

For Dole, the Nixon Issue Is 'an Impossible Dilemma'

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WASHINGTON, June 4 — There is a statistic that very nearly drives Senator Robert Dole to distraction.

The statistic emerged from the most recent statewide poll taken by television station KAKE in Wichita, Kan., Mr. Dole's home state. It showed that 50 per cent of the electorate wanted President Nixon to continue in office, 48 per cent wanted him to quit or be ousted and 2 per cent had no opinion.

"How the hell do you deal with that if you're a Republican up for re-election," Mr. Dole asked. "It's an impossible dilemma. One guy gives me hell for betraying Nixon. The next guy comes up to me and says, 'I'm for you, Bob, but you've got to get Nixon off your back.' No way to stay on that tightrope."

Mr. Dole is a good example of the Republican Senators trying to win re-election in the year of Watergate — expect that he is more candid than most in conceding his problems, in part perhaps because his problems are more severe.

"The people are worried about inflation, sure," the 50-year-old Kansas said last week in an interview in his office, "but Watergate will be the overriding issue in November, unless the President is out of office, and any politician who tells you otherwise, is just living on pipedreams, that's all."

Tough Questions Asked

Everywhere he goes in Kansas—and he spend as much time as he can there, with three visits last week—Mr. Dole is asked about Mr. Nixon and impeachment. He tries to emphasize other issues, Mr. Dole said, but it seldom works.

"The Watergate questions are good questions," he remarked with a smile, "which means they're hard to answer."

Mr. Dole, who said in February that "a legal case against the President has not been made," has retreated slightly from that position. He says now that he hopes that Mr. Nixon is proved innocent.

But he is clearly troubled—especially, he said, by discussions of "hush money" on March 21, 1973; by gaps on key tapes, and by his "lawyer's presumption" that "if there was some unmistakably clear evidence of the President's lack of involvement, the White House would have published it months ago."

Mr. Dole has tried a number of approaches to reduce the potential damage of the Nixon issue. He has toyed with the idea of calling together all the Republican Senators to draft a statement of independence, but gave that up as impracticable. He tried telling an audience that Mr. Nixon wanted him re-elected and was taken to task by several backers.

He tried humor. Asked wheth-

er he would like the President to go to Kansas to campaign for him he replied that he "wouldn't mind if he flew over." That produced widespread chuckles but also a batch of hostile mail. One woman wrote from Kansas: "That remark is going to cost you a lot of votes, including mine."

So Mr. Dole goes his ambiguous way, trying neither to criticize too much nor defend too much, conscious always of the nearly total polarization of the Kansas electorate on Mr. Nixon.

Ambiguous Road Sought

Lately, he said, he has become philosophical, almost fatalistic, although he still thinks he will win. He has been reading about Edmund G. Ross, the Kansas Senator who cast the deciding vote against the conviction of President Andrew Johnson at his impeachment trial. Ross, having "looked down into my open grace," as he later put it, lost his seat and was driven from Kansas.

"I wouldn't mind losing my seat if the man is innocent and I voted to clear him," Mr. Dole said. "But I'd hate to be deceived. And I don't know, I don't know."

The Senator's problem is complicated by a number of factors: the popularity of his opponent, Representative William R. Roy, the only Democrat in the Kansas delegation; Mr. Dole's own service as Republican National Chairman in 1971-1972, and his image as a hard-line partisan of Mr. Nixon.

He referred to critics of Mr. Nixon's Vietnam policies as "the new Chamberlains." He called former Attorney General Ramsay Clark "a left-leaning marshmallow." He described Watergate disclosures in the media as "the death rattle" of Senator George McGovern's 1972 campaign for the Presidency.

Attempting to capitalize on Mr. Dole's service as national chairman and his reputation as the Nixon "point man" in the Senate, Mr. Roy has devised an epigrammatic description of his opponent: "He thought more of his party and his President than his state and his country."

Change in Campaign

Senator Dole has countered with a campaign that is, by his own admission, radically different from his past efforts. Much that he has done is designed to emphasize his integrity, thus discouraging voters from linking him to "the mess in Washington," if they perceive one.

He started early, beginning a money-raising drive in January, 1973, and opening a campaign office last August, at least in part because he is convinced that if a Senate trial is under way this fall it would



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Senator Robert Dole

be suicidal for him or any other Senator to return to their home states to campaign.

For the first time, his campaign staff and his Senate staff are separate, so there can be no charges that public money is being used to advance his private political hopes.

He returned \$15,000 in contributions to dairy groups that have been accused of widespread impropriety in 1972.

Though he is a dedicated conservative, he has brought liberal as well as conservative Republicans into the state to speak for him, because some of the liberals have been frequent Nixon critics — men including Senator Charles H. Percy of Illinois and former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson.

Finally, he has disclosed for the first time his tax returns and his financial net worth and has told Kansas newsmen they can have his blood count if they want it.

"It's a new ball game," Senator Dole said. "No matter how hard you twist and turn, if you're a Republican you get tarred with Watergate. My only hope is to convince people that that is unjust."