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Will the real Bob Dole please stand up?

Bob Dole was on television the other night doing his darnedest not to look like Bob Dole. You could see, though, that it wasn't easy. Under attack, he is afflicted with an instinct for the crushing rebuttal. This night he was having a hard time keeping his thermostat low.

Having been anointed "front-runner" for the Republican nomination, Dole is everybody's target for destruction. The media will need to get rid of him by next winter in order to spin their entertaining horse-race tale of upsets, crippled front-runners, new faces, all the usual hocus-pocus.

Republican contenders galore need him out of the way as soon as possible. They believe the real Bob Dole — a human dark and stormy night, his critics believe — is still in there and bound to surface. On the TV you glimpsed a man trying hard not to raise his opponents' hopes.

Democrats and assorted news people had been suggesting that he, Bob Dole, wanted deadly hamburgers sold to kids. Hamburgers full of that E. coli bacteria.

They weren't really saying outright that Bob Dole was the kind of fellow who wanted bad hamburger served to kids, but politics is the art of saying it without really saying it outright, at least if what you are saying is so vile that your own mother would be ashamed of you if you said it outright.

As Senate leader, Dole is pushing a batch of regulatory changes aimed at making life better for the Republicans' natural constituency, which is business and big money. Among other things,



these would cut the budget for inspecting meat.

So there was Bob Dole on the screen trying to stay cool, ironic, amused and self-controlled about these well-poisoners' hints that he — decent, upright, small-town-Kansas Bob Dole — wanted to cut the meat-inspection budget and sell American kids hamburgers reeking with deadly disease.

Running for president, Dole could not afford to do what nature was probably tempting him to do. He has a stinging wit for laying out his critics, and wit is a terrible political burden in a nation whose taste in humor runs to sitcoms. Dole's is often perceived as meanness, and the media report him as a dark spirit, as "Mean Bob Dole."

Richard Ben Cramer's dazzling portrait of Dole in "What It Takes," perhaps the best presidential campaign book ever written, shows why Dole, of all our practicing politicians, is uniquely entitled to indulge in dark and bitter ironies. Still, dark irony is not a big seller with voters, and when translated into "Mean Bob Dole" it can be deadly.

Americans want Presidents to be nice guys, especially after un-nice-guy Richard Nixon. Yet Nixon's darkness had political virtues: Nixon devotees

loved him for the enemies he made. Americans also know there is such a thing as being too nice a guy, like George McGovern, Nixon's hapless opponent in 1972. Ronald Reagan got it just right. Nice, really nice, but not too nice.

Dole's problem is that while he does not come across as a nice guy, neither does he have Nixon's gift for making the kind of enemies people love to hate.

Nixon pouring bile on rotten, pinko, America-hating liberals really seemed to mean it. Dole blasting liberals and such agents of moral rot sounds like a man reading a ghosted speech because poll takers said it would boost him three points in somebody's poll.

The interesting questions about presidential dreams are the child's questions: Why? What? The why is almost always the same, but never openly confessed: The honor of the thing is irresistible. "Top of the world, Ma!" For a politician it is the trade's top job. Not wanting it would be inhuman.

The what question is a bit puzzling with Dole. To win nomination in a convention run by America's most conservative conservatives, Dole has done pretty much everything edge-of-the-cliff conservatives expect. But is this what President Bob Dole would do?

He used to be a dealer. Is he now converted to an authentic believer washed in the rectified sauces of the Only True Conservatism?

Will the real Bob Dole stand up? Not if he can help it while there's still hope of getting the big job. If then. The real Bill Clinton has already had it for two years and still hasn't stood up.

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Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., waved as he walked along pit row before a race recently in Loudon, N.H. To his left was U.S. Rep. Bill Zeliff, R-N.H.

Dole will turn 72 Saturday. If elected president, the GOP front-runner would be 73 at the time of his inauguration.

Dole turns 72 Saturday

By RITA BEAMISH
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Bob Dole turns 72 on Saturday, a vigorous septuagenarian with a daily regimen to exhaust men half his age. Still, with political opponents insinuating he is over the hill, Dole would probably rather skip this birthday.

If elected president, Dole would be 73 at the time of his inauguration, the oldest president ever to enter the White House. The record-holder is Ronald Reagan, who took office at 69 and was 77 when his two terms ended.

The age question has percolated quietly since Dole began his bid for the Republican nomination to run against baby-boomer President Clinton.

It emerged more pointedly when rival Lamar Alexander suggested Dole was from the wrong generation to lead America in the new century. Dole aides called that a desperate bid for advantage.

Dole defies any stereotype of a senior citizen, and his campaign has tried to neutralize the age issue by promoting him as seasoned and steady

against a wobbly and inexperienced Clinton.

"The bottom line is voters elect presidents on the basis of leadership, character and philosophy," said Dole deputy campaign manager Bill Lacy.

Despite a World War II injury that rendered his right arm all but useless, Dole is robust — keeping long hours in his demanding role as Senate majority leader, arriving by 8 a.m. and staying for late night sessions, then hitting the campaign trail when the Senate is not in session.

The tall, trim Kansan uses a treadmill several times a week, has few streaks of gray in his hair and says he has had no resurgence of his 1991 prostate cancer.

But, like Reagan before him, Dole has had to deflect age questions in what some see as a problem compounded by GOP enthusiasm for changes swept into Washington by a crop of younger, fresher Republican faces.

While other rivals have declined to join Alexander's sniping, Dole aides soon will take the preemptive step of releasing Dole's medical records. They "demonstrate Sen. Dole is in

excellent health," said campaign spokesman Nelson Warfield.

Further, said Lacy, campaign polling and focus groups show age "is not an issue for us." But aides to the 55-year-old Alexander said their research shows people do raise questions.

"You can't escape the fact that he is 72 and people comment on it," said Fred Malek, a longtime Dole associate and the Republican National Committee's fund-raising chairman. "But he's about the youngest 72-year-old and has the most energy that I've ever seen."

Malek described traveling with Dole to former President Nixon's funeral last year on a flight that left Washington in the morning and returned at 2 a.m. "On the way back he was patrolling the plane and chatting with people," said Malek. "Most of the people sitting in the plane wanted to go to sleep. They were exhausted."

Even opponents give Dole his due. "Bob Dole is down there every day, working just as hard as any of these other candidates. That's saying a lot," said Charlie Black, adviser to Dole's rival Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas.

THE WICHITA EAGLE Wednesday, July 19, 1995

Dole pushes for vote on arming Bosnia

By David Hess and Michael E. Ruane
Eagle Washington bureau

WASHINGTON — Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole directly challenged President Clinton's Bosnia policy Tuesday, seeking a binding Senate resolution that would require the United States to lift a weapons ban on the Balkans.

The move — an extraordinary effort to wrest management of foreign affairs away from a sitting president — has a "good chance" to win enough Senate votes to override a presidential veto, said Democratic Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, a longtime opponent of the weapons embargo.

Others in Congress said they expected the vote, which could come later this week, to be close. Whatever the outcome, Dole's action is expected to cause legal and political turmoil.

Dole says lifting the embargo would bring a quick and relatively clean end to a long-failed effort to mediate a bloody civil war. Clinton has argued that an end to the embargo would suck the United States deeper into the Bosnian violence.

Dole's action comes at a crucial juncture for the Bosnian crisis. The United States has been conferring daily with senior French and British diplomatic and military officials as the three countries wrestle over whether to challenge recent Serb aggression against U.N. "safe zones" in Bosnia or to retreat.

The French favor a military challenge, but the British are hesitant and Clinton, who would be required to provide U.S. helicopters and air support for any military action, is clearly hesitant about the potential loss of American lives.

Both the British and the French have said they will withdraw their peacekeepers from Bosnia if the United States lifts the embargo.

Dole, a Kansas Republican, introduced the resolution at the end of a day in which senior Clinton aides lobbied heavily against lifting the embargo.

The resolution, co-sponsored by Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., is similar to a resolution already passed by the House.

In light of the U.N.'s recent military impotence in Bosnia, lifting the embargo would theoretically allow the Bosnian Muslims to redress the weapons advantage enjoyed by the Bosnian Serbs, and which the embargo perpetuates.

"It's time for us to stand up," Dole told the Senate. "It's a moral issue that can be addressed without committing American forces. We're not saying, 'Let's lift the embargo and we will defend you.' We are saying, 'Lift the embargo and you can defend yourselves.'"

But Clinton and his aides argued that the action would "Americanize" the war by forcing the United States to supply and train the Muslims before they were slaughtered by their Serbian enemies.

No one knows how quickly the Bosnian Muslims could

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be helped and what the Serbs would do in the interim.

Clinton could conceivably ignore the Dole resolution or mount a legal challenge on constitutional grounds. The Constitution says the president has responsibility for managing the nation's foreign affairs, with Congress required to vote only on treaties and going to war.

White House spokesman Michael McCurry on Tuesday called lifting the embargo "just a nutty idea," and the administration earlier in the day had dispatched Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Defense Secretary William Perry to Capitol Hill to lobby against the resolution.

Under Dole's proposal, the U.S. embargo would be removed either after the Bosnian government had requested the withdrawal of U.N. peacekeeping forces or once the U.N. Security Council had ordered such a withdrawal.

While it is not certain whether Dole's proposal would collect enough votes — 67 — to assure an override of a presidential veto, aides in both parties say there may be as many as 65 to 70 votes now, with several other senators — particularly Democrats — inclined to support it.

On June 8, the House adopted a similar resolution by a 318-99 mar-

gin — far more than would be needed to overcome a veto.

"The secretary of state says this is a terrible time to bring up this resolution, but that's what the administration has said every time we wanted to consider it," said Dole on Tuesday.

"We've waited and waited, hoping something good would happen," he said. "But nothing good has happened. . . ."

"The best thing we could do is pass this resolution by a big margin, and that would give the president and the secretary of state a great deal of leverage to negotiate with the French and the others (to get out) . . . and then we could turn the fighting over to the parties involved."

But the White House thinks it would not be that simple.

"Our view has been it is highly questionable morally for the United States Congress to say that we are unilaterally lifting the arms embargo so that the Muslims can have a fair fight and then not do anything to provide them exactly those armaments that we're talking about," said McCurry, the White House spokesman.

Both the Dole resolution and the House resolution, which was sponsored by Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., would bar the use of American troops in Bosnia "for any purpose, including training, support or delivery of military equipment."

The intensity of the embargo debate has been heightened in recent days by daily televised accounts of the Serbian roundup of Bosnian Muslim civilians from hitherto "safe" enclaves and the arrest and detention, including reports of murder, of Muslim men and boys.

"The credibility of NATO as well as of the U.N. has been severely undermined," Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., said Tuesday. "The longer the present situation continues, the greater the damage to the health and solidarity of the Western Alliance."

An underlying fear among most members of Congress is that somehow the United States will be sucked into a power vacuum left by a NATO-U.N. withdrawal — and left as the only credible force standing between the Bosnian combatants.

Echoing the White House, Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., said Tuesday: "Congress cannot responsibly advocate a course of action and pretend to ignore the certain consequences of this action."