rep. Bob Dornan of California plans to enter the race today, and Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar's announcement is April 19. California Gov. Pete Wilson is likely to join the field in May.

■ State leader joins Dole campaign — Steve Brown, executive director of the Kansas Republican Party since 1991, has resigned to take a job with the Dole campaign in Washington. Brown will be coordinating direct mail and telemarketing fund-raising activities. The state party headquarters will be run by state Chairman David Miller and Gilda Lintz of the office staff until a new executive director is named.

■ Alternative choices — In Exeter, N.H., on Monday Bob Dole had a bit of competition. As he spoke to a crowd of several hundred, reporters noticed some different campaign signs — "Bruno '96."

The Bruno is Louie Bruno, a Bronx native who has been convicted of something, though his entourage claimed they didn't know what. As a stunt for Michael Moore's television show, "TV Nation," Bruno is flaunting his ex-con status as a parody candidate with campaign signs that note, "He's a pro. He's a con."

"There is another America waiting," Bruno said hastily. "Let's give it a break. Let's move on America. Let's get to it."

■ Here's the primary schedule — By this time next year, it could be clear who will be the Republican nominee for president.

About 60 percent of the convention delegates will be selected by the end of March 1996. That compares with 36 percent of the GOP delegates selected through March 1992.

The following is a tentative schedule of primaries through March next year.

Feb. 12 — Iowa (caucus); Feb. 20 — New Hampshire; Feb. 24 — Delaware; Feb. 27 — Arizona, South Dakota; March 5 — Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, Vermont; March 7 — New York; March 12 — Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas; March 19 — Illinois, Michigan, Ohio; March 26 — California, Connecticut.

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other issues such as affirmative action, has upset those among Dole's advisers who want a more moderate line. These advisers point out that about 70 percent of those responding to public opinion polls favor the assault weapons ban.

Among Dole supporters said to be most upset about the letter are fund-raisers concerned that the issue may dry up potential sources of contributions to his presidential campaign.

Dole, campaigning in the Midwest, stood by his letter to the NRA. Through a spokesman, he reiterated his support for the rights of gun owners. But he didn't comment on the rift among his supporters or their claims that he made a major political mistake.

"The senator thinks the letter speaks for itself," Nelson Warfield, Dole's campaign press spokesman, said.

In remarks Tuesday night in Denver, Dole talked about his stand on crime, urging that parole be denied for violent criminals, that "frivolous" appeals in criminal cases be limited, that teenagers who commit violent crimes be tried as adults — and that all this be done "without penalizing all those law-abiding Americans who want to exercise their constitutional right to bear arms."

While Dole's stand has upset some advisers, others point out that large numbers of Republican conservatives crucial to the party's presidential nomination process oppose the assault weapon ban. In New Hampshire,

Advisers criticize NRA letter

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site of the nation's first primary, polls indicate that roughly 48 percent of potential GOP primary voters are gun owners and the NRA has some 25,000 members — this in a state where the total primary vote seldom exceeds 175,000.

Early polls show Dole far out in front of other Republican candidates in New Hampshire, but Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, his best-financed rival, is a staunch opponent of gun control.

In addition to creating division among his advisers, Dole's pledge to the NRA has given energy to gun-control advocates and personalized an explosive issue that promises to touch off a bruising fight in Congress. Playing a prominent role in that fight could help Dole with conservatives but some advisers fear that it also could distract him as he seeks to put his imprint on House legislation passed as part of the GOP's "Contract With America."

In another bow to the party's right-wing, Dole also has spoken out strongly in favor of rolling back affirmative action, a process he once favored as a means of redressing job discrimination. Gramm has been one of the most outspoken opponents of affirmative action.

"Somehow Bob Dole has this bizarre notion that he has to stand to the right of Phil Gramm on everything to get the Republican nomination," said a longtime friend of Dole. "Most people who've carried Dole this far think that's nutty strategy and won't help him win."

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Dole gathers endorsements, money in Florida

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole traveled to Florida on Wednesday to rake in money for his front-runner GOP bid for the presidency and accept a bushel of congressional endorsements.

The 71-year-old Kansas senator, who has a vacation condo in nearby Bal Harbour, scheduled a fund-raising event that includes some of Florida's best-known Republicans.

All four Republican congressmen from South Florida plan to endorse Dole during his brief stop in Florida, said Zack Zachariah, Dole's state financial chairman.

Republican Reps. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Mark Foley and Clay Shaw are backing Dole, said Zachariah. Former state Senator President Ander Crenshaw, a Jacksonville Republican, and Jim Smith, another GOP stalwart, also were planning to back Dole, he said. "I think Florida is for Dole," said

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