

Social Security Review Is Inevitable, Dole Says

GOP Candidate Excludes It as Election Issue

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Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.), a leading candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, said yesterday that the controversial issue of financing Social Security will have to be reopened at some point, while indicating that it should not be part of the 1996 campaign.

"If we are going to preserve [Social Security], we are going to have to reopen it sometime. You can't say it's never going to be looked at," Dole told a gathering of conservatives sponsored by the magazine *National Review*. Dole said benefits to retirees would have to remain intact.

In response to a question from a 26-year-old from Pennsylvania who voiced fears that the program would be bankrupt by the time of his retirement, Dole said the Social Security trust fund could run out of money by the year 2020 or earlier.

"I think we ought to be very clear with people," Dole told the group, which was exploring whether a Republican political realignment is taking place. "We can't tell the American people that forever and ever, entitlements are never going to be part of the problem. Entitlements are part of the problem."

Stressing the view that "we are not talking about a reduction in benefits," Dole said "there are a lot of things we can do in Social Security and Medicare that make reforms that are going to keep the system [of benefits for the elderly] intact. I think we have to do it."

But, he said, the danger that Democrats and President Clinton would seek to make political gains out of a serious attempt to deal with Social Security now prevents the is-

sue from being taken up.

He noted that in 1985 the Republican-controlled Senate approved a bill that would have frozen Social Security cost of living adjustments (COLAs), but then in the 1986 election "we lost six seats and a lot of people said that's because you cut Social Security."

In a brief interview after his speech, Dole ruled out any renewed effort to freeze COLAs and said he had no specific ideas, except to mention the possibility of raising the retirement age.

Democratic candidates running for the House, Senate and the presidency have sought in the past to use fears that Republicans would cut Social Security benefits— with considerable

success in legislative races, but with less effect in presidential elections.

The political problem for Dole or any other presidential candidate who acknowledges that action must be taken to firm up Social Security finances is that it increases pressure during the campaign to spell out how this would be achieved. House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has said that a Republican Congress should not take up the issue of Social Security reform until the GOP has won the confidence and trust of the American voters.