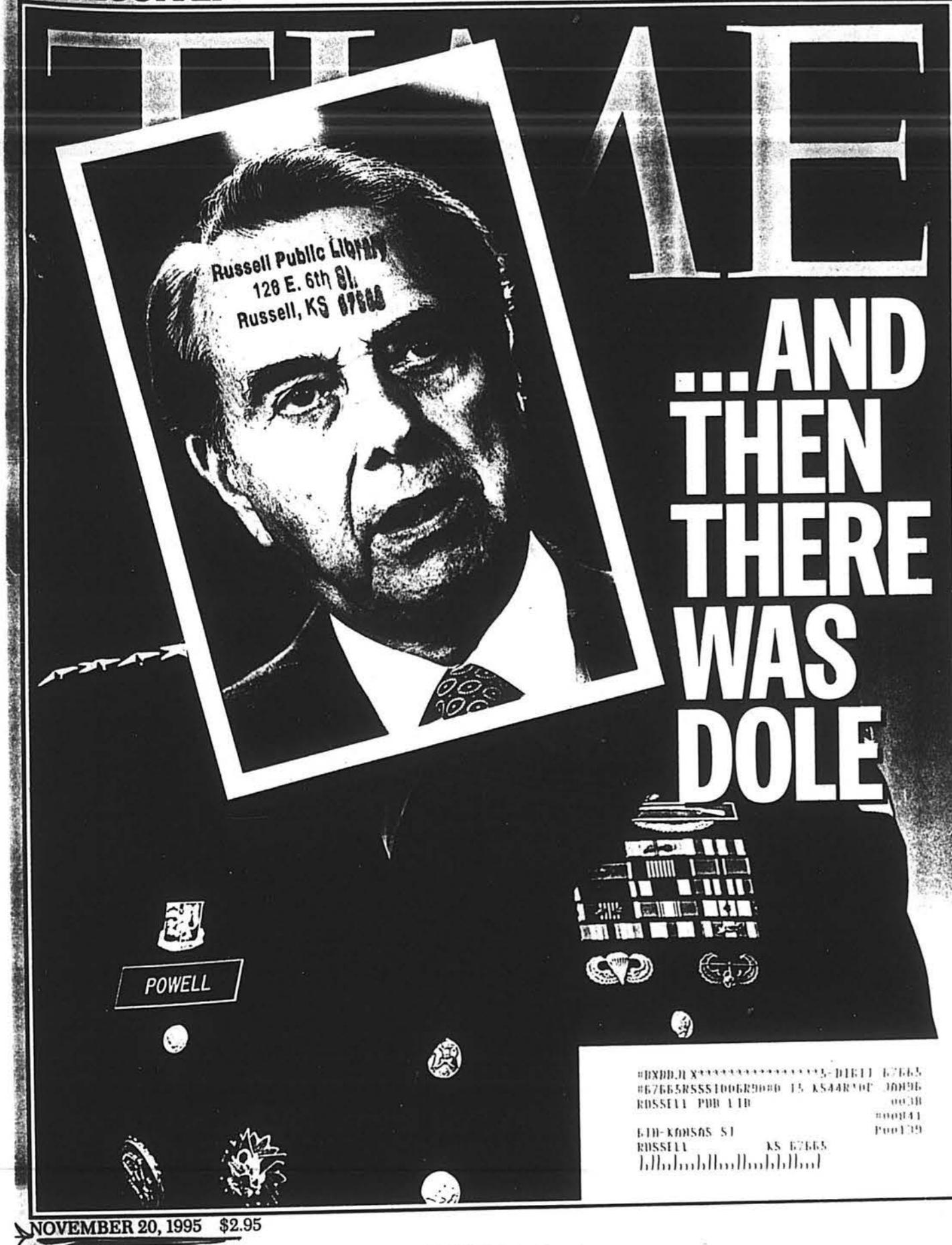


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WILL THE REAL BOB DOLE PLEASE STAND UP?

As he tacks right to win the prize, a man of principle and candor suffers a troubled soul

By MICHAEL KRAMER

FOR MONTHS, COLIN POWELL was Bob Dole's obsession. Having lost the Republican presidential nomination twice, this time Dole believes the prize is rightfully his. And he was beside himself at the prospect of Powell's snatching it away. As Dole zipped across the nation campaigning, and as he darted about in Congress, helping shape the Republican budget, he constantly asked, "I hear anything yet? Is he in? Out? Whaddaya know?"

Dole knew last Wednesday morning at about 9 o'clock, six hours before Powell's official announcement. The Senate majority leader was flying to New Hampshire aboard a chartered Gulfstream II to receive the endorsement of New Hampshire Governor Steve Merrill, a coup of major proportions. Merrill's conservative credentials are unquestioned; his support can help stem the far right's cry that Dole is too moderate. "That right?" said Dole, smiling thinly, when the news reached him at 35,000 ft. And then he fixed his gaze at a distant point outside the window. Lost in thought, he was obviously relieved. But not elated.

Bob Dole doesn't permit himself to

be elated. His previous defeats were scarily disappointing, and even now, with a huge post-Powell lead for the nomination, he dreads having to endure that experience again.

Worse, he is worried that the one remaining major obstacle is no one other than ... Bob Dole. In his determination not to be outflanked on the right wing, he has followed the guidance of his campaign advisers and portrayed himself as more conservative than he really is. The result is that he often appears craven and false, so while his support is wide, it is shallow and unenthusiastic. "The road ahead," he says, "won't be any picnic."

Could doing what he believes to be politically necessary cost him the support he's trying to capture? Is he fighting the previous campaign, when 1996 is quite different? Says Ohio Governor George Voinovich: "Dole's conservatism on all the things you want him to be conservative on: downsizing government, returning power to the states and, above all, real fiscal integrity rather than phony budgets. You can be for that and still be compassionate and still not pander. I'm staying with him because I believe that he doesn't believe all the crap his handlers have been having him say."

"I've been for Dole since '88," adds

Photograph for TIME by Gregory Heisler

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[Gramm's] like a bug you step on that keeps crawling



HOT PURSUIT Of all the candidates, Phil Gramm, who delights in taunting the front runner, causes the Dole campaign the most worry

Jo Ann Davidson, speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives. "I saw him get beat because he wouldn't bend like Bush. Now he's doing a lot of the same kinds of things. But this time the country—and I think even the party—is looking for exactly the opposite, for someone who'll stand up. That was the Powell attraction, and that's the real Dole. I just don't know why he won't do that."

The greatest fear for those closest to Dole—those managing his effort and those who have known him for decades—is Dole's discomfort with his own campaign's core themes and strategy. They see and hear the tension in Dole's mind as he races forward, tension that is real and growing. Dole knows what he believes, and what he believes is often hidden as he follows the advice of "the professionals" controlling his effort, the men and women who view the Republican nominating electorate as

more conservative than their candidate. Dole himself feels that dissonance keenly. His political soul is troubled. And with Powell gone, he must decide once again where he stands. Will he feel secure enough to trim his pandering? Or will he conclude, since he can no longer position himself as the best hope to stop Powell, that he must now move even closer to the far right's agenda?

IT IS TWO SATURDAYS AGO IN CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa, but it could be anywhere, any day on the campaign trail. Freed from the weekly Senate grind, Dole is suffering another punishing round of stump appearances. He is serving up the red-meat, conservative lines the campaign insists will win the nomination. The audience has already been shown a 13-minute video titled *Bob Dole: An American Hero*. The film cost \$167,000 to produce and distribute and has the feel

of *Morning in America*, the famous, upbeat Ronald Reagan video. Dole's film is heavy on the story of his road back from the war injuries that left his right arm forever limp and his left only barely useable.

Dole is uncomfortable talking about that ordeal and does so only sporadically. But his life's story is a compelling tale, an up-from-nowhere American saga, and the video accomplishes the political need to tell it. Offstage, Dole admits he thinks about his past almost every day. "Yep, it's true," he says, "for a long time I really thought I'd never get married; that I'd never amount to anything; that I'd have to live off some pension or maybe even sell pencils on a street corner." Having recovered beyond anyone's expectations—he almost died from his wounds three times during the years he spent recovering—Dole considers it a "badge of something" that he can button his shirts and dress himself without assistance.

bund no matter how hard you squish him.



TAKING A STAND Dole refused to sign an antiabortion pledge

"I don't like people helping me," Dole says. "Self-reliance and all that. But I do envy Danny," he adds, a reference to Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye, another war hero whose remaining arm is strong enough "to cut ood, which I can't do." Dole is particularly perturbed by the superfluous inside button on men's trousers. "I wish it could be Velcro or something," he says. Then why button it in the first place? Dole's stare is withering: "I'm the kind of guy that if that isn't buttoned, even if no one else knows it because they can't see it, then I still know it and I can't perform."

Now, to a group of about 200 Republicans, the only hint of Dole's handicap

comes when he advocates returning power to the states. That's what the 10th Amendment commands, he says as he yanks a copy from his shirt pocket. "You don't make the mistake of misstating the Constitution," he explains, reading the 28 words he knows by heart. The move to the pocket is practiced but still a chore, and the audience notices. "I can't get stuff out of my pants pockets," Dole says later. "That's why I keep it in my shirt," along with a spare five- or 10-dollar bill.

In his strong prairie twang, Dole builds his pitch. "I know the difference between Michelangelo and Mapplethorpe," he says, "and our tax dollars shouldn't subsidize Mapplethorpe." The applause is real but uncertain. "Where's he going?" wonders a woman in the crowd. "What's that all about?" It's a common reaction.

Dole plugs on: "I believe in America.

We need a President who can make us proud ... We need a President who'll say yes to the American people ... It's all about hon-

esty and integrity and family. I know about

sacrifices and I've been tested ... I know

how to lead. I'm a leader."

To where, exactly? Dole heard that complaint often enough to be prepared with what he calls the three Rs.

"I'm for reigning in the Federal Govern-

ment, reasserting Ameri-

cain values," he drones.

There's more, of course,

and on this day Dole

serves three crowd-

pleasing doses of con-

servative dogma: a riff

on making English

the nation's official lan-

guage, a plea to end late-

term abortions, and

Dole's favorite promise.

"If I'm President," he

says, "American troops

will never serve under

the command of [United Nations Secre-

tary-General] Boutros Boutros-Ghali"—

stringing out the two Boutros to ensure

the most pejorative pronunciation.

This time, for a change, Dole avoids

what he calls the "process things," the

recitation of supportive polls, the list of

impressive endorsements from local pols

and the observation that "it feels different

this time, it feels good." The reception is

familiar: tepid applause from an audience

that seems resigned rather than enthusiastic.

Collectively, they seem to have con-

cluded, "It looks like he's our guy, and we

don't want Clinton, so we'd better get

used to it."

Dole's aides are hardly oblivious. "Barely adequate" is their candid assessment of Dole on the stump. But this time they have reason to gloat. Dole has stayed "on message." Among the Doleites, their man is "on message" when he avoids describing the government as "doing a lot of good things," a sentiment the campaign would just as soon have him ditch. "Stayed on message," Dole says afterward, before repeating a pet peeve: "Every time I do that reconnect-the-government-to-values stuff, I feel like a plumber."

FOR AN EARLY GLIMPSE OF THE essential Bob Dole, one needs to revisit a summer day in 1964. Dole was then a second-term Congressman from Kansas, and he sat calmly in a Senate conference room while Karl Mundt, an arch-conservative from South Dakota, tore into the school-lunch program. "Come off it, Senator," Dole finally said. "These kids we're talking about here."

Asked to recall that moment, Dole opens a vein. "A lot of this stuff, cutting welfare the way some would, can really hurt children if we're not careful," he says. "We can't do that. I won't let it happen." And indeed the most severe of the so-called reforms in the House's version of the welfare bill have been tempered simply because Dole has managed to soften them.

Compare that authentic Dole with the more recent rent-a-Dole, which began in earnest when Dole embraced Oliver North's 1994 candidacy for the Senate. "You've got to be flexible," Dole says when asked to square that action with his earlier trashing of North as "no hero in my book." Since then, Dole has been feeding the far right's desire for ideological purity almost daily. Some cases in point, along with the Dole team's justifications:

► The single incident confirming Dole as a man of uncommon political courage occurred during the 1988 campaign, when he refused to sign a pledge binding him to oppose tax increases. His first significant act of this cycle's race was to sign that most pejorative pronunciation.

► This time, for a change, Dole avoids

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► Dole has been a longtime supporter of affirmative-action programs, and fought hard against Ronald Reagan's desire to repeal an executive order protecting them. Today he supports a bill that would effectively gut those regulations. "No, it won't," says Dole—a view almost every expert in the field disputes.