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Dole Is a Main Street Conservative

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WASHINGTON — Four decades ago, after a young war hero was elected to the Kansas State Legislature, a local reporter asked what his legislative philosophy would be. "I'm going to sit and watch for a couple of days," said young Robert Dole, "and then I'll stand up for what I think is right."

For the man who now is the Republican Party's leading presidential candidate, those simple words would foretell the particular brand of prairie pragmatism he has carried through a congressional career now spanning 35 years, 12 thousand votes and two previous presidential campaigns. More than anything else, Senator Dole projects a distinctly Midwestern, Main Street, balance-the-books brand of small conservatism, the kind that was common in the Republican Party in which he came of age.

The question facing Senator Dole, who formally announced his 1996 candidacy on Monday, April 10, is whether, in a party increasingly driven by more ideological "revolutionaries," the Dole brand of practical conservatism will be viewed as an anachronism.

It is the kind of conservatism that led young Bob Dole to score a perfect 100 percent Conservative Coalition voting record in his first year in Congress in 1961, to vote against the creation of Medicare in 1965—and to block President Clinton's health plan three decades later.

Yet it also is a fair-play brand of conservatism that led him to stand with Lyndon Johnson for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as the follow-on version that George Bush signed in 1991. It is suspicious of government, yet envisions an affirmative role for it in helping the down-trodden, a view born of Dole's own hard-times boyhood and shattering war wounds.

Deficit Hawk

And it is the kind of budget-conscious conservatism that led Dole both to oppose John F. Kennedy's tax cut in the 1960s and to dilute Ronald Reagan's in the 1980s. His view of the dangers of running up the deficit hadn't changed through the years, but the conservative world around him had: His stance won him plaudits from the austerity-minded GOP right of the 1960s, but scorn from the rising cadre of 1980s supply-side conservatives who had emerged as dam- the deficit exponents of growth.

"When I first arrived, I was just a hard-rock conservative who tried to stop everything that even smelled of government," Senator Dole says in a Senate office adorned with memorabilia of his political hero, Dwight D. Eisenhower. "Then you sort of go through maybe a little bit of a change. You have to take a broader view."

In general, Dole says, he has "always tried to watch the growth of government (and) taxes, and I've always been a deficit hawk." At the same time, he says, "You don't have to put up a big 'no' sign on your front yard and say I'm against everything. You try to stick to your philosophy, but still do something that you hope may benefit somebody."

Winding Road

This is the picture that emerges from a look back at Senator Dole's sweeping congressional record, which covers votes on every conceivable issue spanning three decades. The story of those years actually represents more than the sum of one man who would be president. In many ways Senator Dole's history is a chronicle of the winding path Republicans and the conservative movement have traveled for more than a generation, redefining themselves along the way.

Across his years in Washington, Senator Dole has navigated three separate conservative Republican "revolutions": Senator Barry Goldwater's in 1964, President Reagan's in 1980, and House Speaker Newt Gingrich's now. In between, he also prospered during the moderate leadership of Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford.

Now, making his third presidential bid at age 71, this product of Eisenhower's Kansas must accommodate himself, however uncomfortably, to his party's evolving mix of tax cutters and budget balancers, libertarians and Southern evangelicals, corporate conservatives and angry populists, isolationists and internationalists.

"A new Republican Party is being defined," says Gingrich, whose relations with Dole have weathered a rocky beginning. "This is a very long period of change, and if you are a Midwestern Republican of the traditional school... you're always going to be skeptical of these new guys with these new ideas and this emerging new center of power."

Now, as he has before, Senator Dole is showing he can bend with prevailing winds—raising questions

about how deeply he holds his beliefs. He pledges, for example, to cast a critical eye upon the same affirmative-action programs he once championed. And having backed a waiting period for handgun purchases during the Bush years, he voted against the 1993 Brady Law. (He justifies that change by explaining that the latter version didn't require phasing out the waiting period in a few years after a national system of computer background checks is in place.)

Similarly, he continues to search for just the right amount of government. He initially voted against creating both the Education Department and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, but favored creating the Energy Department. Today, as a presidential candidate, he advocates eliminating all three.

But through the years, two powerful impulses have held steady for Bob Dole.

He often votes quietly to help the disadvantaged, recalling the \$8 a day he made as a county attorney and the burdens of war wounds that left him without much use of his right arm. "I use a buttonhook every day to dress," he says. "It's a reminder that I'm not doing it the way you do it... that people have problems." In 1977 he supported a four-stage increase in the minimum wage and also backed one of the Bush administration's biggest regulatory initiatives, the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Balancing the Books

Second, and above all, the Dole record reveals a deep antipathy toward deficit spending, either to finance liberals' utopian social schemes or to fuel conservatives' hopes of economic growth through tax cuts. "Fiscal responsibility... is one thing he's remained attached to," says fellow Kansan Robert Ellsworth, a close friend who was sworn into the House with Dole in 1961. In a revealing eulogy for Nixon last year, Dole likened the former president—and himself by implication—to the millions of ordinary Americans "who want their government to do the decent thing, but not to bankrupt them in the process."

In fact, it may be the tough-minded Nixon, rather than any of the party's ideological comets, who left the deepest mark on the senior senator from Kansas. Nixon led the Republican ticket when Dole was first elected to the House in 1960, and when he was elected to the Senate eight years later.

It was Nixon who hoisted the young Kansan onto the national stage as national party chairman, and who died just as Senator Dole had finally emerged as the nation's dominant Republican politician. The two men shared a view of Republicanism born of small-town hardships and dreams, as well as a view of government and the world influenced by Depression and war.

Like Nixon, Senator Dole displays little appetite for high-flown political theology, even at a time when many Republicans warm to the ideas of transplanted academics such as Gingrich, with his vision of a "Third Wave" politics for the Information Age. Dole argues that results, more than theories, are what count.

"I'm not an intellectual," he says. "I think I am pragmatic. But I do think I've got a pretty good mind when it comes to making decisions, deciding how far you're going to go bringing people together. Is that compromise? I don't know. That's policy. That's how you make it work. But I don't think I've ever been one to say, 'Oh, I better run down to the office, I've got 10 new ideas.'"

To skeptics, he says, "Take a look at what somebody talks about after 10 years in the leadership, not six months. It gets to be pretty hard work."

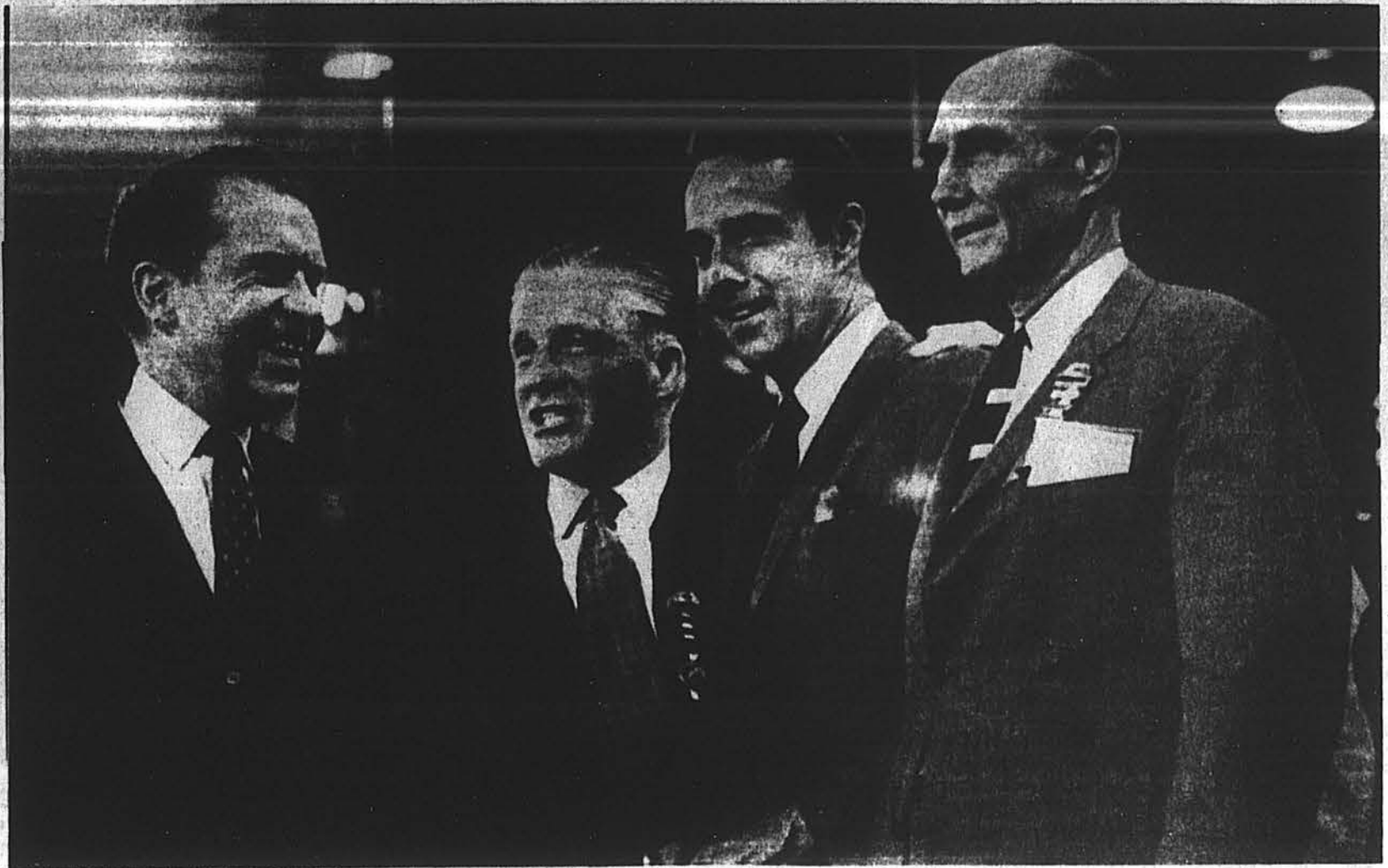
Cold War

And Dole's baby-boom detractors, their resumes filled with advanced degrees but little evidence of personal sacrifice, have their problems, too. Like their Democratic counterparts, they have struggled to project the moral authority to lead. That is why the wounds Dole sustained on an Italian hillside a half-century ago represent a powerful symbolic advantage in coming battles for the allegiance of Republican primary voters.

The early bedrock of his conservatism, forged at the height of the Cold War, was an unyielding anti-communism. As early as his first year in Washington, the young House backbencher assailed President Kennedy's plans to sell grain to the Soviet bloc, a stance that would foreshadow his later support for the Vietnam War, his skepticism of U.S.-Soviet arms-control treaties, his support for a "Star Wars" missile-defense system and his embrace of aid to Nicaraguan Contras.

Food for Peace

Over time, however, Dole developed a more sophisticated view of the world. Sensing that global markets were the future for American producers—and later mindful of



DOLE WAS JUST beginning to surface when this picture was taken in 1968 at the Republican Convention in Florida which nominated Richard M. Nixon for the presidency of the United States. To Nixon's left are George Romney, former governor of Michigan, who had opposed

Nixon for the nomination, Bob Dole and Strom Thurmond, senator from South Carolina. Dole had just been elected to the Senate when the convention was held. Sometime after assuming the presidency Nixon named Dole the National Republican Party chairman.

the agribusiness interests that increasingly supported him—he became a backer of the Kennedy Food for Peace program and other export initiatives. And he began to work smoothly on Capitol Hill, even with Democrats he had denounced.

Within a Democratic Congress, he became a key Republican ally of such Great Society liberals as George McGovern and Hubert H. Humphrey to expand food and nutrition programs for the poor and the elderly. He worked with McGovern to expand the food-stamp program and with the late Humphrey to turn the school lunch system into a federal entitlement program. Young, conservative upstarts now want to undo the latter move.

"He came to appreciate that there are certain fundamental things government has to do," McGovern says. "He broadened and deepened as a human being."

That sort of legislative maneuvering began to earn Dole the suspicion of the conservative movement. The feeling bloomed into open resentment when supply-siders like Jack Kemp, eager to liberate Republicans from the discomfort of a "green-eyeshade"

economic policy, seized on tax cuts as a prescription for growth in the stagnating economy of the late 1970s.

When Ronald Reagan rode the theory into the White House and proposed deep, across-the-board income-tax cuts, Dole, like the rest of Congress, went along. But he quickly sought to sop up widening deficits by promoting a series of tax-increase and spending-cut packages running from 1982 through the Bush administration's 1990 budget deal.

While supply-siders saw those moves as disasters, for Dole the very difficulty of the decisions represented a virtue in contrast to the easy promises of tax relief. "I've made about every tough decision you can make in this place," he says. "I haven't backed away from any of them."

All for One

Dole also has always understood the virtues of loyal partisanship. As party chairman in the early 1970s, "Bob Dole was the one guy you could count on" to appear at the most obscure Republican functions, recalls Frank Fahrenkopf, who headed the Nevada GOP and later succeeded Dole as national party chairman. As Senate minor-

ity leader, Dole displayed almost unwavering solidarity with the man who ousted him from the 1988 presidential race, George Bush. Through the four years of his former rival's presidency, he voted in support of the administration's position roughly 90 percent of the time.

Those strong partisan roots have helped him withstand seismic shifts in his party. Its locus of power has moved during his career from his native Midwest to the Sunbelt, and toward social-issues conservatives from the religious right, the gun lobby and the pro-life cause. On most of their issues, Dole has hewed to a strict conservative line. He won a 1974 election campaign after supporters launched bitter attacks on his pro-choice opponent, has voted to restore school prayer and has fought most gun-control initiatives. And though a civil-rights supporter, he drew the line on forced school busing, which he opposed in a series of votes in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Today, Dole seeks to hold the loyalty of a newly ascendant crop of social conservatives. Claiming his turn as the last of the post-

World War II GOP leaders, he faces younger men who have shattered old political rules. When Dole arrived in the Senate in 1969, he waited 3½ months to make his first speech, an appeal for an experimental housing program for the handicapped. Now, his brash presidential rival Phil Gramm declares bluntly: "We don't have a seniority system in the Republican Party, we have a merit system."

Intriguingly, though, the pressures of the 1990s and Dole's own political shrewdness may be pushing him and some of his onetime doubters back together. Nodding toward the GOP's "opportunity" wing, he recently appointed Kemp to lead a tax-reform study commission, and he toys with the idea of a so-called flat tax. At the same time, the experience of the 1980s has increased skepticism of supply-side nostrums among voters and GOP elected officials alike. That sentiment—echoing Dole's earlier warnings—is reflected in the current pressure to the Republican tax cuts to progress toward a balanced budget.

"We were 10 years ahead of our time," Dole says with a grin.

Former Governor —

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the agriculture committee with his obvious opponent in the upcoming election. It was not a good year for Republicans, but Bob prevailed.

When I left Congress in 1965, Bob had gained popularity with his contemporaries, both as a hard worker and with his delightful sense of humor. The Agriculture Committee did not provide great exposure among the 435 members, as the prevalent issues at that time were the Vietnam War and Civil Rights. However, he provided excellent constituent service, and at the same time gradually extended his influence in the House. In 1963, he was elected president of his Republican colleagues who entered Congress with him and were serving in the 58th Congress.

In 1968, Frank Carlson, of Concordia, announced he would not seek re-election to the United States Senate. Bob and I became Republican candidates and he overwhelmingly defeated me in the Republican Primary in August, and was elected to the Senate in the following November election.

His role as a leader has advanced every year since, first as National Chairman of the Republican Party while still serving in the Senate, then as vice presidential candidate with Jerry Ford in 1976, and in 1982, as majority leader of the Senate, the highest recognition of leadership, integrity and keen political perception.

He was an unsuccessful candidate for president in 1988, losing to George Bush, but retaining what had become the minority Republican leader until the Republicans regained control of the Senate in 1994.

It is now 1995. What can I say about Bob Dole that is not already common knowledge in his hometown? However, I was impressed to learn of the family hardships during the Depression of the thirties. He had experienced difficulties and found solutions long before his service-connected disability in World War II. Perhaps he learned from those

earlier hardships the will to never quit trying. Such a will served him well both in personal life as well as in public service. Despite his present role as a world leader, he vividly remembers those early days of poverty, and the struggle to prevail. He also learned humility.

He told me that during those difficult days of the thirties, he spent some time with his grandparents, who lived on a farm. Later, when serving as county attorney, it became his responsibility to approve recipients of public assistance. His grandparents were on that list. He can identify still with those in need.

Bob does not have experience as an executive or as an administrator, but few with those qualifications who have served in national leadership roles, have had military experience, nor such a conservative philosophy.

Many Kansans have expressed the hope that he will not run for president in 1996, as they feel he is most important to Kansas as their senator. However, since the decision has been made, he will receive their enthusiastic and total support. Those Kansans include the writer. — Good luck Bob!

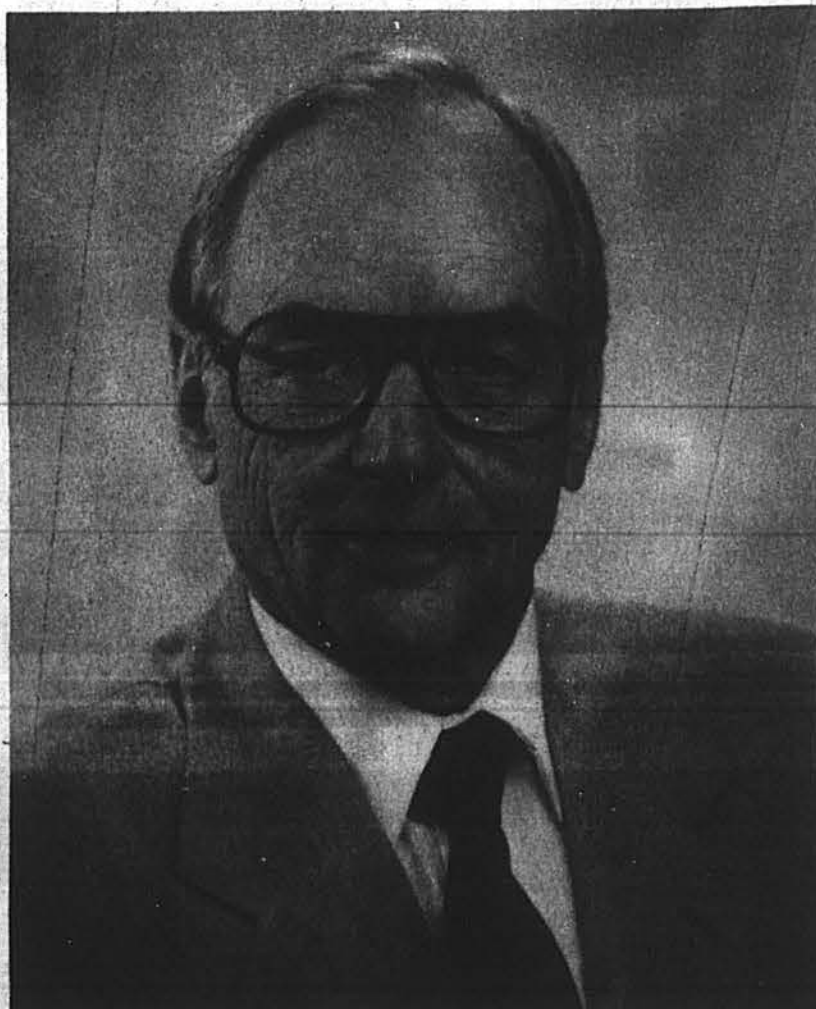
Dole Earns Acclaim

WASHINGTON — Senator Bob Dole, hoping to bolster his conservative credentials for the 1996 presidential race, has proposed eliminating four cabinet departments he says cost taxpayers \$70 billion a year and do more harm than good.

He urges the elimination of departments of Education, Energy, Commerce, and Housing and Urban Development.

Dole said on April 7 that Republicans must be bold as they pursue their goals of balancing the budget while shifting power from Washington.

"I think the best place to start is with four of the most ineffective, burdensome and meddling departments," Dole told the National Newspaper Association, an organization of community newspaper editors.



RUSSELL T. TOWNSLEY, publisher of The Russell Daily News since 1947 and The Russell Record since 1962 until his retirement in 1989, was the master of ceremonies in November, 1987, when Senator Bob Dole announced his candidacy for the presidency here. The historic event was held in front of the drugstore where Dole went to work jerking sodas at age 12, near the corner of Main and Eighth streets. An estimated 10,000 people weathered extremely cold temperatures to attend Dole's second presidential announcement. (Staff Photo)

