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**ELIZABETH DOLE A VIABLE CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENCY,  
SAYS 'WOMEN IN POLITICS' CO-AUTHOR DAVID AHERN**

DAYTON, Ohio — Elizabeth Dole, who resigned as president of the American Red Cross Monday, has as good a chance as anyone else to become the nation's president in 2000, says David Ahern, co-author of the books *Women in Politics* and *Women in Public Policy* (both of Congressional Quarterly Press).

"There's always that question about having a woman candidate for president, but the political climate in America has changed," says Ahern, an associate professor who chairs the political science department at the University of Dayton. "Women are now seen as viable candidates at all levels."

Dole, 62, hinted in her resignation speech that she may have aspirations for the White House: "At this important time in our national life, I believe there may be another way for me to serve our country. ... there may be other duties to fulfill." After meeting with employees of the organization, Dole told a reporter that she would give "serious consideration" to running for president in 2000.

Though Dole, wife of 1996 GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole, has never run for public office, she brings an impressive resume no less stellar than — "in most cases far superior to" — any other candidate thus far, Ahern says.

"She's been a cabinet member in two different (presidential) administrations, has a long and respected career in public service, has great name recognition and she's viewed as an excellent campaigner," Ahern says. "Yes, she definitely has a good chance of winning."

In *Women in Politics*, the authors chronicle the change in the American political environment over the last 30 years, especially the ever-increasing role women now play.

"Being a woman in public office is no longer a negative — as it once was," Ahern says. "In fact, some argue that it's a positive because of the growing perception that women bring a different style of politics to the table — a more consensual, less combative style."

As a recent example, Ahern points to Arizona, whose citizens recently elected

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women to the state's top five government offices. Dubbed the "Fab Five" by the media, the women are gaining celebrity not only for their number but for their "feminine" approach to politics.

"I think the time is ripe for a female candidate, given (Washington, D.C.) today and discussions about the 'politics of personal destruction,'" Ahern says. "The assumption is that women campaign and run their offices differently than do men. I don't know that this is necessarily always true, but that's the perception of a lot of people."

So what has it taken to compel American society to finally consider a woman for the nation's highest elected office?

"Forty or 50 years ago you didn't see women in the (college) majors, such as political science or business, that led to law school or graduate school, which in turn could often lead to a political career," Ahern explains. "You saw them in traditionally female majors, such as nursing and teaching. But that's all changed. For example, more than half of UD's political science majors this year are female, doubling the percentage of 25 years ago."

Another major factor for women in politics: a boost in campaign finance support.

In the early 1980s, several women's organizations, including the National Organization For Women (NOW), created a campaign fund for women candidates at all levels of government, says Ahern. Called EMILY'S List (Early Money Is Like Yeast) — an acronym playing on the words "dough" or money and "yeast" as in raising it — the fund has helped many women run for — and in many cases win — campaigns they could not have otherwise paid for, Ahern says.

"There was a time when you couldn't get contributors to back a woman candidate," Ahern explains, "because of the old perception that it was like throwing money down a drain. EMILY'S List has helped provide many women with the financial backing to make them serious contenders."

There is a public perception taking hold today that politics, at all levels, has become "too mean spirited and that women can bring something more civilizing to the table," Ahern says. "This may be a perfect time for Elizabeth Dole to run."

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