

## **Bob Dole Influenced Me in Many Ways**

### **By Jeff Chapman – Salina Post – December 2021**

As an 11-year-old boy having just moved to Salina near my father's childhood neighborhood on East Minneapolis and just a few weeks into 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at Heusner Elementary, the doorbell rang on an afternoon while my parents were at work. I eagerly answered the door to see a nice lady with pamphlets of some sort, and a "Bob Dole" button on her shirt.

It was Deena Horst, known now for her long time of service to the Salina community in the State Legislature and Board of Education among other things, but that afternoon, she was just Mrs. Horst, a teacher and volunteer.

"I'm going door to door for Senator Dole and would like for your parents to vote for him, is one of them here today?" she asked.

"No, they are at work. I know him! He's very nice. I have known him a long time, like 4 years!"

Deena was delighted and handed me the political stuff to give my parents.

"I'll help you with the rest of the neighborhood, I know about everyone."

I was a very friendly neighbor kid, curious about the new people moving in and would find myself chatting with about anyone who would as I biked about. Occasionally stopping to help someone with a heavy load or carrying an extra bag of leaves to the streetside or fetching a loose dog. I am not claiming to be anything great here, just a good neighborhood kid is all.

Deena Horst and I canvassed the neighborhood. After that, Mrs. Horst called my parents to thank me for the help, and my mom said, "Keep asking him, get him out of the house!"

And so, it was... My early in life acquaintance with Bob Dole in 1976 while in Sylvan Grove, Kansas had turned into a volunteer opportunity. From that moment on, Deena Horst and Carol D'Albini always called. And from then I was interested in politics, campaigning and now a lifetime since then, getting involved for the people, communities and causes I liked. I always thank Deena Horst for that moment, but it was because Senator Dole was so kind and genuinely interested in a conversation with me at age 7, that made me want to.

If you're interested in something as a kid, it can almost be an obsession, and so it was to learn more about the man, Bob Dole, but also about all the things he did, said, championed or tried to squelch.

For instance, every one of the times I saw him, he always recalled my name or something about me.

"Jeff are you in Salina or Manhattan now?" he would chuckle, but it wasn't just me, he remembered everyone it seemed who was in a crowd or in line to shake his hand. I even heard him tell his staff, "Let's work with Steve on that." And his staff member wrote it down, then asked him. "Senator, which one is Steve?" I thought that it was funny that he could recall but his staff couldn't, but it also told me why he was the Senator.

In High School I had gotten involved and desired to eventually be Student Body President at Salina High School Central. As a friendly person, I made it important from my first day as a freshman to learn people's names and faces. I always said hello by name and greeted everyone. I knew the teachers,

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janitors and secretaries, even telling the attendance secretary “Good morning” daily. But it wasn’t about.

campaigning, I was genuinely interested in knowing people and making friends and because of that, my high school experience was very positive.

My high school political life actually started because someone moved away, and the position of Class Secretary was open. I decided to go for it after Mrs. Trula Harris lobbied me and I won a close election to a friend who was way smarter than I was and who would have been much better at the job, but I knew from my campaign volunteer experience that if you just genuinely reached out to all of people for their support, like Bob Dole did, I could win. I would scold my consulted political candidates from then on if they didn’t actively go door to door. Those who didn’t, would lose. It’s real science.

After 2 years as being Class President, working hard to win every contest, delivering on all promises, I ran uncontested for Student body President. When no one wants to run against you because they think they can’t win, that’s a victory in what I like to call ballot management. Bob Dole always said, “I know the vote count before the vote.”

I did attempt to do something unprecedented; I ran for student body president as a Junior to try to do it for two years. I lost by 1 vote to Scott Edmonds. A good guy and a friend, but I thought because of my many friendships in the school I could pull it off. It was assumed a member of the senior class would be the president of the student body, but Dr. Marilyn Green our principal confirmed that I could run as a junior. I know of at least 5 friends that were lazy and didn’t vote, thought I had it won... lessons learned.

I cut class my senior year to drive to Russell, Kansas for the announcement of Bob Dole running for President. It was a chilly and windy Monday morning. I remember he joked about the teleprompter, that he had “...practiced on it all night, but it was too sunny to use it” the crowd laughed, so he had to speak from memory. I learned from that moment that if you know it, when you speak it, it’s more genuine. President Nixon was the same as an elder statesman. He rarely used a written speech, so now, I don’t either and try to speak from the heart. And I always use well-timed humor, at which Dole was a genius.

Once at a briefing at the Salina airport, Senator Dole started out, “I see my good friend George Pyle is here from the Salina Journal. It’s a good thing the rest of you are here in person to hear in my actual remarks, versus what he will print.” It was a funny jab, brought laughs and he was probably right.

Senator Dole also referenced a visit with Governor Alf Landon on his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, saying that “He never lost his sense of humor, interest in learning or love of living.” I think that will stick with me until my end.

When I connect people for mutual benefit, when I get the right people sitting at a table to work things out or work on a common cause, when I sit back and listen and then stand up for something or say something to change the course of action, and most importantly when I use humor to deflect or warm a room, I do these things because I learned that Bob Dole did it that way, and it seemed to work pretty well for him.