

Gingrich Vows to Pursue Christian Coalition Agenda

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By Laurie Goodstein
Washington Post Staff Writer

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) yesterday pledged that the House will vote on restricting abortion and on a constitutional amendment to allow prayer in schools and other public places as Republican leaders hailed the Christian Coalition's new 10-point "blueprint" for moral and social reform.

Gingrich, Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) and a host of Republican congressional leaders acknowledged their debt to religious conservatives in an elaborate ceremony in the Mansfield Room of the Capitol and

pledged their support for the Christian Coalition's "Contract with the American Family."

"House Republicans are totally committed" to bringing each measure to a floor vote, Gingrich said, because the public will support the initiatives. He said that "75, 80, 85 percent of the country believes in the same general direction" as the Christian Coalition, which was instrumental in mobilizing voters in successful Republican campaigns last fall.

Among the coalition's proposals are eliminating the federal Education Department and transferring the funds to local school districts; establishing pub-

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lic funding of private and religious schools through vouchers; restricting pornography on cable television and the Internet; and abolishing the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Legal Services Corp., which provides legal aid to poor and low-income people.

"This is not a Christian agenda, a Republican agenda or a special interest agenda. It is a pro-family agenda that is embraced by the American people," said Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed.

But the plan provoked indignant opposition yesterday from a variety of religious leaders—Methodists, Presbyterians, Jews and Quakers among them. "The Christian Coalition wants to dictate their view of Christianity to our schoolchildren and to us," said the Rev. Robert J. Brooks, director of government relations for the Episcopal Church, at a later news conference.

The coalition, founded by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson after his failed presidential campaign, paid its political dues and bided its time before presenting this broad social agenda. Following the elections last November that swept Republicans to a majority in the House for the first time in 40 years, Reed devoted \$1 million and

urged the coalition's 1.5 million members to lobby for Republican legislative priorities on taxes, welfare and slashing federal authority.

A succession of Republican leaders took to the microphone at the coalition's news conference to assure Reed and his group that the Republicans acknowledge their debt. "We are committed to keeping our faith with the people who helped with the 'Contract With America,'" Gingrich said.

House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) said, "I feel confident, being a vote-counter, that [the coalition's agenda] is supported by the majority of the House and the Senate."

Reed portrayed his group's wish list as "mainstream" and said pollsters had determined that public support for elements of the package ranged from 60 to 90 percent. Although Reed recently proclaimed that conservative Christians would not vote for a Republican presidential candidate who supports abortion, yesterday he stressed

that his group was not making "threats" or "ultimatums."

"These proposals are the 10 suggestions, not the Ten Commandments," Reed said. "We have no intention of doing to this Congress what the unions, the feminists and the gay lobby did to Bill Clinton when he took office two years ago. They made unreasonable demands, presented an extremist agenda, and they forced this administration out of the mainstream."

He said the coalition will spend \$2 million on ads, mailings, phone banks and fax alerts to promote its platform, which will soon be available in bookstores in a mass market edition.

Gramm was the only Republican presidential candidate who appeared at the news conference, but immediately afterward the group met privately with Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.), who like Gramm has been actively courting religious conservatives.

Dole later issued a statement in which he welcomed the contract and said specifically he will work to pass the proposed "Religious Equality Amendment" aimed at redressing laws that Reed said have squelched religious expression in public places, such as placing crèches on town squares and saying prayers at public school graduations and sports events.

"It may not be fashionable inside the Beltway, but I believe that we must restore religious expression to its rightful place in our national conversation and our public life," Dole said. "We can do that without infringing on the rights of others in the

slightest.”

Among other Republican candidates, Sen. Richard G. Lugar (Ind.) and former Tennessee governor Lamar Alexander expressed support for the contract's items, but Patrick J. Buchanan and Sen. Arlen Specter (Pa.) criticized it from different ends of the political spectrum.

Specter, whose presidential candidacy is based in part on his opposition to the growing power of Christian conservatives, attacked the contract for trying to restrict abortion and for the amendment on religious liberty. He said other parts of it were a “subterfuge.”

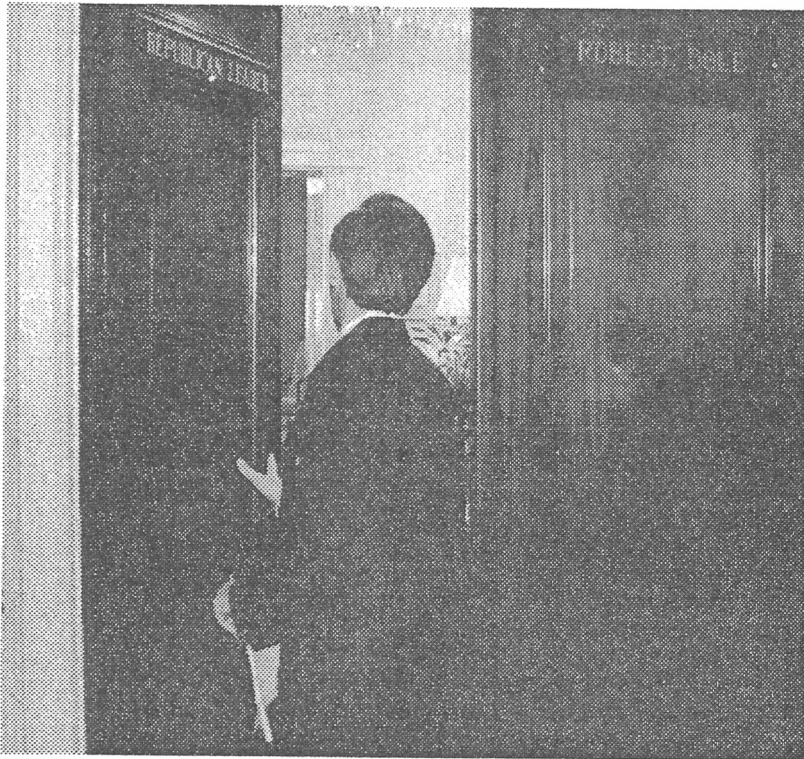
California Gov. Pete Wilson, the other abortion rights supporter in the GOP field, issued a statement through

ers, Episcopalians and members of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ and American Ethical Union.

If the religious equality amendment is passed, said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, “the result will be groups competing for spaces

and times to display religious symbols, judges evangelizing juries, military officers religiously testifying before their troops, public school teachers and supervisors organizing and leading religious activity.”

Staff writer Dan Balz contributed to this report.



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

After news conference, Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed enters the office of Senate Majority Leader Dole for a private meeting.

his chairman saying he agrees with some measures and disagrees with others, but he was not specific.

Buchanan, campaigning in Iowa, criticized the Christian Coalition for being too timid. He said the group should push for a constitutional amendment to ban abortion and hearings on when life begins.

“I think they want to cast a net as wide as possible, but they’ve lowered the hurdle so that everyone this side of Arlen Specter can jump over it,” Buchanan said.

Religious leaders who immediately spoke out against the coalition’s proposals represented United Methodists, American Baptists, Jews, Quak-

THE CHRISTIAN COALITION'S 'CONTRACT WITH THE AMERICAN FAMILY'

- Allow communal prayer in public places such as schools, high school graduation ceremonies and courthouses.
- Abolish the federal Department of Education
- Establish vouchers for parents to use to send their children to private and parochial schools.
- Establish \$500 tax credit for children; favor "in concept" flat tax; remove "marriage penalty" in tax laws; allow homemakers to contribute up to \$2,000 annually toward an Individual Retirement Account.
- Limit abortion, ban certain abortion procedures, end use of Medicaid funds for abortion; cut off federal funding to groups such as Planned Parenthood.
- Limit access to pornography on cable television and the Internet.
- Abolish federal funding for the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Legal Services Corp.
- Eventually turn over welfare programs to private charities.
- Enact a "Parental Rights Act" and reject the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Use federal funds to encourage states to require prisoners to study and work, and require restitution to victims subsequent to release.