



**ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE**

Maxwell Finland Award Recipient  
1994

**T**o succeed in public life takes a strong driving force and sense of purpose. In the case of Elizabeth Hanford Dole this has meant speaking for those who do not have their own voice. "Underdogs have always appealed to me," she says. "I have seen how fraud or deception can victimize the elderly and others too young or impoverished to fight back."

Over a quarter of a century, Mrs. Dole has worked for six Presidents—from Lyndon Johnson to George Bush—from Democrats to Republicans which demonstrates her ability to gain and keep the confidence of those she works with and survive intact. As one of her biographers notes, she has the reputation of being among the most capable and politically astute women in Washington.

Born in July 1936 in Salisbury, North Carolina, Elizabeth Hanford took a B.A. degree with honors in political science in 1958 at Duke University in Durham. She went on to Harvard University, and spent a summer doing postgraduate work at Oxford University in England, taking her M.A. degree in education in 1960.

When Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine told her she could accomplish more in public policy work with a law degree, Elizabeth Hanford entered Harvard Law School and graduated in 1965.

Her first government job was in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare where she used her educational background to organize a national conference on training the deaf, a pioneer federal conference.

In 1968, the young Elizabeth Hanford joined the President's Committee on Consumer Interests, first under Betty Furness and later, during the first Nixon administration, with Virginia Knauer. Elizabeth Hanford was ultimately named the committee's Executive Director,

and drew high praise from Miss Furness both for her ability and her willingness to work hard.

She was speaking for the voiceless, against unfair and deceptive business practices, promoting legislation to permit the Federal Trade Commission to issue injunctions against businesses accused of fleecing consumers, also to authorize the government to review and evaluate standards used by private testing laboratories of consumer products.

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"A simple philosophy guided us. For consumers to make wise choices they must have access to all relevant information," Mrs. Dole says of those days, in her autobiography *Unlimited Partners* (written with her husband).

One outcome was the creation of the Consumer Information Center, a clearinghouse for government publications on health, safety and money management. A newsletter, *Consumer News*, was also started, filled with useful tips culled from federal agencies and the *Federal Register*.

At this time she met Robert Dole, the Republican Senator from Kansas, whom



she married in December 1975. In 1973, President Nixon had appointed her to the Federal Trade Commission for the usual seven-year term. But when her husband ran as vice-president with Gerald Ford in 1976, she took a leave of absence to avoid charges of conflict of interest. The issue came up again three years later when Mr. Dole tried, unsuccessfully, for the Republican presidential nomination. At that time Mrs. Dole resigned from the commission.

A well-established effective administrator, she now demonstrated her capacity as a political campaigner. Supporting her husband's bids for office she

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often attracted more attention than the candidate himself, and when Mr. Dole lost his bid for the presidential nomination she campaigned tirelessly for Ronald Reagan. After he took office, Mrs. Dole received a White House appointment as Assistant to the President for Public Liaison.

In January 1983, Reagan raised her to the Cabinet as Secretary of Transportation, an appointment she held for four-and-a-half years before resigning when Mr. Dole once more ran for the presi-

dential nomination. Again she hit the campaign trail hard. However, George Bush became the Republican candidate and won the election. This time there was no two-year wait for a Cabinet post. He was hardly elected before he announced in January 1988 that his next Secretary of Labor would be Elizabeth Hanford Dole.

Both of the departments she has represented in the Cabinet have potentially significant influence on injury prevention and health. As Secretary of Transportation, Mrs. Dole, against considerable industry opposition, led the effort to make air bags and automatic seat belts mandatory for all new passenger cars. She also pressed for the passage of state safety belt laws. The regulation known as Rule 208 was, she says, “the toughest policy issue I have ever encountered—and the most far-reaching in its impact on lives saved and injuries prevented.”

In the early 1980s, less than 14 percent of Americans used safety belts. Today the percentage is 63 percent. No state in those days had a safety belt law; now there are 46. Then, few cars were equipped with safety belts or air bags; today there are millions. “Her initiative changed the climate of automotive safety in America,” runs a citation by the Safety and Health Hall of Fame honoring her with its International Award last October. “This sweeping initiative under Mrs. Dole’s leadership and direction has saved tens of thousands of lives, prevented hundreds of thousands of injuries and saved hundreds of billions of dollars.”

Another move was the requirement of an additional brake light mounted in a car’s rear window. Studies showed, says Mrs. Dole, that this could eliminate some 900,000 rear-end crashes every year. Known as the Dole light, it became standard equipment in 1986.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is part of the Labor Department. During her first year as Secretary, Mrs. Dole issued a



proposed major new regulation aimed at controlling the exposure of an estimated 5.32 million workers to bloodborne pathogens, the cause of an estimated 200 deaths and over 9,200 infections annually. Employees in hospitals and medical offices were directly affected as were workers in law enforcement, fire and rescue, correctional facilities, research laboratories, blood banks, even those in the funeral industry.

This was the first regulatory proposal by OSHA against biological hazards like hepatitis B and the AIDS virus. "AIDS and hepatitis B are facts of life," said Mrs. Dole when she issued the new proposal, "but we can do something to reduce the incidence of these diseases among American workers."

Not only did the regulation require employers to take steps to reduce the risk of exposure to these diseases, but it also mandated that exposed workers be offered immunization against hepatitis B.

The full story of how Mrs. Dole succeeded in implementing these and other initiatives, both at Transportation and at Labor, remains to be told. She was not operating in a political climate conducive to regulation.

By the time the OSHA bloodborne standards regulation was finalized in December 1991, Mrs. Dole had moved on into the private sector. In February of that year she accepted the presidency of the American Red Cross.

In less than four months she persuaded her Board of Governors to undertake a sweeping overhaul of the Red Cross's blood collecting, processing and distribution system—a \$148 million effort to incorporate newly evolving medical technologies.

The Red Cross collects about half the nation's blood supply, in addition to its high profile disaster relief activities. Under the new plan, all its blood operations will eventually be controlled by a single national computer system, train-

ing will be standardized, and a clear organizational structure will be implemented to ensure accountability.

Testing laboratories which screen for agents like hepatitis and AIDS are being consolidated to ensure uniform quality control, and already half the blood collected is tested in these new facilities.

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When Elizabeth Dole speaks to youthful audiences, she says that, after graduating from college and pounding the pavements looking for a summer job, she learned her own personal priorities. "I couldn't settle for observer status," she writes in her biography. "Life was more than a spectator sport."

She tells the next generation that they can find no higher calling in life than that of public service. "They may not get rich, but they'll enrich the lives of countless others. Along the way they can raise society's sights and elevate its standards. And when the time comes for them to look back, they can take pride in having been an active part of the struggle of their times. Because of them, the world is a little better."

She might have been describing her own career. 