

It's still Dole out in front of a crowded GOP field

By Robert Shogan
Los Angeles Times/
Washington Post Service

GREEN BAY, Wis. — The starting lap of the Republican presidential race is over, and one result has become clear — in the eyes of the party activists and professionals who are the candidates' current audience, none of the hopefuls has so far been able to provide a good reason for rejecting the leader of the pack, Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas. As a result, as Dole and his fellow candidates arrived in Green Bay over the weekend for the latest in a series of regional forums for GOP candidates, the Senate majority leader dominates the early competition much as Green Bay's beloved gridiron heroes, the Packers, once ruled the National Football League. Basking in the comfort of his front-runner status, Dole has so far avoided the sort of tunders that damaged him in past presidential drives. Moreover, on issue after is-

sue, from family values to assault weapons to affirmative action, he has adroitly maneuvered to foreclose openings that the others might exploit against him. Of course, Dole could well slip — he is, after all, 71 years old and has a long history of losing in presidential politics. But his rivals face the frustrating reality that at this point they themselves can do little to force him to stumble. "It's very hard to force a professional like Dole to make a mistake," House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., said. "He may make a mistake, but it won't be because somebody forced him to do it. And in the effort to try to force it, the others may actually chew themselves up." Indeed, instead of making Dole slip, his rivals have spent the spring plagued by minor and major miscues of their own — from California Gov. Pete Wilson's embar-

See GOP, Page 5A

GOP

From Page 1A

rassment over hiring an illegal immigrant as a domestic worker to Texas Sen. Phil Gramm's mishandling of relations with conservative social activists and local political figures in New Hampshire, scene of the contest's first primary next winter.

Gingrich himself has been the latest bearer of bad news to Wilson, Gramm, former Gov. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee and the five other declared candidates who are chasing Dole.

Earlier in the year, Gingrich disavowed all presidential ambitions. Now he has once again taken to hinting that he might get into the race — a sure indication that he feels none of the others have shown much sign of catching fire.

"I don't rule out anything," is now the word from the House speaker, who plans to visit New Hampshire in early June. Were he to enter the race, Gingrich almost certainly would quickly overshadow Dole's other rivals.

All that has caused a certain restlessness, even here in the Midwest, Dole's home turf, where 600 activists from 13 states gathered for a Republican regional leadership conference.

"We need a candidate who can articulate a vision that will mobilize voters," lamented Betty Jo Nelson, a former state legislator from suburban Milwaukee.

Robert Shinkle, a Dayton, Ohio, business consultant, voiced a similar concern. He said he prefers Gramm to Dole because he considers Gramm a "risk taker." "People who are not risk takers are supporters of Dole," he said.

As for the candidates themselves, they have mostly remained polite —

"It's very hard to force a professional like Dole to make a mistake. He may make a mistake, but it won't be because somebody forced him to do it."

Newt Gingrich

praising each other by repeatedly saying that any Republican would be better for the country than President Clinton. But that stance could change quickly.

"All of us can't roll along to the start of the primaries saying: 'We're all great guys,'" said one of the candidates, asking not to be identified. "If Dole is still up there and we're still down here, we'll have to start shooting."

Indeed some sniping has already begun. At a recent gathering in Denver, for example, Gramm repeated his boast that he deserved much of the credit for defeating Clinton's health-care reform proposal, then sharpened his point with a new line claiming that he had staked out a hard-line position in opposition "when the pollsters in Bob Dole's office said it was political suicide to take on health care."

Strategists for several campaigns hope events in the next few months will reinforce precisely that argument. Dole's ingrained tendency to bargain and compromise on legislation, they think, could prove to be his undoing, causing him to make pragmatic sacrifices of portions of the GOP Contract With America cherished by conservatives.

"To me, he's the contract killer," said Earl Ehrhart, GOP whip of the Georgia House of Representatives

and a Gramm supporter. "Everything Gingrich sends over, Dole cuts in half and then says: 'OK, and now we'll compromise on the other half.' That just bugs me no end."

Still others say they think that Dole's membership in the World War II generation will hurt him despite his combat-hero status.

"People are going to want somebody from a younger generation to lead the country into the next century," said Mike Murphy, chief strategist for Alexander.

So far, however, neither of those arguments has taken hold, and Dole continues to roll on — piling up endorsements from influential party leaders. Eight governors and 16 senators top a 12-page list of VIP backers compiled by his campaign headquarters.

And not only is the Kansas lawmaker way ahead in every national survey of Republican voters, he leads Wilson in surveys of Californians and edged Gramm in one recent measure of popularity in Texas.

At the same time, the very size of the field impedes the others from gaining the attention their candidates need to flourish, and so does the fact that all share the same fundamental conservative beliefs.

Each one is down on government, high on family values, strong for tax breaks and fervently committed to making the United States No. 1 in the world. This makes it hard for casual listeners to distinguish among them. "They were all talking Republican principles," said Delaware GOP Chairman Basil Battaglia after Gramm and three other contenders, Rep. Robert Dornan, R-Calif., former State Department official Alan Keyes, and Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana, addressed his party's state convention early this month. "To differentiate them would be pretty hard."

Senate says no to Gramm budget plan

Texan sought to cut \$160 billion

By The Associated Press
WASHINGTON — The Senate shot down Sen. Phil Gramm's effort Tuesday to add tax cuts to the Republican balanced-budget plan, exposing deep rifts within GOP ranks over one of the party's premier priorities for the year.

In a fight driven as much by presidential politics as anything else, senators rejected the plan by the Texas Republican and presidential candidate by a vote of 69-31.

As expected, Gramm ran into solid opposition from Democrats and from Republicans who prefer an all-out effort to eliminate deficits. All 46 Democrats, joined by 23 of 54 Republicans, voted "no."

Gramm proposed cutting taxes on families, businesses and investors by \$160 billion over five years in a package that was similar to the collection of levy reductions already approved by the House. In that chamber, Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., has called the tax cuts the "crown jewel" of the "Contract With America."

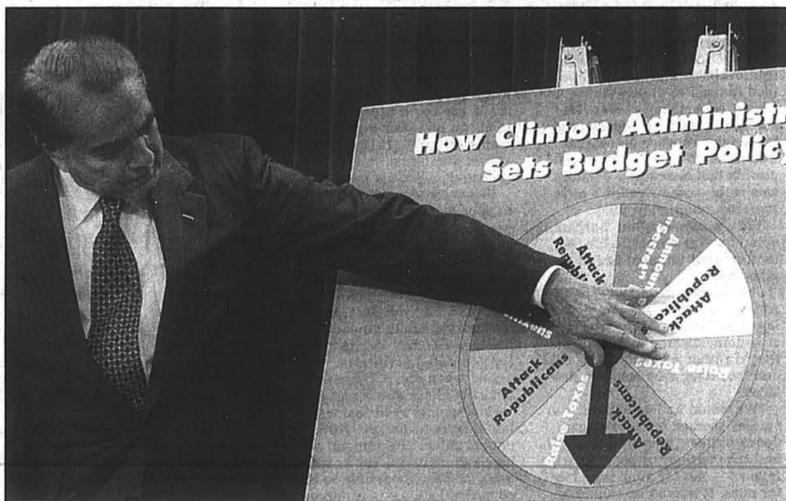
The overwhelming vote raised questions about how readily House-Senate bargainers will be able to resolve their differences over taxes when they try crafting a compromise budget.

It is possible that the Senate would address the issue again today. Tax cuts appeal deeply to many conservatives who will vote in the GOP primaries next year, and another presidential contender — Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole — was considering offering an alternative. He has said repeatedly that the Senate will vote this year to cut taxes.

The Kansas Republican has worked on a smaller package that could provide tax credits for families and reduce the capital gains tax, said GOP Senate aides.

But after the lopsided vote against Gramm's plan, some GOP senators said they thought Dole had little to gain by offering a proposal that would probably lose.

As Republicans tussled over taxes, President Clinton pledged to work with them toward eliminat-



Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole points to a chart of President Clinton's budget policy during a Capitol Hill news conference Tuesday.

ing the deficit within a specified period, but not in seven years as the GOP prefers. Sticking to the seven-year timetable, he said, would require "massive tax increases or massive budget cuts" that would hurt Americans.

Gramm bashes Dole

Gramm seemed to take issue with the majority leader's plan for cutting taxes, which Senate sources said probably would lower levies for about three years.

"Coming back later with some temporary tax cut, some cut-a-deal proposal, undermines what the American people wanted us to do" when they elected a Republican Congress last fall, Gramm said.

The tax maneuvering occurred as the Senate debated a GOP outline for culling nearly \$1 trillion in savings from Medicare, Medicaid, and hundreds of other programs over the next seven years, eliminating federal deficits by 2002. The overall measure, which probably will be approved today, omits tax cuts for now but would permit

them once a plan for balancing the budget becomes law.

Democrats argued that the proposed tax cut sounded like a reheated version of the 1980s, when President Reagan sought tax cuts and a balanced budget and ended up with record federal deficits.

Clinton said the budget could not be balanced in seven years like Republicans want without damaging the economy, though he said it should be done "in a reasonable amount of time" that both parties should agree to.

"If you balance the budget in seven years, with the evidence we now have, that would either require massive tax increases or massive budget cuts, which would be unfair to our long-term objective to stabilize the incomes and the way of living of the American people," Clinton said.

President confuses

He also said that once Republicans complete work on their budget, which does not require the president's signature, he would try

to help shape the final bills that actually cut spending.

"I will bargain and negotiate and deal in good faith because I believe in deficit reduction," he told reporters at the White House.

The remarks contrasted with comments Clinton made in a radio interview last week, when he said the budget could be balanced in seven years and that he would propose a "counter-budget" of his own.

The comments had confused White House aides and congressional Democrats, who said they believed Clinton was not abandoning his oft-repeated pledge to negotiate with Republicans only after they drop plans to trim Medicare, education and taxes for the well-off.

Republicans rebuked Clinton on Tuesday for offering nothing while lawmakers have labored to make hard decisions on cutting spending.

"It seems to me it's a little late after all the attacks on Republicans, all the efforts to scare senior citizens" about GOP plans to slow spending for Medicare, said Dole.

Senate rejects Gramm's tax-cut plan

Presidential politics a factor in fight

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate shot down Sen. Phil Gramm's effort Tuesday to add tax cuts to the Republican balanced-budget plan, exposing deep rifts within GOP ranks over one of the party's premier priorities for the year.

In a fight driven as much by presidential politics as anything else, senators rejected the plan by the Texas Republican and presidential candidate by a vote of 69-31.

As expected, Gramm ran into solid opposition from Democrats and from Republicans who prefer an all-out effort to eliminate deficits. All 46 Democrats, joined by 23 of 54 Republicans, voted no. Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas was among the Republicans voting against the measure.

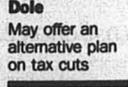
Gramm proposed cutting taxes on families, businesses and investors by \$160 billion over five years in a package that was similar to the collection of levy reductions already approved by the House. In that chamber, Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., has called the tax cuts the "crown jewel" of the Contract With America.

But it was possible that the Senate would address the issue again today. Tax cuts appeal deeply to many conservatives who will vote in the GOP primaries next year, and another presidential contender — Sen-

ate Majority Leader Bob Dole — was considering offering an alternative. He has said repeatedly that the Senate will vote this year to cut taxes.

The Kansas Republican has worked on a smaller package that could provide tax credits for families and reduce the capital gains tax, said GOP Senate aides who spoke on condition of anonymity. But after the lopsided vote against Gramm's plan, some GOP senators said they thought Dole had little to gain by offering a proposal that would probably lose, and Dole himself said, "I don't know" when asked what he would do.

As Republicans tussled over taxes, President Clinton pledged to work with them toward eliminating the deficit within a specified period, but not in seven years as the GOP prefers. Sticking to the seven-year timetable, he said, would require "massive tax increases or massive budget cuts" that would hurt Americans.



Dole may offer an alternative plan on tax cuts

Before the vote that he knew would fall short, Gramm argued that his tax-cut plan would let Republicans demonstrate their desire to "let working men and women keep more of what they earn," a theme he uses often.

Dole, who voted for Gramm's amendment, refused to say he would offer an alternative of his own. But he has said repeatedly that the Senate will vote to lower taxes.

"I like tax cuts," he said Tuesday. Without mentioning Dole by name, Gramm seemed to take issue with the majority leader's plan, which Senate sources said probably would cut taxes for about three years.

"Coming back later with some temporary tax cut, some cut-a-deal proposal, undermines what the American people wanted us to do" when they elected a Republican Congress last fall, Gramm said.

The tax maneuvering occurred as the Senate debated a GOP outline for culling nearly \$1 trillion in savings from Medicare, Medicaid, and hundreds of other programs over the next seven years, eliminating federal deficits by 2002. The overall measure, which probably will be approved today, would omit tax cuts

for now but would permit them once a plan for balancing the budget becomes law.

Clinton also said that once Republicans complete work on their budget, which does not require the president's signature, he would try to help shape the final bills.

"I will bargain and negotiate and deal in good faith because I believe in deficit reduction," he told reporters at the White House. "I believe in a balanced budget, but I also know we've got to invest in the people of this country if we're going to raise their incomes."

The remarks contrasted with comments Clinton made in a radio interview last week, when he said the budget could be balanced in seven years and that he would propose a "counter-budget" of his own.

The comments had confused White House aides and congressional Democrats, who said they thought Clinton was not abandoning his oft-repeated pledge to negotiate with Republicans only after they drop plans to trim Medicare, education and taxes for the well-off.

Republicans rebuked Clinton on Tuesday for offering nothing while lawmakers have labored to make hard decisions on cutting spending.