

Dole asks Perot to quit, GOP sources say

■ **CAMPAIGN:** Far behind in the polls, the Republican candidate seeks Perot's support and votes

By John King
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a dramatic bid to revive his White House campaign, Bob Dole dispatched his top aide Wednesday to urge Ross Perot to quit the presidential race and endorse the Republican ticket, GOP and Reform Party sources said.

Dole campaign manager Scott Reed made the urgent entreaty at a meeting with Perot in Dallas, according to several sources who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Neither Dole nor Perot had immediate comment. Shortly before the meeting, a Reform Party source said it was highly unlikely Perot would agree to abort his candidacy. Separately, Perot spokeswoman Sharon Holman said she was not aware of any Perot-Reed meeting but said emphatically: "Mr. Perot has no intention of quitting the race, no intention whatsoever."

Clinton aides cast Reed's mission as proof of Dole's desperation, and suggested the former Kansas senator was out of step with Perot voters. "We believe that on the issues that are most important to Mr. Perot — the deficit, campaign finance reform — we have a stronger record," said Clinton campaign spokesman Joe Lockhart.

The entreaty was evidence of the deep frustration within the Dole camp as the 1996 campaign entered the final 12 days with Clinton comfortably ahead in national polls and enjoying a similarly lopsided advantage in state-by-state electoral vote counts. A new NBC-Wall Street Journal poll, for ex-

ample, had Clinton at 52 percent, Dole at 35 percent and Perot at 6 percent.

In the view of some Dole advisers, a Perot endorsement could swing several states in Dole's favor, especially in the Mountain West. Texas and Florida are also two traditionally Republican states where Clinton and Dole are running neck-and-neck with Perot garnering roughly 6 percent in the polls.



DOLE

More significantly, the GOP sources suggested such a dramatic development would throw what has been a stable race into sudden turmoil, perhaps giving Dole one last chance to overtake Clinton. Ironically, it was Perot's decision to quit the 1992 race just before the Democratic convention that helped boost Clinton from third place to first. Perot later rejoined the race, and ran third with 19 percent.

Dole decided to go forward with the entreaty despite Perot's unpredictability and recent bad blood between the Dole and Perot camps. It was Dole's campaign that insisted Perot be excluded from the presidential debates, drawing sharp criticism from Perot and Reform Party running mate Pat Choate.

Just what the Dole camp had to offer Perot was unclear; one Dole adviser noted the GOP candidate recently proposed a commission to draft a sweeping rewrite of campaign finance laws, and said perhaps Perot could be offered a leading role.

Indeed, as Dole campaigned in Jacksonville, Fla. Wednesday, a small plane buzzed overhead trailing an American flag

and the message: "Don't Export Jobs — Vote Perot."

One Dole adviser said Perot might be open to the idea because he is facing the embarrassing prospect of getting less than 10 percent of the vote four years after he was a major campaign force.

Perot has mounted an unconventional campaign, making only rare public appearances and relying mostly on 30-minute television programs. The latest of those was airing Wednesday night on CBS. Perot was scheduled to deliver a National Press Club speech Thursday in Washington.

Of most urgent concern in the Dole campaign, the GOP sources said, was getting Dole over 40 percent in national polls so that he would be within striking distance of Clinton. When the ethics attacks of the last week failed to move the polls in Dole's favor, the idea of approaching Perot was raised.

While some Dole aides opposed the idea, those in favor said Dole had little to lose at this point and a Perot endorsement might swing a few states in Dole's favor.

Much of Perot's support in Florida, Texas, California and Ohio was described by Republicans as from voters who otherwise would likely vote Republican — or at least be motivated to vote against Clinton.

Even if Perot were to endorse Dole, however, it is hardly certain his supporters would heed his advice. Even if they did, only in a few states would winning most or all of Perot's support move Dole into the lead. And with the election a week from Tuesday, it is too late to get Perot off ballots.

In making an eleventh-hour entreaty to Perot, the Dole campaign implicitly acknowledged that its strategy has failed to cut into Clinton's lead.

POLITICAL ALMANAC

Wednesday's events on the presidential campaign trail:

THE CANDIDATES

■ **BILL CLINTON:** Highlighted in Daytona Beach, Fla., that more than \$1 billion in delinquent child support was collected during his presidency in 1995. The most recent independent statewide poll found Clinton and Dole in a statistical dead heat in the Sunshine State, but the president took time out for nine holes of golf before hitting the campaign trail again.

■ **BOB DOLE:** Attempted to strengthen his popularity in the South by promising to protect military bases as commander in chief. "I know we've got to watch the defense budget. But as commander in chief, if I'm going to make an error, it's going to be on the side of having enough, and not having too little," Dole said in Macon, Ga.

NEWS OF NOTE

■ A former vice chairman of Dole's campaign finance committee will pay a fine of more than \$1 million and spend six months under house arrest for making \$120,000 in illegal political contributions. Simon Fireman, 71, pleaded guilty to funneling money through employees of his company to the campaigns of Dole, the 1992 Bush-Quayle campaign, the Republican National Committee and a group supporting Democratic Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II. His company, Aqua-Leisure Industries of Avon, was fined \$5 million.

—The Associated Press

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