

New G.O.P. Chairman

Robert Joseph Dole



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Considered a tough in-fighter

(Senator Dole, left, with predecessor, Rogers C. B. Morton)

By DAVID E. ROSENBAUM

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For the two years that he has been in the Senate, Robert J. Dole of Kansas has made a point to ride shotgun for the Nixon Administration. Invariably, if a Kennedy or a Muskie or a Fulbright rises on the Senate floor to criticize the Administration, Mr.

Dole is on his feet, too, sometimes needling, sometimes droll, but always defending President Nixon's interests.

"There are so many Democrats who want to be President, and I get tired of seeing them browbeating President Nixon," Senator Dole said recently. "So when I see Muskie and the others giving the President a hard time, I stand up, too. That's just the way I am."

In the past, his self-appointed role as the Administration's bodyguard was largely unofficial—accounted for, the 47-year-old freshman Senator said, by the fact that "I'm on the floor a lot while the senior Senators are tied up in committees."

Now with his appointment as Republican National Chairman, there will be no doubt that when the Kansas Senator speaks he will not only be defending the White House but also representing it. The transition should not prove at all difficult.

His Main Interest

"As far as I know, the Senator has no hobbies," one of his aides said. "What he's most interested in is getting other Republicans elected, and that's the way he spends his spare time."

Senator Dole can remember no instances when he has opposed the President on significant legislation. In the skirmishing in the Senate over Vietnam policy, the Supreme Court nominations, the supersonic transport and the antiballistic missile system, he has advocated the Administration's position with a fervor seldom matched in gentlemanly Senate debates.

This partisan fervor, the biting sarcasm he sometimes uses in debates and his disdain of the Senatorial courtesies have won him the reputation of being a tough in-fighter. And his lean appearance — 6 feet 2, about 175 pounds — and his coal-black hair and sideburns to the bottom of his ears—add to this impression.

Senator William B. Saxbe of Ohio, the one Republican who has publicly expressed his distaste for Senator Dole, called him a "hatchet man" who was so antagonistic that he "couldn't sell beer on a troop ship."

But other Senators, even those who disapprove of his partisan politics and his brusque public manner, say that in private he is witty and charming.

Robert Joseph Dole was born July 22, 1923, in Russell,

Kan., the son of the manager of a grain elevator. He left the University of Kansas to enter the Army in 1942, and in the last days of World War II, while leading an infantry platoon through Italy, he was critically wounded. His right shoulder was shattered and vertebrae were cracked by an explosive shell.

Mr. Dole spent the next 39 months in Army hospitals. He had lost forever the use of his right arm but slowly regained use of his left, though he still has so little feeling in his fingers that he cannot button his shirt without a mirror.

While hospitalized, Mr. Dole met and married Phyllis Holden. She took notes for him and wrote the answers he dictated to examination questions as he obtained his undergraduate degree at the University of Arizona and his law degree from Washburn University in Topeka, Kan. Later, Mr. Dole taught himself to write with his left hand.

The Doles have one daughter, Robin, who is now 16.

In 1951, when 28 years old and still in law school, he was elected to the Kansas Legislature. Two years later, he became the prosecuting attorney in Russell County, a post he held for nine years until he was elected to the House of Representatives to serve a 52-county wheatlands district in Western Kansas.

In four terms as a Representative, Mr. Dole was a backbencher, serving diligently on the Agriculture Committee, solidifying his political base in Kansas and rarely showing the aggressiveness that has marked his days in the Senate.

Conservative Line

In the House, he seldom strayed from the straight conservative line. Nearly every year he was awarded the annual plaque given by the American for Constitutional Action to the most conservative Congressman, and one colleague described his political views as "somewhere to the right of Genghis Khan."

Nevertheless, he has voted for every significant piece of civil rights legislation since he has been in Congress. "Some of my conservative friends don't agree with me," Mr. Dole said, "but I've never equated liberalism with civil rights. The true conservative wants to remove the shackles from the oppressed."

He said that he had seen the President privately only once, right after the November elections, when he talked with him about the national chairmanship. In a group, he said, he has met with the President perhaps 15 times.

But there is a personal touch that makes Senator Dole feel proud. Whenever they meet, the Senator said, the President always remembers to hold out his left hand.