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Dole tries to juggle two jobs

Senate duties could be boon or albatross

By JOHN KING
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Legal reform was the subject at hand when Bob Dole strolled onto the Senate floor Friday to rebut President Clinton's latest criticism of the GOP agenda. Accusing the president of scare tactics, Dole said tersely, "This is about politics, not policy."

But Dole is well aware just about every debate these days is about both.

Analysis

As both majority leader and the early front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, Dole finds himself in a delicate position on a daily — if not hourly — basis, trying to juggle Senate duties that are inclined to deal-making with the need to establish his principles clearly as a presidential candidate.

Last week offered some telling glimpses of this daunting challenge.

Dole tried, unsuccessfully so far, to get the Senate to approve a major overhaul of the civil legal system. The House has already passed a sweeping version, and this is just one issue on which Dole is under pressure to get the Senate to closely follow the script written by the more conservative House. He'll try again this week, but Democrats say he needs more votes.

Dole has also made no secret of his opposition to Clinton's nomination of Dr. Henry Foster to be surgeon general, and kept close tabs on confirmation hearings at which both sides agree Foster made no major missteps.

In the old days, that would be enough for Foster to win confirmation; Dole has repeatedly said over the years that presidents deserve a lot of leeway in nominations.

But these aren't the old days. Dole's biggest concern as a presidential candidate is a challenge from the right.

"I think Dole is doing an expert job behind the scenes" so far to thwart Foster's confirmation, said Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition. "I think he may well pull it off."

And if that proves wishful thinking, and Foster wins confirmation?

"Then we are going to have it out on the abortion issue," said Pat Buchanan, another GOP presidential candidate. "If the Republican Party provides the margin of victory for an abortionist to be-

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Dole puts leadership skills on line every day

come surgeon general, then the right-to-life issue goes to the top of the agenda."

As the Foster debate plays out this week, Dole also will have a

budget battle to worry about. Then comes welfare reform.

In these and numerous other debates, Dole the majority leader is looking for enough votes to enact legislation, while Dole the candidate looks for winning campaign issues.

"To convince voters he is a leader capable of being president,

he needs to draw some lines in the sand on what he stands for and what he believes in," said GOP pollster Ed Geas. "But he also has a responsibility in the Senate to look for consensus."

Three other GOP senators are running for president, too: Phil Gramm of Texas, Richard Lugar of Indiana and Arlen Specter of

Pennsylvania. But they can pick their fights. As majority leader, Dole has no choice but to lead every battle.

Dole advisers readily acknowledge the risks, but they prefer to focus on the advantages.

"Overall, being majority leader is a net plus for us," said Dole campaign chairman William Lacy. "It gives him a forum to talk about any issue. ... He gets to show every day that he's a leader."

THE WICHITA EAGLE Monday, May 8, 1995

Nixon's advice rings loud and clear in Dole's '96 campaign

By Jack Nelson

Los Angeles Times/Washington Post Service

WASHINGTON — "Some compassion on health and welfare issues will be useful politically as well as being right philosophically," the longtime adviser counseled Sen. Bob Dole before the Kansas Republican began his latest presidential campaign.

But "don't let them get the impression that you are no longer tough," he quickly added. "Being tough with a smile is the best posture for you."

If the mixture of political positioning and philosophy — as well as the emphasis on toughness — sounds familiar, it should. The advice came from a figure who dominated American politics for a generation and continues to influence it even now — the late Richard Nixon.

In laying out his strategy for winning the Republican presidential nomination in 1996, Senate Majority Leader Dole has leaned heavily on detailed advice from President Nixon, who was one of his oldest and closest political friends. The advice, spelled out in a series of private conversations and letters supplied to the Los



Former President Richard Nixon, ever the pragmatic politician, counseled Sen. Bob Dole to be show that he has a heart and be compassionate on issues such as health and welfare. "Appearing mean would play into the false caricature your critics have tagged you with," Nixon wrote. "Being tough with a smile is the best posture for you."



Angeles Times, provides a window both on the motivations for Dole's strategy and on the continuing ability of Nixon to influence American politics more than a year after his death.

Dole, whose friendship with Nixon was so strong that he defended the embattled president to the end during the Watergate scandal that ended his presidency, re-

leased the letters to The Times.

On everything from when to smile to how to treat the GOP's right wing, Dole has been sticking close to Nixon's script.

To win the Republican nomination, Nixon told Dole, "you have to run as far as you can to the right because that's where 40 percent of the people who decide the

nomination are. And to get elected you have to run as fast as you can back to the middle because only about 4 percent of the nation's voters are on the extreme right wing."

You have the "brains, heart and guts" required of the best leaders, Nixon told Dole, but cautioned that some have questioned whether the Kansan has the heart. For that reason, the ever-pragmatic former president advised compassion on health and welfare. "Appearing mean would play into the false caricature your critics have tagged you with. Being tough with a smile is the best posture for you," Nixon said.

Nixon and Dole had a close personal friendship that dated back to the 1950s. Nixon once called Dole the "dominant Republican" of his era and the senator, in a tearful eulogy at the former president's funeral, declared that "the second half of the 20th century will be known as the age of Nixon."

A longtime friend and supporter of both men recounted Nixon's advice about running to the right and said that Dole "is following the advice and tolerating right-

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wingers" in his political camp because he thinks it will help him get the nomination. If Dole wins the presidency, said the friend, a major financial supporter, "I believe he will do just like Nixon did after appealing to the far right and wind up supporting such things as affirmative action."

Catering to the party's right wing is "one of the uglier aspects of nomination politics," said former Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., a friend of Dole's who supports former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander's bid for the GOP nomination. But, Baker insisted, Dole has "a well-fixed, well-developed central core of convictions." Other candidates also have felt compelled to appeal to the right — including Alexander, Baker added.

Despite his admonition to curry favor with the right, Nixon counseled Dole to seek a middle ground on some social policy issues, especially health care. In a letter three months before he died, the former president commended Dole for proposing "a responsible program" to counter President Clinton's ill-fated health reform proposals.

"Some of our more reactionary colleagues will complain but they are wrong, both politically and substantively," Nixon wrote.

"As you know," the letter continued, "I signed on to a health care plan with liberal Republican congressmen like Jake Javits (of New York) when I was in my first year in the House. If we had faced up to the problem then, we wouldn't be confronted with Clinton's revolutionary proposals today."

As Nixon predicted, more conservative opponents have used Dole's health care stand against him. Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, in particular, has used health care as a point of contrast between Dole's willingness to deal and his own, more uncompromising, brand of conservatism.

Nixon, in one of his letters, suggested that critics might try to focus on Dole's age but argued that "after four years of Clinton and his baby boomers, age may not prove to be a liability."

Several times in different letters Nixon commented that Dole, who is now 71, should not worry about the age issue because of his youthful appearance and physical and mental stamina.

"In talking to the three girls on my staff," Nixon wrote, "they all emphasized that you looked 15 years younger than your three score and 10. As I told you, one of your greatest assets is your voice. Most important, you have not lost any of your mental sharpness. Looking back over the years, I vividly recall that (France's Charles) DeGaulle, (Germany's Konrad) Adenauer, (Japan's Shigeru) Yoshida, and (China's) Chou En-lai were all in top form mentally in their 70s."

Three years ago, Nixon reminded Dole in a letter that by 1996 the senator would be six months younger than Ronald Reagan was in 1984 when he ran for a second term. "You will either be the nominee, if your health permits, or you will name the nominee," he wrote.

Dole himself has dismissed the age issue as unimportant but polls indicate that it could be a crucial factor, especially in a close race. A recent NBC/Wall Street Journal poll showed that, while 65 percent of the public think that Dole's age would not affect his ability to be president, just 18 percent prefer a candidate of the World War II generation, and only 1 percent think that the 70s is the best age for a president. Two in five older Americans said that, because of his age, Dole would be less able to handle the presidency.

Nixon told Dole that "everyone" recognizes him as the top leader of the Republican Party "even though we have the unprecedented situation of having four living former Republican" presidents.

It is not necessary, though, for Dole to say he is the leader, Nixon said. "Let others say it for you — but you must insist that all major issues be cleared with you."

Calling Dole "the most dominant legislative, political and policy leader of the Republican Party" he had ever seen, Nixon said that the senator is in a much better position to run for president than Nixon was when he ran in 1968.

He reminded Dole that he had faced New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, California Gov. Reagan and Michigan Gov. George Romney, all "formidable potential candidates with substantial public support" and said that Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona, while no longer a viable candidate because of his devastating defeat in 1964, still had "a hard core of right-wing loyalists." His own major support, Nixon said, had been among House and Senate members for whom he had campaigned in six election years.

Nixon urged Dole to declare a personal moratorium on any discussion of his 1996 plans before 1994 and to demonstrate his qualifications to be considered a potential candidate by helping other Republicans win in 1994 — a piece of advice that Dole followed.

"After 1994," Nixon wrote, "you will have no one who can defeat you, if you run, or can win without you, if you decide not to run."