

Religious Right Ready to Press

By Thomas B. Edsall
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Christian right is poised to capitalize on its growing power in the Republican Party to press for enactment of its own "Contract With the American Family," individual religious expression in schools and a ban on an abortion procedure.

The proposals, which the Christian Coalition and a number of allied organizations will detail at a news conference this week, have already been market-tested by pollster Frank Luntz, who will assure jittery Republican leaders that all the items have at least a 60 percent approval rating.

"I do expect generally favorable treatment by this Congress," said Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition. "I am absolutely confident that virtually every provision will be passed by this Congress or by a subsequent Congress."

Luntz's testing of the coalition's proposals was designed in part to allay the fears of Republican leaders, many of whom have been very reluctant to enter terrain that could alienate supporters who are conservative financially but more liberal socially, especially suburban women. Many moderate Republicans believe that the socially conservative tenor of the 1992 GOP convention hurt candidates up and down the ticket.

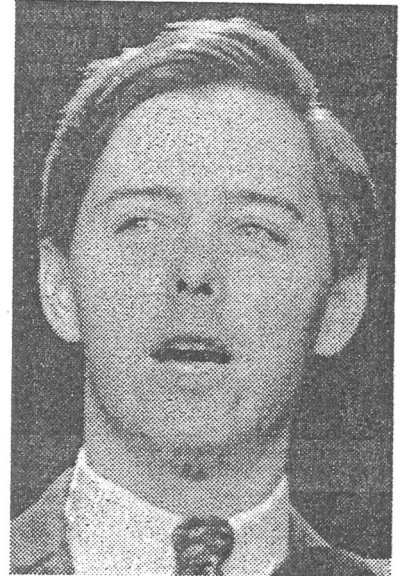
The coalition agenda does not take up such divisive issues as a full-scale ban on abortion or the issue of gay rights.

During the first 100 days, when the House concentrated on the generally economic and procedural issues contained in the "Contract With America," social-issue conservatives became increasingly restive. Gary Bauer, president of the Family Research Council, and James Dobson, president of Focus on the Family, both met with GOP officials, and Bauer warned that Christian activists could bolt the party in 1996 if their issues remain neglected by Congress.

The announcement of the Christian Coalition agenda is a clear signal that conservative organizations pressing social issue initiatives intend to make sure that the newly elected Republican Congress repays the constituencies of these groups for the strong voter support they supplied the GOP.

The frustration of the conservative groups dates to the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who won their hearts and ballots, but never pushed hard for enactment of a social-issue agenda.

In addition to the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council, such organizations as the American Family Association, Concerned Women for America, the Traditional Values Coalition, the National Right to Life Committee and the Eagle Forum have been pressing to place abortion, homosexuality, condom distribution, religious freedom, home schooling and more favorable tax treatment of families at the top of Senate and House priority lists.



RALPH REED

... expects Congress's support

Both House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Senate Majority leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.), who is running for president and needs support from the Christian right, are considered likely to signal sympathy, if not explicit support, for the group's contract. Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), who is also running for president, may appear either at the Christian Coalition press conference or separately with Reed to show his support for the proposals.

Since winning the speakership, Gingrich has sent mixed signals to the religious right. Initially, he declared his commitment to take up a

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school prayer constitutional amendment, but then agreed to postpone consideration. In April, Gingrich first said he believed the issue of gays in the military should be taken up by Congress, but then backed off, contending that he had been misinterpreted. Earlier this month, Gingrich dismayed some conservatives when he questioned the legitimacy of trying to pass an antiabortion constitutional amendment, warning that it could lead to "millions of women" turning to "back-alley" abortions.

Beverly LaHaye, who runs Concerned Women for America, outlined an agenda that is very similar to that of the Christian Coalition. Her organization has set as its top priority the elimination of the Department of Education, and the group strongly supports the "Religious Equality" constitutional amendment.

She would like to go beyond the Christian Coalition agenda to attack federal policies seen as endorsing or supporting "the gay lifestyle," including the "don't ask, don't tell" policy permitting homosexuals in the military.

Kristi Hamrick, spokeswoman for the Family Research Council, said the group is likely to support the Christian Coalition's agenda. But she also said she would like to see all federal money currently channeled to Planned Parenthood cut off, and the ending of all federal programs that provide condoms to youths or in any way place "the imprimatur of

government on sexual behavior outside of marriage."

In a process very similar to the planning of Gingrich's "Contract With America," the items on the Christian Coalition's contract were tested in surveys and focus groups, according to Reed, and all have favorable ratings, ranging from 60 percent to more than 90 percent positive.

The top two items, he said, are the "Religious Equality" amendment, which could have language declaring that "nothing in this [U.S.] constitution or in any state constitution shall be construed to prohibit a citizen from expressing his or her faith in a public place," and a tough policy on convicted criminals.

Under the crime proposal, Reed said, convicted federal prisoners would have to work, attend literacy programs if they do not meet reading and writing standards, and make monetary restitution to their victims, both while working in prison and, if the amount warranted it, after being released.

The Christian Coalition's contract will also call for the conversion of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Public Broadcasting System and the Legal Services program into volunteer private charities with all federal funding phased out over three years.

As a first step toward school vouchers and school choice, Reed said, the contract will include the backing of pending legislation pro-

viding for \$30 million to be spent on such programs in poor and minority school districts.

The specific abortion procedure the Christian Coalition is seeking to ban is called dilation and extraction. According to Stanley K. Henshaw of the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the procedure is used in a small percentage of abortions conducted after the 19th week of pregnancy. In Ohio, where there is pending legislation to prohibit the procedure, those who want to ban the practice call it "brain suction" abortion. In addition, the contract would seek to end all federal programs providing abortion counseling, referral and encouragement, Reed said.

The tax provisions are still undecided, Reed said, although the contract could call for enactment of a flat tax, with certain exemptions for families. More modest tax proposals include creation of individual retirement accounts for mothers who do not work, and further changes to reduce the marriage penalty in the income tax code.

Reed stressed during an interview that the items in his contract are not meant to be the counterpart of Gingrich's "Contract With America" during the second 100 days of Congress.

"We do not see this as the Ten Commandments; these are the 10 suggestions," Reed said. "We are not delivering a command or ultimatum; this is our contribution as a friend to the Congress as to what agenda should follow the first 100 days."