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DOLE CALLS FOR REEXAMINATION OF PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION PROCESS BY GOP

DETROIT-- Senator Bob Dole today told the Rules Committee at the Republican National Convention that he believes it is time to look at serious reform of the Presidential selection process.

Dole, a former Republican National Committee Chairman and a 1980 candidate for his party's Presidential nomination, appeared at a Sunday morning session of the Committee.

In a prepared statement, Dole told the Committee, "I believe it is important to address this topic now, while the memory of the 1980 primaries is still fresh, and at a time when interest in our political process is at a peak. Even as we nominate our candidate for the presidency in 1980, we should be looking ahead to 1984. I recall that after the 1976 election the late Hubert Humphrey and I appeared together to discuss the process. We exchanged some very good ideas-- but in no time the 1980 election was upon us and nothing had really changed.

"I am here this morning not to present rigid proposals, but to offer some opinions and suggestions. I am not here to suggest that the Presidential selection process failed in 1980. I want to make that point at the outset, lest there be any misunderstanding, because the Republican Party nominated its popular choice in 1980," said Senator Dole.

"But surely there must be a better way.

"All of us-- party leaders, political writers and journalists, elected officials-- can agree that the process is too long, too expensive, and too superficial.

"Even as I sit here, I have no doubt that there are those-- both in politics and in the media-- who are busily speculating about, and maybe even planning for, the 1984 race. That is because the race has become, to quote Jules Whitcover, a marathon, rather than a sprint. One could argue that to make such a race, you must be rich and unemployed. Those without personal resources-- or those who have an obligation to a job or a constituency-- are at a severe disadvantage," said Dole.

Primary Season Too Long

"To begin with, I believe the actual primary and caucus 'season' is too long and begins too early. Popularity in January or February in Iowa or New Hampshire can melt away as quickly as the winter snowbanks by April and May. A grain embargo can become a grain fiasco - credit controls can become discredited policy. My own view is that the primaries should be moved from the winter months into the spring. I would even suggest that the primaries and caucuses be held within a limited period of time, perhaps 60 days. Party rules could provide that only those delegates chosen within that time frame be seated at our next Convention. New Hampshire or Iowa could still hold the 'first' primary or caucus, but we would do well to shorten the period in a way that would provide a more orderly process. This could even reduce the number of primaries. In 1980 we had 38 primary contests and many, especially the later contests, were almost meaningless excercises, producing low turnout and little interest, with many voters feeling, justifiably, disenfranchised," said Dole.

(MORE)

Other Suggestions

"Other suggestions could include a look at regional primaries, though I doubt such an approach has much merit, nor do I believe a national primary is the answer. Some have suggested revision of presidential campaign financing laws to insure more equitable treatment. There are numerous ideas around, but the point is I believe we can do better," said Dole.

Media Role

"Finally, I would suggest that the media be more introspective on the subject of our selection process for the highest office in the land. There is a tendency to cover presidential politics as if it were a long pennant race. I would argue that this 'Wide World of Politics' approach, with its stress on form over substance, serves to trivialize our political process," said Dole.

"I found that issues were all but ignored by the media, which was more concerned about who had raised how much money, signed on which staff members, or who had the most momentum. Perhaps it is unrealistic for some to believe that the American public cares about the issues-- but I continue to hold that belief," said Dole.

Now Is The Time

"I would hope that this discussion will cause all of us to focus on this system. I would hope that my Party would begin to put into motion actions that could lead to change. I would propose that we appoint a special committee to investigate the problem, asking them to research it and report their findings to the Rules Committee so that specific recommendations can be adopted by early 1982, thus giving states ample time to adjust their laws."

"We have the opportunity to act-- all we need is the will," Dole concluded.