

Dole's Hometown Folks Turn Out to Rally for 'Their Boy'

■ Campaign: Russell residents, who helped the Kansas Republican in his darkest hours after WWII, present him with a new cigar box of contributions.

By RONALD BROWNSTEIN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

RUSSELL, KAN.—In a dramatic conclusion to his presidential announcement tour, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole returned to his wind-swept Kansas hometown Friday for an enthusiastic rally that recalled his darkest hours and anticipated much brighter days ahead.

Under cloudy skies, in a stiff wind that flapped the flags so loudly they sometimes drowned out the speakers on the podium, the local Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter presented Dole with a monument commemorating the wounds he suffered in Italy in the waning months of World War II—50 years earlier to the day.

Remembering the cigar box that residents put out to raise funds for Dole's hospital bills during his long months of recovery after the war, the town also presented him with a new wooden cigar box—filled with more than \$7,000 in contributions for his presidential campaign.

That gesture caught the spirit of the day. For the thousands of friends and supporters who gathered at a VFW post here, and for Dole himself, the morning felt less like a memorial than a celebration. The past was heavy in the air. But almost everyone in Russell appeared to have their eyes on the future. Public opinion polls show Dole leading his competitors for the 1996 GOP nomination—and besting President Clinton in tests of strength for the general election.

"Nobody knows what will happen in the next 12 months," Dole told the crowd. "But . . . it feels different this time around. . . . It just seems to me that it's out there."

Dole's appearance in Russell capped a week that gave him every cause for optimism. There may be many turns ahead in his quest for the prize that eluded him in 1980 and 1988 bids for the nomination, but his campaign aides were glowing this week about the strong start of his third drive for the presidency.

Since announcing his candidacy last Monday, he raised \$3 million and formed impressive committees of supporters in North Carolina and Florida. He also moved forcefully to preempt doubts about his candidacy on the right by endorsing voluntary school prayer and promising not to raise income taxes if elected—a pledge that he refused to sign in 1988 at great cost to his campaign.

At Friday's ceremonies in Russell, Dole's relatives, friends, high school classmates and longtime political supporters all bubbled over with enthusiasm and anticipation. The local newspaper printed a four-section special edition celebrating his life. Supporters sold buttons declaring Russell the "home of Bob Dole," and at the rally, classmates from Russell High held up placards reading simply, "Class of '41."

It seemed that virtually all 4,781 souls in Russell, not to mention many from neighboring communities, crowded into the VFW hall for a pancake breakfast and then filed out behind the building to watch the unveiling of the monument to Dole: a bronze plaque embedded in

a nine-foot-high, two-ton sheet of milky-colored greenhorn limestone quarried just north of town. The street that ran behind the VFW hall was renamed Bob Dole Drive.

Dole himself spent much of his time on the platform calling out to friends in the audience and reminiscing about experiences growing up. After his remarks, he spent over an hour shaking hands and signing autographs on everything from posters to greeting cards to a woman's T-shirt.

"Everywhere I look around I see something that reminds me of one little chapter, one little phase of my life," Dole said.

The most powerful memories stemmed from Dole's experiences in World War II. Like much else over the past week, Dole's appearance Friday highlighted his identity as the last plausible presidential candidate from the "GI Generation" that survived the Depression, defeated the Nazis, and then provided America with most of its postwar presidents.

Friday's ceremonies underscored the chasm in age and experiences between the 71-year-old Dole and 48-year-old Bill Clinton, the first baby boomer President. Dole was torn open by German fire in Italy just two days after Franklin D. Roosevelt died, and more than a year before Bill Clinton was born.

Events conspired to frame the contrast even more sharply. While Dole was celebrating the memory of those who fought in World War II—a conflict that offered moral clarity so stark it has been termed "The Good War"—the President was arguing in Washington that the penitent memoirs of former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara validated the views of

those, like Clinton, who opposed the bitterly divisive war in Vietnam.

Many political analysts believe that in stressing his experiences in World War II, Dole may be not only drawing a contrast with competitors who did not serve in the military, a group that includes leading Republican rivals such as Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, but also tapping favorable images of a generation often portrayed in popular culture as more stable and steady than the mercurial baby boom.

In so doing, Dole's campaign is attempting to convert what might be a liability—his age—into an asset.

"It's the first time we've had generational politics from the older generation," says Democratic poli-

ster Mark Mellman.

Indeed, after downplaying discussion of his war record through most of his political career, Dole all week wrapped himself in that memory. On Thursday, he appeared at a local monument to Vietnam veterans in Columbia, S.C., and was introduced by Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) as "someone who embodies all the best qualities of the American soldier."

At virtually every stop during his five-day inaugural campaign swing, Dole portrayed his decision to run as flowing from the emotions he experienced while attending the ceremonies commemorating the 50th anniversary of D-day last year—and his memories of how his neighbors in Russell

helped him rebuild his life after his battlefield wounds brought him near death.

"I'm not perfect," Dole said at a North Carolina rally Thursday, "but . . . I have been tested and tested and tested in many, many ways in my lifetime."

On Friday there were many in the crowd who remembered when Dole, who left for the war as a 190-pound star athlete, returned to his house on 1035 Maple Drive on a stretcher, weighing less than 125 pounds and unable to use his right arm.

"It was tough," recalled his sister Norma Jean Steele. "When they first brought him home it was pitiful. . . . [But] the town just poured out. They brought food, they were there for visits, they brought us flowers. He was their boy, and he still is."

Henry Bender from Russell was

in the crowd holding up a "Class of '41" placard. He also remembers when his friend arrived home, so thin and hobbled that his life already appeared behind him. Now Bender shakes his head at the sight of that shattered young man standing before him almost half a century later as the clear front-runner for his party's presidential nomination.

"It hardly seems believable," Bender says.

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GOP race may get dirty *Hutchinson News 4-15-95*

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

WASHINGTON — In theory, Republican candidates are supposed to adhere to the 11th Commandment of GOP politics: "Thou shalt not speak ill of a fellow Republican."

Then again, that's one commandment that wasn't written in stone.

With a year to go before the 1996 presidential election, the race for the Republican nomination is shaping up as an old-fashioned, in-house political slugfest.

Like squabbling siblings who unite to fight the kid next door, Republicans are warming up for their anticipated bout with President Clinton by trading blows with each other.

For example, the latest Republican entrant, Rep. Bob Dornan of California, is almost as critical of Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas as he is of Clinton.

Dornan, a former fighter pilot who sprinkles his speech with military imagery, portrayed himself as a potential spoiler in Gramm's plan to overtake Senate Majority

Leader Bob Dole of Kansas, the acknowledged front-runner.

"While Phil is closing in on Dole, he's going to find me shooting sidewinders at him and hosing him with a Gatling gun," the conservative California congressman declared in a recent interview. "Phil is dishing it out big-time on Dole, so Phil ought to be able to take it."

If Dornan is the thunder on the right, Sen. Arlen Specter is the lightning bolt on the left. The Pennsylvania senator, who comes from the party's moderate wing, has repeatedly accused his rivals of pandering to "religious fringe" organizations.

Meanwhile, an adviser to former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander, another GOP candidate, told The New York Times Sunday Magazine that he would like to "gut" Gramm "like a catfish."

In short, just about everyone has something bad to say about someone else.

"You'll be able to sell tickets to their joint appearances. It'll be the best entertainment in town," Re-

publican consultant Eddie Mahe predicted.

Of course, political in-fighting is par for the course in primary elections. But most political analysts see the 1996 race as a particularly volatile mix of hard-charging candidates and hot-button issues.

Gramm, Dornan, Dole and television commentator Patrick Buchanan are all known for their slash-and-burn style of campaigning.

"I didn't go to Washington to be loved, and I haven't been disappointed," Gramm once said of his reputation for abrasiveness.

Dornan, a frequent fill-in for talk show host Rush Limbaugh, is known as "B-1 Bob" for his bomb-throwing rhetoric and pro-military views. Dole's previous campaigns earned him the nickname "Darth Vader," after the evil character in the Star Wars movies.

"Politics is competitive, it's hardball sometimes," Dole said in a recent television interview. "Maybe I've said the wrong thing a couple of times in my career."

Opinions varied on subject of Dole's major competition

By Alan Montgomery
The Hutchinson News

RUSSELL — People in the crowd Friday at the Russell Veterans of Foreign Wars building had a range of opinions about who is the major competition for Sen. Bob Dole in his bid for the Republican nomination.

"The guy to watch is Richard Lugar," said George Meredith, a physician from Great Bend. "This idea of getting rid of the IRS is going to catch on big-time. He's pushing for a flat tax."

"(Phil) Gramm would be his biggest opposition," said Jack Luthi, 84, a retired Army colonel who was Dole's history teacher at Russell High School in 1939. Luthi enlisted in the army in 1940 and began his military career.

"Pete Wilson is very substantial," Luthi said. "He is very high on my list. And Arlen Specter. He's also from Russell."

Russell Townsley, retired publisher of the Russell Daily News, is not a Pete Wilson fan.

"Somebody's got to beat Wilson," he said. "He's no good. He's a Californian."

Sen. Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, said "Wilson in some ways is a formidable opponent, in terms of the size of the state he's from."

"Governors make good presidential candidates," Kerr said. "They are in a position of decision-making. Pete Wilson is as formidable as any of them."

Wilson undergoes surgery Friday for a nodule on his right vocal cord that was causing him dis-

comfort and making his voice crack repeatedly, according to his surgeon.

His staff believed it was the first surgery for Wilson since 1988, when he underwent an appendectomy while a U.S. senator.

That operation led to a controversial statement by Sen. Bob Dole. Immediately after Wilson's 1983 surgery, he was brought back to the Capitol by wheelchair to vote for a Republican-backed freeze in Social Security benefits.

After the vote, Dole said of Wilson, "We rolled him in from the hospital. He was under heavy sedation. We rolled him onto the floor. I said, 'Vote yes.' He voted 'yes.' We rolled him out again. He does better under sedation."

Friday's throat procedure was minor, and Wilson — an unannounced candidate for the Republican presidential nomination — faces no long-term threat. It should stop the voice-cracking and hoarseness that have plagued the 61-year-old governor, said Dr. Gerald Berke, Wilson's surgeon. Berke is chief of the division of head and neck surgery at the UCLA School of Medicine.

The surgery entailed cutting the nodule — described as similar to a callus, about 2 to 3 millimeters long — from Wilson's vocal cord. The procedure was done through the mouth, so there is no incision on the neck.

Wilson has had voice trouble for "several years," according to Leslie Goodman, his deputy chief of staff.

"He otherwise is in really excellent health," Berke said. The doctor said Wilson should

not use his voice for two days and should limit its use for about a week.