
CHARMING HER WAY ^{to} the WHITE HOUSE

Air travel stinks, auto safety is a joke— and Washington still loves Liddy Dole

by Philip Weiss

"She's progressive at the core"—a former aide to Elizabeth Dole, quoted in Fortune.

"She is essentially a conservative person"—Virginia Knauer, Dole's former boss in the Nixon White House.

This summer, when every day seemed to bring another report of a close call in the skies, the media began taking a keen interest in air safety. Typical was the *Newsweek* cover story, "The Year of the Near Miss," which declared, "America's air-travel system is showing signs of breakdown. Reports of midair near collisions are soaring, errors by controllers are on the rise and the flying public's tolerance for cattle-car conditions and horrendous delays is wearing thin." You'd think that such an article would include a rather pointed critique of whoever's responsible for the mess. But the article, like other pieces about airline chaos, lacked any criticism of the Secretary of Transportation, Elizabeth Hanford Dole. The piece did not picture Dole, mentioned her only three times, and then in a positive light—even though her policies are largely to blame for the crisis.

The widespread image of Elizabeth Dole is of a politically moderate, competent, woman cabinet secretary, a view she has tried to reinforce by promoting herself as the "safety secretary." Her positive image has survived the doubling of airplane near-misses, an 18 percent increase in air traffic controller errors, and 19 major airline mergers. Though she has ignored auto safety problems that have killed thousands of people and weakened auto recall efforts, her policies

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have had no ill effect on the staggering number of invitations she gets to speak across the country or the lavishness of praise bestowed by feature columnists.

Dole is no antiregulation ideologue. But she is a species just as common in Washington—the consummate role player, her positions defined by her job description rather than deeply felt beliefs. Indeed she has been the Wallenda of Washington's big top, performing astounding flips throughout 21 years in top government posts, starting with the Johnson administration. She has gone from Democrat to Independent to Republican and espoused such divergent positions as (circa 1975) urging the breakup of a major oil company to (circa 1986) approving mergers in which an airline got 80 percent of a market. Or (circa 1973) calling for Congress to create a consumer advocacy agency dealing with those who "oppress" consumers to (circa 1987) opposing Congress's bipartisan effort to tell consumers how well airlines were meeting their schedules.

Yet today, Dole's political stock seems more secure than ever. Profiles now mention her role as not just a potential First Lady if Senator Robert Dole's campaign succeeds but as a presidential or vice presidential candidate in her own right. "She has the dynamism and magnetism that make people want to come up and meet her," marvels Charles Black, the campaign manager for Rep. Jack Kemp, one of her husband's opponents. "It could be next year, or ten years from now, but I'll be very surprised if she is not on the ticket one of these days." If she gets that far it will be interesting to see if *The New York Times* still gives her this sort of ap-

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praisal: "One of the most stunning women in Washington—slender, blue-eyed, and fair-skinned, with dark hair worn in a floppy style that she says is 'my first blow-dry hairdo; I'm worried that it might be too flat on top.' "

May Queen Liddy

Mary Elizabeth Hanford was born 51 years ago in Salisbury, North Carolina, a small city halfway between Charlotte and Winston-Salem, where she grew up extremely well-off. Her mother, Mary Hanford, talks of a pet chihuahua; there were also horseback riding lessons, water skiing, ballet, tennis, piano, a weekend house, a debutante ball, and the guiding thought that she could get anything she wanted. She was the second child by many years of a rich florist who was locally regarded as conservative and dour. Her mother belonged to the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, a largely southern group whose members trace their lineage to a noteworthy individual in colonial service, thus gaining status over the Daughters of the American Revolution. In time, the daughter, too, would become a Colonial Dame.

Friends say that even at a young age Elizabeth (or "Liddy," as she named herself when beginning to talk) was drawn to public activities. "She always loved to participate," her mother says, noting that she rushed off Saturdays to help a neighborhood woman organize activities for the Children of the American Revolution. As a child, as she would so often as an adult, Liddy Hanford campaigned. She was a toddler when she won a competition to be the mascot of the graduating high school class of her brother, who was 13 years her senior, and in third grade she was president of a class club. At the Woman's College at Duke, Hanford was elected president of the student body and majored in political science.

Hanford had been brought up with the values of a traditional southern woman—her mother urging her to study home economics and then come back to Salisbury—and in many ways she hewed to her genteel raising. She joined a Duke sorority and was selected in her senior year to a secret society of seven members called White Duchy. College friends remember her as being popular in part for her beauty, and when she was elected the May Queen she reigned over the spring dance with her court. Later she worked part time as a model.

Such traditional choices for a good-looking,

socially well-placed woman were alloyed even then with a desire to enter the traditionally male world of politics. Childhood friend Wyndham Robertson says that while it was easy to picture Elizabeth being comfortable as the housewife of a Charlotte businessman with club memberships and all the rest, she was too driven for that. She went to the Harvard Graduate School of Education and later entered the law school there, by which time she'd crossed a certain divide. "We were both considered to be old maids from the time we were 25," Robertson says. "We used to laugh about it and had a pact not to get married." Another friend explains that Dole didn't stop to have a family in part because she was so driven. "She had a lot of discipline about her. Most people in our age category had more zigs and zags."

One thing Elizabeth Hanford acquired forthrightly were political connections. "She walked through the door, she didn't have an appointment and we hired her that afternoon," says Bill Cochrane, the former administrative assistant to B. Everett Jordan, the late Democratic senator from North Carolina. "Phi Beta Kappa at Duke and the Queen of May—she was extremely qualified."

A "good Democrat" and "a liberal" in the descriptions of various associates, she served for several months as a legislative secretary to Jordan, a moderate Democrat. Because she was "personable and attractive," Cochrane recommended her to LBJ's staff when the senator needed southerners to help organize a whistle-stop campaign tour for his vice presidential campaign in October 1960. She ended up on the train for five days as a greeter, taking the names and addresses of townspeople who clambered on one town up the line from their own so they could accompany LBJ those 30 miles and then mill around him on the platform as he gave a speech to their neighbors.

In subsequent summers she worked at other liberal station stops, the United Nations and Peace Corps, and after law school flew back to Washington, which, she said, attracted her "like a magnet." At the time Washington was possessed by Johnson's vision of a Great Society, and so was Elizabeth Hanford. One friend remembers her as a "Harvard liberal." She worked at the Department of Education, organizing a conference on the education of the deaf, and upon leaving the job in 1967 went into private practice providing legal representation to indigents. In one case she took on a recent immigrant, a former

zoo keeper, who was accused of petting a lion in the National Zoo without consent; Hanford won the case by pointing out that since the prosecution had not called the lion to testify it was impossible to say the defendant had stroked it without consent.

"She walked in right off the darn street and had a resume that looked like a million dollars, and she had these names on there," recalls her next boss, Leslie Dix, who hired Hanford in 1968 for President Johnson's Committee on Consumer Interests. Among the names were former North Carolina Gov. Terry Sanford and the late Democratic Senator Sam Ervin, Jr. "A great girl, wonderful," Dix recalls of her references. "Everything was a four-star rating."

Johnson had established the committee in 1964 as the consumer's voice within the administration—"we were gung-ho," says Betty Furness, who as the director put through such pioneering legislation as the truth in lending and wholesome meat laws. Hanford worked on legislation. Furness says, "She seemed to be right with us," a fierce consumer advocate.

Thus Furness and Dix were a bit surprised that when Richard Nixon came into the White House ten months later, and they left, their right-thinking associate Hanford remained on the job, though the office's view of consumer advocacy changed sharply. Under Virginia Knauer, the office had more of a good housekeeping aura, intent on distributing product information to people and ironing out problems with manufacturers. Consumers, Hanford told Congress, complained more than anything about automobiles—lemons, safety problems, and so on—but office procedure was to call the manufacturer and work things out individually. "Industry has been pleased with this method," she told Congress.

"Whether Elizabeth changed her mind or changed her colors, I don't know," Furness says. One thing Hanford did change was her registration, from Democrat to Independent.

Knauer was smitten by Hanford ("she's a tremendously dedicated worker, she doesn't step on toes") and elevated her rapidly to executive director. Hanford's faultless social skills made her a political asset; Knauer recalls her "exquisite parties." In the congressional oversight proceedings, Knauer sometimes pushed Hanford out front to make the case for the committee's expansion, in part, Knauer observes, because she was "very beautiful, always a lady." Her honeyed approach before an almost all-male Congress made the case for a bigger budget that much more effective. The

office burgeoned, changing from a committee to a commission and at last to a "full-fledged office of the presidency," as Hanford put it proudly.

Called on the carpet

"The White House called and said, 'Is Liddy Hanford acceptable?'" remembers Michael Pertschuk, then on the staff of the Senate Commerce Committee. "And I said, 'No.'"

It was 1973, and Hanford was at one of the few stumbling points in her career: urged on by Knauer, Nixon was going to nominate her to the Federal Trade Commission. But Congress was ready for a fight. It regarded Nixon as anti-consumer and made it clear the next FTC nominee had to be a strong consumer advocate.

As usual, Hanford had the support of North Carolina—Senator Ervin and his new colleague, Jesse Helms, the latter not failing to remark that she was "lovely... attractive"—but pull would not be enough. Consumer advocates thought of her as a White House insider, associated with a consumer office that often seemed toothless in the face of big business. Of particular concern was the carpet manufacturers episode. Nixon had failed to impose tougher flammability standards on the carpet industry, some of whose leading executives had made contributions to the Committee to Reelect the President in 1972. Hanford had been in on a meeting in the White House in the summer of 1972 when carpet manufacturers, frustrated by government regulations, complained angrily to Special Counsel Charles W. Colson and Maurice Stans, the secretary of commerce. Hanford explained later that she merely made the case that the industry should work out a voluntary program of compliance with flammability standards, but the incident cast doubt on her role in the office. This is why Pertschuk was unequivocal when the White House called.

But Pertschuk had barely hung up the phone when who should come to his door but Elizabeth Hanford herself. "What can I do?" she said. Pertschuk allowed that if she really had consumerist fervor she should go to a convention that was meeting that week and get some endorsements.

The next week the White House called again. Hanford had orchestrated a blizzard of endorsements from consumer advocates across the country, and though many consumer groups continued to be wary of her, Pertschuk says, "there was no way she could be stopped—she'd immediately figured out the problem and figured out how to beat me."

“It could be next year, or ten years from now, but I’ll be very surprised if she is not on the ticket one of these days,” says Charles Black, Jack Kemp’s campaign manager.

Indeed, at the subsequent hearings on her appointments, Hanford made all the right noises. She spoke of “abuses” against consumers, inveighed against “giant conglomerate firms,” committed herself to the “renewed consumer-oriented thrust” of the FTC, and called on the government to establish an independent consumer protection agency. As for antitrust, she flatly disavowed the increasingly popular view that markets can be efficient and competitive even if one company holds an overwhelming share. “The law is fairly settled on that issue,” she said. She was confirmed.

Trustbusting and dog food

While the consumer affairs office had operated under the cautious supervision of the White House, the FTC was an independent agency much more susceptible to pressure from Congress, particularly in this activist period. Congress had endorsed aggressive use of FTC powers to ferret out fraud and bust up monopolies, and Hanford became an activist commissioner. “She was visibly very upset when she heard about consumer fraud, especially against disadvantaged groups,” says Jeffrey Edelstein, who served as Hanford’s attorney adviser. “She lived and breathed her work, she got to work at 8 in the morning and worked on weekends. She was very definitely the hardest-working public official I ever saw in Washington.”

Some noted a temperament problem with difficult decisions: extreme caution, an inability to rule quickly. But in a passionate age, she also displayed passion. She was particularly vigorous on issues involving women, such as the quality of nursing home care, and on regulation of the auto companies. She wrote the FTC opinion blasting Ford and Chrysler for false advertising of fuel efficiency in their new cars and later

signed a sweeping complaint against Ford for not informing customers of lubrication problems resulting in often costly damage to its engines. The case ended (after Dole departed the FTC) with Ford agreeing to put up signs in its showrooms and send out bulletins about a recall program.

As for antitrust, Dole almost never saw a merger she liked. She often argued that if the firm increased its market share even slightly the merger was illegal, and she was committed to the principle that the best market for consumers was one in which “there are many sellers, none of which has any significant market share.” Thus when Liggett and Meyers, the number-four dog food manufacturer with 11 percent of the market in dog food, bought the sixth largest company, with 4.41 percent, the FTC ordered its divestment on grounds that “small but aggressive” independents must be maintained. In one of her infrequent dissents, Hanford even opposed a merger the majority of the FTC had allowed: the purchase by Budd, a maker of van trailers, of the tiny Gindy company, which also made such trailers. Dole said that Gindy was too important in a *sub-category* of the market, open-top van trailers, to be absorbed.

The power couple

Probably the most significant merger to take place during Hanford’s years on the FTC happened December 6, 1975, when she married Senator Robert Dole, who had been divorced from his first wife.

Bob Dole was a former Republican National Committee chairman, and the marriage had political benefits for both him and his wife. At about the time she changed her name, Elizabeth Dole changed her registration again, from Independent to Republican. Within a few months she was dearly needed: a southern Democrat was

running for president, and her husband was on the opposing ticket. In the Ford-Dole campaign against Carter-Mondale, Elizabeth Dole was what Bob called his "southern strategy," criss-crossing meridional climes. *The New York Times*, meanwhile, didn't fail to give her the once-over—"svelte figure, brunette hair, and eye-catching clothes."

Thus was born the Power Couple (she 39, he 52) that has charmed Washington, the features sections, and the women's magazines. *Newsweek* likened the Doles to Tracy and Hepburn, *Savvy* to Nick and Nora Charles. Profiles emphasized their mutual independence. Not long after the election, for instance, the two publicly debated the establishment of a consumer protection agency, then the holy grail of the consumer movement. ("The last person Bob debated was Fritz Mondale—and look what's happened to Fritz," she said.) The FTC commissioner was now a full-fledged consumer advocate and, scorning "business lobbyists," warned of a "public backlash" against business. Who would lead that backlash? Maybe Elizabeth Dole. The voice of business exceeds "by a long shot anything I have ever seen on the consumer side" in the halls of government, she declared.

Two years later Bob announced for president. Though he would later consider the run "a mistake of judgment," Elizabeth quit her FTC post, nearly two years before her term was over, to campaign, thus avoiding the charge that had arisen in 1976 that she was politicizing a quasi-judicial office. "From the first day she went out on the trail, she... had that natural ability," Charles Black, the political consultant who had been on Dole's staff, recalls. "She probably did more good for Bob Dole than he did for himself in that race."

After Bob's campaign fizzled, the sparkling Liddy chaired Voters for Reagan-Bush. That fall she headed a transition planning team and was mentioned as a possible secretary of education or Commerce or (amazingly) nominee to the Supreme Court.

Despite lobbying by Bob Dole, the White House had lesser plans for her. They made her assistant to the president for public liaison, a job once held by Chuck Colson but which has slowly lost its power in the Reagan years. Its prime function was to determine which special interest groups—blacks, farmers, Jews, women, or businessmen—would see the president. For anyone who wanted to earn a gold star within the Reagan administration the choice was easy: aggressively serve business.

And so the woman who a few years before had decried the influence of business lobbyists, who had warned that the slogan "caveat emptor" was about to be replaced by "vendor emptor," now spent the entire spring of 1981, according to David Stockman in *The Triumph of Politics*, rallying business lobbyists behind the White House's radical economic proposals. Indeed, she pushed their interests so hard that even officials of this staunchly pro-business administration were a little stunned. For example, when Stockman sought to remove accelerated depreciation provisions from the 1981 tax bill, she "practically tackled and hog-tied" White House chief of staff James A. Baker III, Stockman wrote. The woman who had threatened to muster a consumer backlash now threatened a business backlash against the Reagan revolution if business's views were not heeded. In part through her efforts, accelerated depreciation stayed right where it was.

Stockman and Baker grumbled, and Dole never made it into the inner circles of the Reagan White House. One reason was because her husband was attacking much of the '81 tax bill from the Senate floor; Dole was seen as a back channel to a Reagan rival. She was also a woman in a macho encampment whose more favored members (notoriously, Donald Regan) made insulting comments about women. In time, though, her womanhood came to be Dole's most prized attribute within the Reagan administration.

Secretary of gender gap

Feminists who have worked with Elizabeth Dole say she has always pushed for women's issues, and yet from the beginning of her service in the White House, her approach was remarkably conciliatory. She abandoned her commitment to the Equal Rights Amendment, explaining that "he's [Reagan's] not going to change on that." Later, women's groups became disturbed because Dole talked of being "gagged" on their concerns; Reagan simply wasn't interested in hearing about them. Dole herself later joked about having been muzzled for 13 months, during which her greatest accomplishment for women apparently was arranging an audience with the president for a group of female go-getters from the financial community.

Everything changed in 1982 when the Reagan administration awakened to the "gender gap," the theory that Reagan had so alienated a voting bloc of women on peace and welfare issues that unless

he did something fast Republicans would take it on the chin in the 1982 elections. One poll said 42 percent of men but only 34 percent of women would vote for a congressman who supported the president's positions. Richard Wirthlin, the president's pollster, explained that Republicans had to show they knew that women's issues were "not a casual concern."

At about this time, Pat Reuss, legislative director of the Women's Equity Action League, got a phone call from the White House. "Pat," said Elizabeth Dole, "guess what I've just done. I've got some of the high level men in this administration behind a task force. . . we're going to look at the federal codes, all our laws and regulations, at every level, to find discrimination against women." Thus the Reagan administration's widely promoted alternative to the ERA: the Task Force on Legal Equity for Women, aimed at ferreting out federal regulations, policies, and practices that discriminated against women—the E and the R without the A.

Later that year, Reuss received another invigorating call from Dole. Again with kettle drums and cymbals, the Reagan administration had named a White House Coordinating Council on Women, led by Dole, to serve as a clearinghouse in the administration on women's concerns. As a result, Reagan got behind some bills to help women, including one that stiffened child support laws and another that made pension systems fairer to women whose spouses die short of retirement or whose own careers are interrupted.

But the gender gap wouldn't go away, and a fearful administration threw up another bulwark, Elizabeth Dole's promotion. In early 1983, again after her husband's lobbying, she was named as the first woman transportation secretary, replacing the departing Drew Lewis.

Fixing the table settings

From the beginning Dole was obsessed with publicity. One morning she appeared at the department's parking entrance with a STOP sign in her hands, halting cars to make sure employees were buckling their seat belts, a photo opp of Secretarial dimensions. When things went poorly, though, she became more camera shy. In December 1984 Dole threw a media event in the Mojave desert, gathering 600 reporters and VIPs at Edwards Air Force Base to view a long-hyped experiment of a special airplane fuel that would supposedly prevent explosions during crash land-

ings. The department was going to use remote control to crash-land an old Boeing filled with integrated black and white dummies. Dole held a press conference before the crash, but when the plane exploded and burned on impact, she "went out the back door," in the words of one former DOT employee. Dole's office said she had an appointment on the coast—in any case, FAA Administrator Donald Engen was left to field the embarrassing questions.

On occasion she has even taken credit for policies she vehemently opposed. For example, she was against a bill that ordered the DOT to tell American travelers which foreign airports had failed U.S. security examinations. The industry fought the law—it held out the prospect of regular, discouraging travel bulletins—and Dole called it "rigid, unilateral," and "counterproductive to international cooperation." But when Congress prevailed, arguing, as Rep. Norman Mineta put it, that the American public should know which airports "are hazardous to your health," Dole took credit, claiming in a travel publication that "I asked the Congress" to pass the notification procedure.

The secretary fretted over how things looked; one former DOT official says she ironed her skirt in her office before and after a ruffling and well-photographed helicopter trip. She went into a state over the table settings for a luncheon with Senate wives, twice changing them because they didn't look quite right. "Everyone was going crazy," he recalls. "It got the same scrutiny as something truly substantial."

This view of Dole clashes somewhat with her persona at the FTC—the hardworking, substantive commissioner signing sober opinions—but then Dole's role had changed as well. A lady in the Reagan administration wore a perfectly pressed skirt even on a helicopter, had perfect place settings, and was always available to the White House to put a pretty face on token initiatives. Cultural atavism, maybe, but the media ate it up. While *Harper's Bazaar* said Dole was a staunch feminist and the most powerful woman in America, it noted happily that her "graceful persistence. . . doesn't threaten those around her."

The administration soon reached its high-water mark for women in cabinet positions (three), but neither U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick (gravelly) nor Secretary of Health and Human Services Margaret M. Heckler (intractable) could be counted on as window dressing for the administration's policies on women, and inevitably the job fell to Dole (effusive). The administra-

tion regarded her above all as a political asset, or as Bob Dole (pragmatic) told *Newsweek* months before the convention, "If they're smart, they'll just buy her a road map and an airplane and say, 'See you after the election.'"

So Dole made the rounds of the women's magazines and rallied women as she had consumers and businessmen before that. Again and again she said that the president's record on women's issues "is not fully understood." Again and again she confessed that over her career she had helped usher in a "quiet revolution, this tidal wave," and that the president's Task Force on Legal Equity would advance the cause further. And when Barbara Honegger, a top staff member for the task force, resigned and labeled the effort a "sham" on the op-ed page of *The Washington Post*, Dole was there for the president, announcing her strong "support" for the government-wide "Women's Equality Day" in honor of the 63rd anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Then the Democrats nominated Geraldine Ferraro, and Dole became even more important. Republicans feared a women's backlash, especially since the Dallas convention, spurred by Jesse Helms, adopted its most conservative platform ever, including planks to extend the Fourteenth Amendment's protections to the unborn and to limit anti-discrimination stipulations in education funding. (The party had abandoned its traditional support of the ERA in 1980.) The staunch feminist Elizabeth Dole seemed to have a cast-iron stomach as she was wheeled out to give a prime-time speech assuring women voters that the administration cared—the president was concerned with "choices" and "opportunities" rather than "promises" for women. Later that fall one of her chores was doing a frothy political ad on her long relationship with Helms, who was locked in a bilious but ultimately successful campaign against former North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt ("her job was to make Helms look like a human being," says Geoffrey D. Garin, a former consultant to Hunt).

She rationalized her positions by noting that the administration's economic changes would create more jobs for women and that economic issues were most important to women. Yet at the very time she was pumping up the White House Coordinating Council on Women as a vanguard of "this quiet revolution, this tidal wave," the council had little influence within the administration. It has even less today. I made perhaps a dozen calls to the White House to track the coun-

cil down and drew an absolute blank. "I don't think that's any longer in effect," said Albert R. Brashear, a White House spokesman.

As for the E and the R without the A, the final report of the celebrated Task Force on Legal Equity was produced in April 1986, and while it prompted gender-sanitization efforts in federal codes—the Soil Conservation Service started using photos of women in its brochures—it stopped well short of addressing fundamental problems. "Cosmetic," Justice's William Bradford Reynolds bluntly termed it. The report has by all accounts simply lain there without any official action.

You can't blame Elizabeth Dole for the administration's flaccidity on women's issues. Indeed, there's evidence that she quietly lobbied the cabinet without much effect. Yet her brief and passionate public lip service leaves a disturbing question about her political nerve. By 1983 and 1984 she had become immeasurably valuable to the Reagan administration in an area, women's rights, close to her heart. Despite the great political capital Dole had built up, she seems not to have exacted much more from Reagan beyond his tolerance for dozens of women in high offices in Transportation and a women's exercise room on the tenth floor of the building.

And anyway Reagan's female trouble was over. The gender gap turned out not to figure in the '84 elections, and Elizabeth Dole was able to get back to her role as "the safety secretary."

Sardine can

Raymond Lee was working in a field outside Snow Hill, North Carolina, in May 1985, when he heard wrenching noises from nearby Route 13 and rushed up through the tobacco plants to the road. The scorched highway was strewn with pickles and corn—a truck had collided with another vehicle head on. He followed a trail of tennis shoes, hair brushes, and other human debris to a shattered school bus that had been thrown to the side of the road. Injured children lay about, including four of Lee's kids, among them James, 12, who reached out for his father and then died, according to an account in the *Charlotte Observer*. Five other school children were killed, and 21 kids suffered injuries, many of them serious. One witness said the bus had opened up like a sardine tin. Its left side was stripped open, and towards the back of the bus the floor had split neatly apart along a seam, leaving a gaping four-foot hole through which as many as three children were ejected.

Dole's Transportation Department has refused to act on the Ford park-to-reverse problem, which is blamed for killing hundreds of people, mostly small children and the elderly, who aren't able to scramble out of the way of lurching cars.

Although such a serious collision would have injured passengers regardless of the bus construction, the floor break was notable because the bus's manufacturer, Thomas Built, had for some time sparred with the Department of Transportation over its floor joints. Thomas Built said the floors were "access panels" and thus not covered by a regulation mandating strong joints. For a time, the DOT had countered this absurdity, pointing out that the floors met the definition: "external or internal body panels." Thomas Built's floors had repeatedly failed strength tests, which called for joints between panels to be at least 60 percent as strong as the panels themselves. Tests done by the DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) during the Carter administration showed that the joints were less than half as strong as they should be, and NHTSA had begun an investigation of the company.

When Ronald Reagan came into office in 1981, he declared that the U.S. auto industry was "virtually being regulated to death," and NHTSA ceased to enforce some rules and stopped developing many others. Tests of the Thomas Built floors ended, and in spring 1985, at about the time of the Snow Hill accident, the DOT dropped its investigation of earlier violations. In fact, after the wreck, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), an independent body that investigates accidents, combed the wreckage and found that the floor-joints were only 7 percent as strong as the sheets of steel they held, a fraction of what NHTSA had once required. NTSB suggested that the floor construction may have been responsible for one child's death and serious injuries to two others.

Dole has declared over and over that safety is her highest priority, and in promoting that view she hasn't hesitated to use the deaths of schoolchildren. A few months after the Snow Hill wreck, for instance, she gave a speech citing the case of a truck that killed a child who had

just gotten off a school bus. But that child's case ("tragic...innocent," said Dole) illustrated a driver's problem; Dole was advocating a program for single licensing of truck drivers so that they cannot rack up violations in one state and get a clean license in another. The Snow Hill case implicated a manufacturer, and on such matters Dole has been assiduous in not making rules and not speaking out.

Lurching cars

Elizabeth Dole, of course, has had successes at Transportation besides single licensing of truck drivers. She added more FAA inspectors, went after airlines for deceptive scheduling, and campaigned for higher drinking ages.

Two relative bright spots in auto rule-making came early on. One was her 1983 rule ordering a high center-mounted brake light on all cars. Although it does not save lives, the rule is said to save millions in auto repair bills and hundreds of injuries each year.

Then there was the airbag rule. In 1984 Dole ordered a gradual phase-in of passive restraints—automatic seat belts or airbags—in all cars beginning in 1987. It was "probably the most difficult public policy issue" she ever tackled, she says, and plainly she was torn: the Reagan administration had opposed the airbag rule and yet Dole herself had said good things about airbags when she came into office and had them installed in her official Lincoln. Most important, the Supreme Court had ruled unanimously that the Reagan administration's rescission of an earlier airbag regulation violated the charter of the Transportation Department, which, after all, came to life in the mid-sixties at the time of Ralph Nader's historic study of auto safety, *Unsafe at Any Speed*. Thus Dole had little choice but to make a rule, and after some delay she did. (Even then, she almost sabotaged the rule by including a provision under which airbags would not be re-

quired if a certain number of states passed seat belt laws.)

Certainly her relentless speechifying about drunk driving and other safety issues is better than Drew Lewis's silence. But aside from the flawed airbag stance, it's difficult to see when she ever used her political weight to fight either auto companies or, just as important, the paladins of the Office of Management and Budget who calculate the costs and benefits.

When I asked her in an interview about one rule to improve auto safety in side crashes and another applying car safety standards to light trucks, she said brightly, "We're working on that." Meanwhile, however, Dole's office told Congress they "strongly oppose" action on those very rules. Senator John C. Danforth, a Missouri Republican, termed this position "blatant evidence of further DOT foot-dragging" on safety issues.

Perhaps most significantly, Dole has failed to apply existing safety standards to increasingly popular light trucks and minivans, even though small pickups and jeep-like vehicles have death rates up to four times higher than those of large cars. In fact, during rollovers, these vehicles have twice or triple the death toll of even small cars. But the DOT has insisted more study is needed before it will apply roof strength requirements of passenger cars to these vehicles. It has also remained silent on when the airbag rule will be applied to light trucks.

The list of inactivity on auto safety is a long one: Transportation has failed to act on the NTSB's August 1986 recommendation that the department take "immediate" action to order three-point seat belts in back seats; the simple lap belt may do more harm than good in accidents and has been implicated in some gruesome injuries. And after years of promises the DOT still hasn't set a side crash standard for cars. Side impact kills 9,000 people a year; many deaths could be avoided with some easy adjustments like moving the front seat position with respect to the door post.

Interestingly, the department has even opposed publishing information about how cars and bumpers perform in crashes, just the sort of consumer information Dole pushed for as FTC commissioner. "Where the federal government has in its possession objective comparative test data, the government should make it available to the public," Dole told Congress in 1973.

Similarly, although Dole's DOT has slightly increased auto recalls over Drew Lewis's years, Dole

has worked out the auto problems much as she had under Richard Nixon: communicating quietly with the manufacturer. Dole's department has opened very few formal investigations, generally limiting them to "preliminary analyses," which are out of the public eye, as the Center for Auto Safety has observed. The DOT says recalls proceed far more quickly this way. "What's to be accomplished by embarrassing the manufacturers in public?" one DOT official adds. In fact, "embarrassing the manufacturers" is a good way of informing the public of potential defects and getting companies to take these problems more seriously.

On occasion, when a defect requires tough, public action, the DOT is passive. For example, the DOT has refused to act on the Ford park-to-reverse problem, the tendency of many pre-1981 Ford cars to slip into reverse. The problem is blamed for killing hundreds of people, mostly small children and the elderly who aren't able to scramble out of the way of the lurching cars.

Then there's the Audi 5000. A year ago public outcry forced the department to investigate the car, which, in more than 1,500 cases, has reportedly experienced sudden and violent acceleration. Six deaths have been ascribed to the defect, including that of a boy run over by his mother. So far Audi and the DOT have agreed to a recall measure that in essence endorses the company's position that fumbling drivers are responsible for the incidents. Marion Weisfelner, leader of Audi Victims Network, fearing no action to address what she and others believe is a dangerous flaw, repeatedly sought to bring her group of Audi "victims" to meet with Dole, but was always referred to NHTSA. "We'll come anytime—I don't understand what she's so busy doing that she can't take an hour."

One answer is giving speeches. Elizabeth Dole is one of the four or five most requested speakers on the Republican circuit (at 6,000 invitations a year) and is always flying hither and yon. About a year ago, not long before Weisfelner began pestering her, Dole told a St. Louis audience, "We will not shirk our duty to regulate on behalf of public safety. But neither will we forget that before one can lead, one must listen. My door, I assure you, is always open; so is my mind."

Fly the crowded skies

Dole's auto safety record leaves us with a paradox: if Elizabeth Dole is so politically astute and ambitious, why can't she see that highway safety is the classic motherhood issue? Govern-

ment regulation in its behalf is all but universally viewed as one of the great success stories of big government. You'd think that Dole might have staked her claim with the public in defiance of Reagan ideology at least once. But throughout her career, Dole has drawn the lesson that advancement comes on the strength of connections, and that the best way to build those is to please your superiors and to play the part you are assigned. There's a stark contrast between Dole's complaisance and the profiles of independence that even this ideological administration has now and then produced. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop bucked the administration by talking frankly about AIDS. Otis Bowen, head of Health and Human Services, held Reagan's feet to the fire on catastrophic health insurance. Even Drew Lewis fought for and won a 5 cent gas tax hike at a time when Reagan was dead set against any taxes at all. But Dole is a role player in the tradition not of Otis Bowen but of Caspar Weinberger, the tight-fisted OMB director under Nixon who became the profligate defense spender under Reagan.

So Elizabeth Dole's record on air traffic safety should not come as a surprise. Of all the doctrinaire attitudes that Elizabeth Dole confronted—and adopted—when she took over at Transportation, perhaps none was as strong as the Reagan administration's contention that the air traffic control system could be run with fewer controllers than in the past. In August 1981, in a demonstration of its will, the infant administration fired 11,400 striking PATCO controllers and then struggled successfully to keep half the normal flights aloft.

Soon after Dole came into office, she worked to boost air traffic back to its pre-1981 levels—but with about half the number of controllers the Federal Aviation Administration had employed before the strike. She told Congress that within a few months the system would be working so smoothly the supervisors could step away from the control tubes and go back to their desks and the controllers could take leaves when they wanted.

For controllers who were being denied sick leave and forced to work six days a week, such chipper pronouncements were infuriating. Dole further stunned controllers by dismissing the notion that there was any stress unique to air traffic control, despite evidence of hypertension among those who work the monitors for hours on end. Morale began falling in 1984, and the same sorts of complaints that preceded the 1981

strike began cropping up again.

There was surely some merit in Reagan's position that the system could be run with fewer controllers. But to do so would have required her to violate two cardinal rules for being a good Reagan cabinet secretary: don't anger industry and don't spend too much money. For example, the air traffic problem could be reduced by refusing to give airlines permission to run so many flights during peak hours, a step Dole has been reluctant to take. And the traffic problems could also be eased through modernization. As critics have pointed out so often, some of the equipment the controllers use is fifties vintage, vacuum tube stuff—even though more than \$5 billion has been set aside in special trust funds for modernization. Why wasn't it spent? Largely because the Reagan administration has used the fund to make the deficit seem smaller.

By spring this year, traffic was up to 120 percent of its pre-strike level, but there were 1,400 fewer controllers than at that time. Only 9,500 controllers were qualified at all tasks, compared to the 13,300 “full-performance” controllers on the job before the strike. And safety statistics began to worsen. The number of operational errors, down in the past two years, was up 18 percent in the first quarter. The controllers were organizing a union. Meanwhile, runway near-collisions caused by controller errors were rising rapidly, with half again as many in 1986 as there had been in 1984. Typical was a February incident in which a Continental 727 taking off from Los Angeles knocked off the tip of a tail of a Cessna that had been cleared to cross the runway. We seemed to be right back where we started. Congressmen began urging the DOT to hire back some of the old PATCO controllers on a part-time basis to ease the rush-hour crunches. But such creative solutions were not in Dole's arsenal; she insisted her request for an additional 225 more controllers for 1987-1988 was sufficient.

Congress grew increasingly irritated. “People who live in the system tell me it's unsafe,” said Rep. Guy V. Molinari. Rep. Norman Y. Mineta, chairman of the aviation subcommittee, in March wrote Dole saying he was “shocked” and “disturbed” by her failure to hire more air traffic controllers. “I urge you to give this problem a much higher priority,” Mineta concluded, a subtle reference to her busy political speaking schedule. He had been more blunt when earlier he told the *Journal of Commerce*: “I wish she would spend as much time on the job at the Department of Transportation.”

After her marriage to Senator Robert Dole, Washington feature writers fell in love with the Power Couple. *Newsweek* likened the Doles to Tracy and Hepburn, *Savvy* to Nick and Nora Charles.

But Dole was, typically, toeing the line. She accused the Congress of trying to “break faith with the American people” on airline modernization, yet she was against segregating the trust fund solely for capital improvements. She insisted almost blithely that the system was running smoothly. “You’ve all seen the allegations—that the Air Traffic Controller workforce is understaffed, inexperienced, and overworked,” she told the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1986. “The true story makes for less exciting headlines—something along the lines of—‘Orderly Planning Keeps FAA Ahead of the Curve in Air Traffic Controller Needs.’”

In mid-May Dole and the administration got a shock when the National Transportation Safety Board issued a report saying the air traffic control system was overburdened and understaffed and warned that “the potential for a catastrophic accident will continue to increase during the 1987 summer months.” The NTSB called on the DOT to reduce air traffic. DOT refused, saying things were under control.

By late spring, though, the administration gave a point. With near-misses up to roughly two a day, and some congressmen calling for re-regulation of the industry, Dole reversed herself on controller numbers. She sought 580 more instead of 225 more. The decision was portrayed in the press as having been pushed on Dole by FAA Administrator Donald Engen, who, reportedly weary of battling with Dole and her deputy, James H. Burnley IV, resigned his job at the end of June. Dole explained that the increase would be “making the system even safer.”

19 and 0

In 1984 when Congress was trying to decide which agency should regulate airline mergers, some legislators had warned that the Transportation Department might not be sufficiently “insulated” to take on the job—too subject to political pressure, tending to see itself as an advocate of the industry. But those legislators were overruled. After all, the deregulation that began in 1978 was a huge success. The number of airlines had soared, prices crashed. Why worry?

Since then Elizabeth Dole has ultimately approved every single merger that has come before her—including three opposed by Edwin Meese’s Justice Department. According to the Aviation Consumer Action Project, the market share of the ten largest carriers went from 73.3 percent in 1984 to 94.6 by last June. “The tendency of the department to be intimidated by the carriers is worse than at any time I’m aware of,” says one former Carter Transportation official.

In approving the 19 mergers, Dole completely inverted the logic of her FTC decisions, which were so tied to market share data. Today she has argued that even a merger producing market shares in excess of 75 percent—as TWA’s acquisition of Ozark did for emplanements in St. Louis and Northwest’s acquisition of Republic did in Minneapolis—can be legal. She earlier had broken another tenet of her FTC days, that a scrappy competitor must be preserved to police an already concentrated market. She allowed United, which had offered discount fares as a fringe competitor in a highly concentrated market, to gain 26 percent of the market thereby becoming part of the cartel it had once disrupted.

“There has been an evolution in antitrust analysis over 20 years, but the consistency [in my thinking] has always been concern for the consumer,” Dole explained to me. “There is now more an orientation toward—and the Supreme Court has done this—an emphasis on barriers to entry [rather than market share]. That’s the key thing we use in our analysis here. If the barriers to competition are low, others are going to be able to move in, and the airline industry has traditionally had low barriers to entry as opposed to the industries we were regulating at the FTC.”

But Dole’s swing—from full faith in the importance of market share data to a strict refusal to be swayed by such evidence—is suspiciously extreme. Even the Justice Department, brimming with Chicago acolytes, uses market share data in weighing mergers. In fact, in opposing the Northwest-Republic case, the Justice Department argued that a merger would have significant “welfare” costs to consumers and that the airline might be able to triple prices on some routes out

of Minneapolis without facing competition. Dole's suggestion that barriers to entering the airline business are lower than in the industries the FTC governed also seems questionable. The costs, after all, include a fleet of airplanes.

Not surprisingly, there hasn't been a flood of mom-and-pop entrepreneurs setting up airlines to discipline pricing since the merger mania began. In the days of computer reservation systems, frequent flyer programs, and international feed, small competitors tend to get swallowed (as both People and Presidential were) by the firms Dole not so long ago characterized as "giant conglomerates." For example, in 1985, at the height of competitive activity, seven carriers offered 38 flights a day on the Detroit to Boston route. Come June this year, only three carriers were flying the route, offering 11 flights—far below the service that existed before deregulation.

Finally, while Dole has criticized airlines for deceptive scheduling practices, the deregulatory chaos over which she presides has led to greater delays in general and increasing rider agitation about baggage loss. The DOT received six times more consumer complaints this June than a year before.

Reasonably OK

Although she has been better than her predecessor, Drew Lewis, on safety—he didn't even pay lip service to safety—Dole's record on these issues is considered among the weakest in the history of the department. "She comes in as a consumer advocate and misuses her reputation to avoid criticism," says Ralph Nader. Her administration has been "an epidemic of lost opportunities and surrendered authority." But the question arises, if her overall performance on safety and airline deregulation has been so disappointing, why has she lived such a charmed life in the press?

Partly it's because she associates herself so relentlessly with a noble issue, safety, inside an ideological administration; critics look on her as a beleaguered idealist deserving of sympathy rather than criticism. "She's made a decision like a lot of other insiders. 'If you weren't there, would anyone carry on the fight?'" says Ann F. Lewis, former executive director of Americans for Democratic Action, now a political consultant. "It's a great Washington tradition: hold your tongue and write your memoirs." Brian O'Neill, president of the Insurance Institute for Auto

Safety, sharply criticizes Dole's inaction on a number of safety issues and concedes that her "reputation and title" as safety secretary are "probably not well deserved," but nonetheless adds that "given the administration's ideological constraints against regulation I would say she's doing a reasonably OK job."

The feminist community is even more charitable. "There's a very strong sense of liking her and the able manner in which she's conducted herself," says Irene Natividad, of the National Women's Political Caucus. After all, Dole has appointed many women and had great symbolic value as an apparently competent female manager of a vast organization. Indeed, with Heckler exiled to the North Sea and Kirkpatrick working the op-ed pages, Dole's the only woman left in the cabinet, a fact she exploits with her pilgrimages to the women's magazines and style pages, which routinely exult that she's the first woman to head a branch of the military (the Coast Guard). "She is among the most activist of them all, making safety a popular and emotional issue, her number one priority," quoth *Vogue*. Pat Reuss of the Women's Equity Action League agrees: "You see her everywhere, at hearings, airbag, safety stuff."

The trade press has often been critical. David Collogan, writing recently in *Business and Commercial Aviation* in an article headlined "Aviation 'Dole'drums,'" scoffed at Dole's safety claims and said it was "absolutely essential" to remove her from "that nice paneled office." Among mainstream press, *The Washington Post* has been more critical of Dole than any other press outlet. But even in the *Post* tough stories are few and far between, interspersed with valentines about "The Power Couple," or "The Dance of the Doles" (her "North Carolina lilt," "her toughness behind a feminine, almost girlish manner"). These and other sappy profiles take Dole's safety assertions at face value. Last year *Savvy*, in a long piece called "Liddy in Overdrive," said that with the airbag decision "Dole and her staff accomplished in ten months what their predecessors could not do in 15 years," but left out the decisive Supreme Court decision forcing Dole's hand and her own stalling on the rule.

"Gosh"

I became aware of one reason the media has such a soft focus on Dole when I was ushered into Dole's office last June and seated opposite the secretary amid Steuben glass, plants, and

photographs of Bob Dole: she's incredibly gracious and warm. A tape recording of an interview is filled with trilling laughs and surprised expressions like "gosh." She reminisced about lemonade, cookies, and Bible stories back in Salisbury. I felt like a heel for raising prickly issues.

She became defensive only when I asked her whether she had undergone a philosophical change over the years—campaigning for Johnson in '60 and Reagan in '84. Riding the whistlestop train, she said, was merely a chance opportunity she'd had as a senate staff member, a "kind of learning experience for me." When I persisted, she said you had to understand that old southern Democrats and modern southern Republicans have "basically the same kind of philosophy" she has today. If she'd reflected on how a Great Society liberal transformed into an eighties conservative, she didn't want to share those thoughts.

Occasionally, there was a scripted feel to her answers, a glimpse of her prim carefulness. When I asked about abortion, for example, she said, "It is the toughest question I have ever had to wrestle with, and frankly I am still wrestling with it." She had also given *The New York Times* the same answer seven years ago. ("I think it's just about the most difficult question there is, and one I'm still wrestling with.") But even in delivering that statement Dole looked me in the eye like she was confiding in me.

Of course, her appeal is based on more than mere social warmth. Dole glides right into our culture's soft spot for a traditional woman. Profiles routinely speak of Dole in the most nostalgic terms, as a dewy magnolia blossom, and when she walks into Senate hearing rooms, the members become so chivalrous you'd think the Round Table was in session. Political critics who are only too willing to take on James G. Watt and Edwin Meese steer clear when they see this damsel on the Conrail tracks.

Dole is shrewd, and she's seized on these attributes to ease her progress. "She could defuse angry tigers with dynamite in their mouths," says one observer of the airline industry. "I once saw a dozen men who all make lots of money and have lots of power so pissed off at her they couldn't fucking see straight. Then they went in to see her, and the issue was disposed of in 30 seconds." When I suggested to Dale A. Petroskey, Dole's press secretary, that Dole was a feminist, he amended that to say she was very "feminine...appealing."

"She is to the Reagan administration what

Jacqueline Kennedy was to Camelot—a glamorous, feminine presence, draped on a frame of steel."

Who said that? *Cosmo*? No, *Business Week*. In a time of greater female independence, Elizabeth Dole has turned out to be just what an uneasy establishment ordered, a woman of nominal authority but old-fashioned dependence. Our ambivalence about women in power has decreed her success.

On rare occasions, that dependence has truly irritated some legislators. In the middle of last spring's deliberations over whether to raise the 55 mph speed limit in rural areas, some congressmen started looking around for Dole. Opponents of the 55 mph speed limit were arguing that the limit was burdensome and unnecessary in less populated areas. Supporters were basing their arguments on safety—the 55 mph speed limit was thought to have saved 40,000 lives since its enactment in 1973 and the National Safety Council had called it the "best single device for saving lives and preventing injuries from motor vehicle accidents." In their fight they sought, as Senator Daniel P. Moynihan put it one day in frustration, "any material, any counsel, any presence even" from the Department of Transportation. How many lives would be lost at 65 mph? And why wasn't the safety secretary telling them?

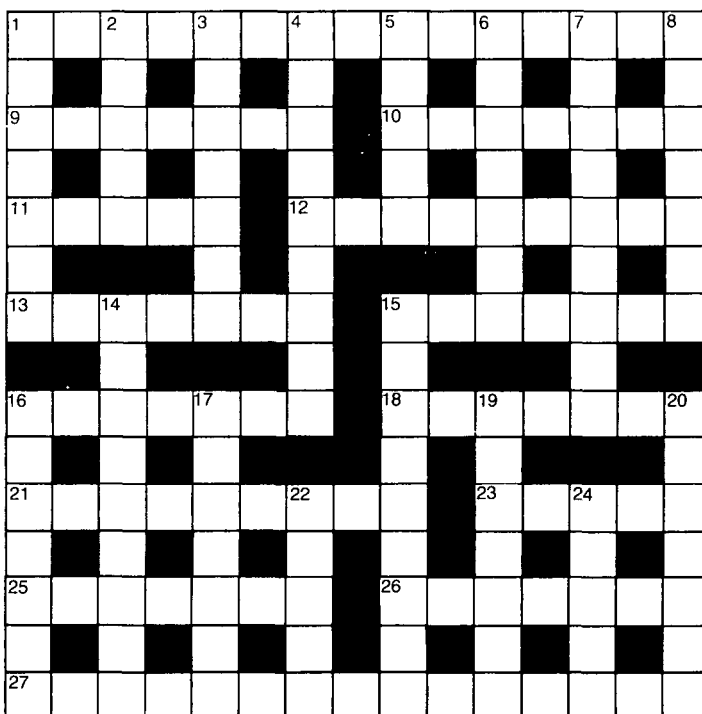
As it turned out, Elizabeth Dole had errands to do. One of them was to travel to Iowa to open a campaign office for her husband and speak at a fundraiser. While the DOT wouldn't supply data or advice for the safety debate, Dole did mention the speed limit in Iowa, advocating it be *increased*. But that was to be expected. If she were to take on the administration on a controversial topic it wasn't then. Her husband, after all, is running for president, and to woo the party faithful, who vote heavily in primaries and caucuses, he has been running hard to the right. Once suspected of being a moderate, the longtime advocate of food stamps and civil rights legislation has lately allied himself with Jesse Helms, speaking increasingly about "Marxist tyranny in Angola and Nicaragua" and the liberals' "spend-and-appease ideas." In fact, a *Conservative Digest* poll placed him to the right of Senator Paul Laxalt and Rep. Jack Kemp.

It just wouldn't do to have the wife of such a candidate disputing the administration or joining forces with liberal activists. Elizabeth Dole has a lot more on her mind than just being the safety secretary. She's now a candidate for First Lady, her next great role in Washington. ■

POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g., (2, 3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g., USA, are treated as one word.



DOWN

1. Hep pair managed to become less sad. (7)
2. Fragment is tough after September 1. (5)
3. Plastered Air Force fed around nine. (7)
4. Radical right spread rail libel. (9)
5. We hear revenue raiser changes course. (5)
6. Pleasure from bringing up story before particle. (7)
7. Join cretin set somehow. (9)
8. Enlarge carefully assembly predecessor. (7)
14. Least substantial mixed ink in modified steins. (9)
15. Holding back Europe? (9)
16. Saint he sculpted carelessly. (2, 5)
17. Bill Bradley, for example, set up little railway vista. (3, 4)
19. Attorney General tread carefully to make distinctions. (7).
20. Quick answer is nothing with excited priest around. (7)
22. Excellent bins tossed around by playwright. (5)
24. Lady graduate makes queen's home. (5)

ACROSS

1. Scattered wardrobe for candidate in 27 Across. (3, 3, 2, 3, 4)
9. It is not serious to have Paul fly around. (7)
10. Discipline of pure nitrogen. (7)
11. Brief independent former guide. (5)
12. Fomenter sends top ego railroad to the queen. (9)
13. Tenant arouses red's ire. (7)
15. Put away defective lace after study. (7)
16. Start Latin II course. (7)
18. Mixed reagent invalidates theory. (7)
21. Heir in ivy famous for marriages. (5, 4)
23. Commentator emphasized in liberal's opinion. (5)
25. Clumsy Shah set dress styles. (7)
26. Fugitives serve awkwardly around year-end. (7)
27. Political start for nice green hatter in a way. (8, 3, 4)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

