

World War II vet Bob Dole raises issue of generations

By Tom Fiedler
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

You could see Bob Dole grow wistful midway through his speech in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., earlier this month when he strayed briefly from his text to share what must be a deep-felt memory. The GOP front-runner's speech was intended to outline the themes on which he'll seek the presidency in 1996.

It contained boilerplate pledges of fiscal responsibility, anger about rampant crime and burgeoning welfare, attacks on Fidel Castro (for local consumption), assertions of personal rectitude and claims of unique qualifications. As a text, especially as delivered in Dole's resonant tenor voice with quick flashes of humor, it was more than good.

But it was in those few seconds when he floated loose from the text that the essence of Bob Dole came through — and perhaps with it, the essential question of the upcoming campaign.

The diversion began when the Senate Republican leader mentioned a trip he'd taken last summer to the beaches of Normandy for ceremonies honoring those who had been killed a half-century before during the Allied invasion of Europe.

Dole's eyes scanned the crowd as he spoke but they seemed momentarily unseeing, as if their gaze were turned inward on other images that only he could comprehend.

"You know," he said, coming back to focus, "it was interesting to watch the sons and grandsons of these veterans suddenly thinking of their fathers and grandfathers in a way they had never thought of them before. You don't think of your grandfather as having been a 19- or 20- or 21-year-old boy. Yet that's what they were."

Although Dole didn't mention it, I sense that another scene also flashed through his mind during those introspective moments. It was 50 years ago this month that he felt machine-gun bullets rip into his own body, virtually tearing off his right arm and leaving him close to dead. He was then 21, leading a squad of soldiers — boys turned to men — in Italy's Po Valley against a Nazi re-doubt.

In that mishapen arm, the Senate Republican leader carries a reminder of that moment with him always.

But perhaps more important, the experience of that war, its aftermath and the subsequent decades have rendered Dole a pure product of his generation.

He was among those who grew up during the Great Depression, fought in what may be remembered as America's noblest war, helped build postwar prosperity and endured the Cold War with communism to its victorious conclusion. It was a remarkable period in which to be in charge.

Most in his generation, those still alive, have pronounced their work done and stepped into retirement.

But not Dole. As he has said many times, there may be "one more mission" for him and his generation. His ideology aside, there is something alluring about this, reminiscent of an old John Wayne western in which the grizzled, seemingly washed-up sheriff comes back to town to reassert law and order when those who were younger and quicker couldn't.

We do know this: The decision is not just out of Dole's hands, it is out of the hands of his generation.

In last November's election, 44 percent of the votes were cast by baby boomers, that huge mass of Americans born after the atomic bomb fell on Japan and before the assassination of John F. Kennedy — still the generation's idol. They represent the largest coherent voting bloc in the electorate.

This, needless to say, is the generation of Bill and Hillary Clinton, Al and Tipper Gore, Newt Gingrich and Rush Limbaugh, people who may live nearly as long in the next century as they do in this.

Although their ideologies are as varied as the spectrum allows, baby boomers share some common traits, according to sociologists. Two were immortalized in slogans from the '60s. "Don't trust anyone over 30," was one. "Challenge authority!" was another.

Although the trust bar has been raised above 30 as the generation aged, its meaning remains unchanged — that those in the generations ahead are obviously not to be relied upon.

None of this would seem to bode well for Dole and there are data to back up the slogans. In its ongoing surveys of the American electorate, the Times Mirror Center in Wash-

ington has detected a generational component to Dole's popularity.

Among baby boomer Republicans, Dole is the choice of just 43 percent, in the center's latest poll. Among those over age 50, the Kansan ratchets up to 48 percent support.

And among his own contemporaries over age 65, he enjoys a clear majority of 53 percent.

Said survey director Andrew Kohut: "There's no doubt that the older you are, the more you like Bob Dole."

By contrast, younger Republican voters lean toward Gingrich (who isn't a candidate) and Pat Buchanan.

But Kohut and others aren't at all sure that the connection is generational. Despite the overall trend suggesting younger voters favor younger candidates, the connection may be more ideological than generational. The yawning attitude gap that separated parent from offspring in the tumultuous 1960s has in most cases disappeared, Kohut said.

By the time they reach 35, the values and views of baby boomers seem almost indistinguishable from those of their parents, the surveys show. What is different, however, is that the baby boomers and their Generation X children are more restless than the World War II generation, much more inclined to favor the candidate who will shake things up — whether that was Clinton in '92 or a Gingrich ally in '94.

The result could be that Dole's difficulty lies not in his age, but in his relatively centrist views. This could explain Dole's recent drift to the right as he attempts to style himself more as an agent of change than as a candidate who will reaffirm the status quo — or return to some bygone era.

Still, the real Bob Dole becomes utterly transparent in the sentences that speak of his generation's early missions. To him, there is still an America of small towns where doors aren't locked, where pies cool on the window sills, where neighbors help neighbors, where one's word is a bond, where America is a blessed nation and fighting under its flag is the greatest duty of all.

It is an appealing vision, no matter how old you might be. And who knows, perhaps Dole's time has come again.

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So the Senate is justified in wanting to take a close look at everything — and in trying to determine how well some of this is really going over with the public. Warnings from the House that Senate Republicans had better "get with the program" have been taken in the upper chamber with a grain of salt. The Senate has approved and President Clinton has signed two pieces of contract legislation.

One requires that Congress follow the laws that other employers must obey — a badly needed change that Republicans had derailed last year.

The other new law is a piece of contradictory gibberish, probably harmless, about unfunded mandates to state and local governments.

In addition, the Senate has approved a line-item veto plan. That plan, however, differs significantly from the one approved in the House.

Everything else in the Contract With America — including crime legislation, a revamping of welfare, new tax breaks, legal reform — is still up in the air in the Senate. There individual Democrats enjoy more clout and some prominent Republicans have strong reservations about some of Gingrich's ideas.

There is particular concern in the Senate over whether the House Republicans have shown sufficient fiscal responsibility, which they haven't.

Presiding over the Senate is Majority Leader Bob Dole, who as the front-runner in the race for the GOP's presidential nomination has other things on his mind than carrying water for Newt Gingrich.

In addition, President Clinton, apparently bolstered by some recent polling data, has been taking a tougher line toward much of the contract. He has promised to veto legislation that would weaken environmental protection or cripple government regulatory efforts.

Clinton also said he would protect his program to give local governments money to hire more police and protect last year's ban on certain types of assault weapons. The president also dismissed the House legislation on tax breaks as "a fantasy."

Whether Clinton will stick to his guns, of course, remains to be seen.

The search for money to reduce the federal deficit and pay for new tax breaks is now expected to take center stage. Ever the histori-

an, Gingrich has promised "one of the great efforts of modern times to remake the federal government so we can get to a balanced budget."

This effort, however, will reveal some of the differences among Republicans that were papered over in their first months in power, particularly in the House.

It will also be a learning experience. Freshman lawmakers, for example, will learn that many of the people who fume about government spending get equally upset over proposals that would deprive them of government benefits.

Some other Republican legislators may learn that new tax break proposals make cutting federal programs even more difficult than usual.

A few other likely hot spots in the coming months:

■ Foreign policy. Last week's horrifying terrorism will focus new attention on foreign policy, including intelligence and defense issues.

In addition, the administration's disappointments with Moscow, the bombing in Bosnia and the subject of Mexican aid all provide targets that are simply too juicy for the GOP to pass up.

Republicans also want to take another slice out of foreign aid, which many Americans believe — mistakenly — gobbles up a huge percentage of the federal budget pie.

Dole will be talking more about foreign affairs to emphasize his presidential credentials, and Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana is trying to build an entire presidential campaign around his foreign policy expertise.

■ Welfare reform. Public discontent with the current system is so overwhelming that the politicians will have to do something. Tacking to the right, the Republican presidential candidates know they have a sure-fire applause line here.

After promising in the 1992 campaign to "end welfare as we know it," Clinton put the issue on the back burner. As the president made clear in his press conference last week, he now sees an opportunity to play the compassionate reformer to Gingrich's Scrooge.

■ The environment. Although the Republicans did not focus on environmental issues in the fall elections, they have mounted a broad assault on government efforts to protect the country's natural resources.

The counter-attack has begun, and the GOP's critics are not mincing any words. A sample from a recent print advertisement by several environmental groups: "In legal boilerplate, the contract sets environmental law back 25 years. . . . Everything from public health to our national parks are targets."

■ The income tax. In his speech to the

country earlier this month, Gingrich indicated that the Republicans had some very big plans in this area. But the GOP is still trying to figure out what it really wants to do besides lower the capital gains tax rate.

Some Republicans want to make another run at a simplified flat tax. So far, however, the GOP legislation has been going in the opposite direction — toward more loopholes and complexity.

Still other Republicans in Congress want to do away with the federal income tax altogether and replace it with a gargantuan sales tax. We will know this idea is being taken seriously when the mayors and governors start screaming.

■ Government reorganization. Vice President Gore is still streamlining away. To show what real streamlining is, some Republicans began talking about vaporizing four government departments.

Too wimpy, says the Heritage Foundation. The conservative think tank has just released a plan that would get rid of nine Cabinet-level departments. That still leaves five, though, so it is conceivable that someone could still one-up Heritage.

■ Affirmative action. This is another big applause line for Republican presidential candidates, and even past champions of affirmative action are suggesting that a thoughtful review of the subject would be worthwhile. Clinton, still trying to figure out which way the wind is blowing, ducked an affirmative action question in last week's press conference.

There will be other tussles over everything from abortion to lobbying reform to defense spending.

With House Republicans moving beyond the contract, Democrats perking up, and Republican senators developing their presidential campaigns, politicians will be more likely to delve into certain issues on the spur of the moment.

So any predictions may be hazardous. The safest one came recently from *Congressional Quarterly*: "The outlook is for chaos."

President Clinton, apparently bolstered by some recent polling data, has been taking a tougher line toward much of the contract. He has promised to veto legislation that would weaken environmental protection or cripple government regulatory efforts.

State will pay for a big win for Dole

Associated Press

TOPEKA — Funding for Kansas' 1996 presidential primary election appears to be no problem as the Legislature returns this week for its wrapup session. But that doesn't mean the issue of whether to hold it at all has gone away.

Gov. Bill Graves included the \$1.5 million to pay for it in budget amendments he sent to chairmen of the appropriations committees last week.

They said they will include it in the omnibus appropriations bill being readied for legislators' return on Wednesday, and expect the Republican majorities in both houses to approve it.

Graves did not have the money in his proposed budget last January, because Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh forgot to request it.

So if the main issue isn't money, why is the primary still controversial?

Because of when it will be held. It is scheduled for next April 2, and many believe the Republican and Democratic nominees for president will long since have been decided by then.

So why is Kansas going through

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with it, and not reverting to the old caucus system of selecting delegates in district and state conventions and letting the political parties foot the bill?

Mainly because Sen. Bob Dole wants the primary, and Republicans are accommodating him.

Dole wants a big ballot-box victory in his home state in his bid for the GOP presidential nomination. He doesn't want anything left to chance in party caucuses — especially since religious conservatives have taken control of the GOP in three of the state's four congressional districts.

How would it look if a Pat Buchanan took delegates away from Dole in his own state?

Many states have advanced their primaries. Delaware, Arizona and South Dakota now have theirs scheduled right behind Iowa's caucuses and New Hampshire's primary, both in February.

Twenty-five more states have pri-

maries or caucuses set for the first two weeks in March. Four big-delegate states have their primaries in late March: Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and California.

By the time the Kansas primary rolls around in April, about three-quarters of the delegates will have been divvied up.

Members of the Senate committee that handles election matters, led by Sen. Mark Parkinson, R-Olathe, wanted to move the date up to the third Tuesday in February.

But that would have caused big problems for Democrats, whose national party rules prohibit any primaries or caucuses that bind delegates to specific candidates from being held before March — to protect the Iowa caucuses, set for Feb. 12, 1996, and the New Hampshire primary, scheduled for Feb. 20.

Kansas still could have a presidential preferential primary in February — but not make it binding on who gets the delegates to the national conventions, where the two major party candidates are chosen.

That would mean Democrats would know who is the most popular among their candidates — presumably President Clinton — but they

still would have to have a convention or caucuses to select their delegates.

"The proposal is dead" to move the date to early March, Parkinson said.

It will be held the same time as the city and school board elections the first Tuesday in April, to save a little on the cost.

"We wanted it earlier so we could get more attention for the state," Parkinson said. "But the Democrats wrote saying they are very concerned because the process for them might not be valid. The idea of holding it early has been derailed. The plan is to leave it as is."

Lyn Shaw, executive director of the state Democratic Party, said the party supports the primary regardless of when it is held because "we support things that juice up the process and let more people participate — but not if they don't comply with our national rules."

She said it is "interesting to see the kind of problems this is causing for the Republican Party."

"Bob Dole is a little bit leery of trusting his Kansas delegates to a caucus method," she said.

THE POLITICAL INTEREST

Michael Kramer

The Brand-New Bob Dole

"IT FEELS GOOD TO BE IN OHIO," BOB DOLE SAID last Tuesday. "Good to be among friends." "It feels good to be in Dallas," Dole said last Wednesday. "Good to be among friends." Don't worry. Sooner or later the G.O.P. front runner will visit your state and feel good about being there too. That's what running to lead the world's most powerful nation is all about. And for the third time, that is what Bob Dole is trying to do.

After unofficially declaring for the presidency about 1,000 times during the past few months, Dole finally made it official last week. In a mad dash through 10 states — a purposely grueling schedule designed to prove that at 71 he's still vigorous enough for the job — Dole announced and reannounced that he should be President because "I have the experience," because "I have been tested and tested and tested in many ways" and because "I am not afraid to lead, and I know the way."

To where, though? Stay tuned, said Dole. "We'll flesh things out as we go along." Says the candidate's chief strategist, Bill Lacey: "Our only vulnerability would be if we don't have a viable message." It may be that the sum of Dole's rhetoric never coheres into a concrete plan of action; yet setting a tone is the requisite beginning of a "viable message," and that's what Dole was about last week.

Dole, however, has a problem. He is the putative nominee, but all around him, his party is seething. His situation is a lot like the one Ed Muskie faced when he ran for the Democratic nomination in 1972. Muskie failed to accommodate the Democrats' antiwar majority and his attempt, he later said, was a mistake because "it destroyed my core support." Like Muskie, Dole is now trying to adapt himself to the changing center of gravity in his party. That he should have to make the effort at all tells you how far rightward the G.O.P. has tilted. Until now, no one has challenged Dole's conservatism.

However, evidence of Dole's compassion — his support for school lunches, food stamps and AIDS research, for example — is cited by his opponents as proof that he is a closet moderate, which for many hard-core conservatives is akin to saying he's a socialist. If Dole were truly the leader he claims to be, he would be seeking to bring the G.O.P. back to his brand of pragmatism, the kind of Republicanism that flourished before Ronald Reagan. Instead, Dole is slavishly striving to join the rightward lurch.

Compare his previous announcement speeches with last week's, and with some of his other recent statements, and the magnitude of the lurch becomes clear. When he ran for the

1980 nomination, Dole swiped at "single-issue constituencies," like those seeking to preserve "the right to bear arms." Today Dole favors repealing the ban on assault weapons. Back then Dole described America as "the Mother of Exiles" and spoke movingly about "not fearing that new Americans [might] threaten to diminish a finite national wealth." Today he supports the G.O.P.'s anti-immigrant stance. Back then he warned against "dividing a people to conquer office" and about "exacerbating [racial tensions] for political advantage." Today he opposes the affirmative-action programs he used to defend.

When he ran in 1988, Dole favored the Federal Government's "stimulating school systems to improve what goes on in our classrooms." Today he proposes abolishing four Cabinet agencies, including the Education Department. Seven years ago, Dole spoke about the need to "provide care and assistance for the hungry and the homeless and the disabled." Nothing resembling that was heard last week. Instead, Dole adopted a Dan Quayle-like concern for restoring "traditional values." In a neat "twofor," Dole attacked Hollywood for promoting "casual violence and even more casual sex" and the government in Washington for undermining "the moral code we nurture in our churches and synagogues."

Perhaps Dole's greatest change involves taxes. When he ran in '88 — and indeed throughout his career — Dole identified the "federal budget deficit" as the "single greatest threat to a prosperous and dynamic America." He spoke about cutting taxes (as every politician does), but he lost the crucial '88 New Hampshire primary when he refused to sign the pledge that George Bush later evolved into "Read my lips: no new taxes." Last week Dole surrendered without a fight when he signed the very same kind of pledge he responsibly refrained from endorsing seven years ago.

These days Dole calls himself "warm and cuddly." If his legendary meanness remains submerged, says Dole, it will be because he is finally "relaxed" about his ambition. It may also be that Dole has simply resigned himself to following Bush's disciplined determination to do and say "whatever it takes" to win. And that, in turn, may reflect Dole's growing comfort with his old nemesis' cynical view of the entire punishing enterprise. "The people are wonderful at understanding when a campaign ends and the world of business begins," Bush said after he won in 1988. Forget about what he'd said and done to triumph, Bush explained. The campaign isn't a guide to governance: "It's history. It doesn't mean anything anymore."



It's official: a mad dash through 10 states