

Mrs. Dole trods fine line, relatively speaking

Her husband's ads, stances seen as potential pitfall

By Ralph Z. Hallow
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Can a Republican candidate find happiness and success on the campaign trail if her husband pitches a cure for erectile dysfunction on television and supports a Democratic president's war in Yugoslavia?

That question confronts Elizabeth Dole, undeclared candidate for the GOP presidential nomination, and her husband, Bob Dole, former Senate majority leader and the 1996 GOP presidential nominee who lately has been seen in ads for Viagra, a male-impotency pill.

Mr. Dole supports President Clinton on Kosovo and says the United States and NATO will probably have to send in ground troops to reverse the Serbs' purge of the Albanian majority in the Serbian province.

Mrs. Dole, after staying mum on the Kosovo war, earlier this month jumped in on her husband's side.

The 60-second Viagra ads have inspired considerable mirth in the political and comedic circles. But Mr. Dole's visibility could become a serious issue for his wife.

"If Bob Dole really wants to put American ground forces into a civil war in Yugoslavia and make us part of an occupying army for the next four years, it proves that Viagra has side effects that no one foresaw," says Reagan White House national security aide Oliver North.

Whether and how Mr. Dole's views and causes will affect his wife's candidacy divide the experts.

Robert Lighthizer, a Bob Dole intimate and his campaign treasurer in



Being married to Bob Dole, the 1996 GOP presidential nominee, is both an asset and a liability for 2000 Republican aspirant Elizabeth Dole.

1996, doesn't think the Viagra ads matter to Mrs. Dole's candidacy one way or the other.

"But it would be a little embarrassing if her Kosovo position were different from her husband's," says Mr. Lighthizer. And that's the problem, as he sees it.

David A. Keene, a personal adviser to Mr. Dole during his unsuccessful 1988 presidential nomination campaign, defines the problem this way: "To the extent that Bob Dole is in the public eye, what he's doing detracts from Mrs. Dole's chances."

"She has to establish herself as independent of him, with her own views," said Mr. Keene, chairman of the American Conservative Union. "Thus far, the issue on which she has expressed the strongest feelings is the Balkans,

and her position exactly reflects that of her husband."

Randy Scheunemann, a former Dole foreign-policy adviser and now president of the Mercury Group, a public-affairs firm, disagrees. While some other GOP presidential hopefuls — Pat Buchanan and Gary Bauer most prominently — quickly condemned the mission, the more cautious responses of Mrs. Dole and Texas Gov. George W. Bush do not make them something less than their own persons in the eyes of GOP primary voters, he argues.

Given Mrs. Dole's background at the Red Cross and in humanitarian relief, and her husband's long-held positions on the Balkans, "it is clear that she understands the importance of stopping Slobodan Milosevic," Mr. Scheunemann said.

GOP political analysts agree Mrs. Dole's sex is not an issue within the party or with the bulk of the electorate in general. But the higher her husband's profile, the greater her campaign's problem in establishing the candidate as a leader in her own right.

"Almost any public posture he takes will impact on her campaign and she has to show she is her own person," says California GOP campaign strategist Arnie Steinberg. Mr. Steinberg has yet to pick his candidate for the 2000 race.

Mr. Dole's Viagra ads remind Mr. Steinberg of President Clinton's once having revealed that he prefers boxer shorts to briefs. "People don't want to know that much about the spouse of someone who is running for president," Mr. Steinberg said.

Heritage Foundation scholar Marshall Wittmann says Mrs. Dole's pro-intervention position on Serbia is hardly unique among the GOP field. "But you wouldn't say she has led the field or been the clearest or strongest," he said.

Mr. Wittmann says a bigger problem for Mrs. Dole is that the foreign policy "parade has already started, and she may be following it, not leading it."

"Right now is the time for candidates with testosterone, whether they be male or female," he says. "One thing that differentiates a conservative's position from that of others is that it is clearly stated, clearly understood and strong. You can agree or disagree with Buchanan or [Arizona GOP Sen. John] McCain, but theirs are clearly strong positions."

At least one Republican woman who makes her living in politics also argues it ill serves a candidate to appear to be taking dictation on a major policy question from her spouse.

"No candidate will benefit from 'policy by adoption,'" says Kellyanne Fitzpatrick, a GOP pollster who is testing public opinion for former Vice President Dan Quayle's so-far undeclared candidacy.