

Activists rip GOP for ignoring values

By Ralph Z. Hallow
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Several Republican leaders have put themselves at odds with several powerful exponents of family values.

The family values champions, who represent a large portion of the Republican coalition, complain that the drive to turn the party into a big tent is leaving no room for their interpretation of moral issues.

They argue these such issues make the sharpest distinction between the two political parties.

James C. Dobson, president of the Colorado-based Focus on the Family, which claims 2 million members nationwide, led off the bashing with a blistering letter to Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour.

Mr. Dobson criticized Mr. Barbour, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole of Kansas and House Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia by name.

"More than 43 percent of your votes in November came from people who identify themselves as evangelical Christians, most of whom are decidedly pro-life," he wrote.

"You could not have won the House and Senate without them, and you know that is true," Mr. Dobson continued. "Sen. Dole and [Mr.] Gingrich understand that fact, too."

Mr. Dobson called it "political foolishness" on Mr. Barbour's part "to taunt and insult those whose support you covet."

Mr. Dobson concluded his letter with a direct appeal to the Repub-

Pro-lifers slam Dole, Gingrich

lican chairman: "I beg you, one more time, to remain true to the time-honored values that Republicans have supported for decades."

Three days later, Beverly LaHaye, president of Concerned Women for America, wrote to Mr. Barbour "to echo the strong convictions expressed by my dear friend, Dr. James Dobson."

Focusing her ire more on the press than on the party chairman, Mrs. LaHaye wrote that she was "disappointed to see the media capitalizing on the 'big tent' kind of rhetoric that you and others have used because it undermines the pro-life cause, as well as damages the Republican Party."

Also weighing in on the moral-values side was Republican activist Phyllis Schlafly, president of the Eagle Forum and head of the Republican National Coalition for Life.

"The great moral evil of abortion will serve as a political watershed for Republicans in 1996," Mrs. Schlafly wrote in a letter to Mr. Dobson, promising that "politicians who refuse to understand that do so at their political peril."

In a letter of response, Mr. Barbour told Mr. Dobson he was "surprised by your recent letter, especially its tone. . . . Being a pro-life evangelical Christian myself, . . . I have no reason" to change the party platform to exclude pro-lifers.

Mr. Barbour noted that only Republican national convention delegates have the authority to rewrite the platform.

Most moral-issues conservatives agree with Gary Bauer, the former Reagan White House domestic policy adviser who heads the Family Research Council. "I don't think the problem is Haley Barbour," he told The Washington Times.

"What has fueled Dobson's anger is a sense that the party across the board is benefiting from pro-family and pro-life voters but increasingly treats those issues as dispensable," Mr. Bauer said, noting that Mr. Dole recently said "he is for civil rights protection for homosexuals and hasn't made up his mind about homosexuals in the military."

Mr. Bauer faulted Sen. Phil Gramm, Texas Republican, for going "around the country saying that if elected president, he would not do anything about Roe vs. Wade" — the landmark Supreme Court decision that took the right to ban or regulate abortion away from the states and made abortion a constitutionally protected.

The Republican platform has called for overturning the decision, but some party leaders consider such a position no longer tenable and expect that it will not be reflected in the 1996 platform.

Mr. Bauer also faults Mr. Gingrich for "allowing about 25 pro-choice Republicans to blackmail the party leadership into dropping a modest provision [from a bill] that would merely have allowed states to follow their own laws on funding abortion."

Republican leaders, focused on

getting as much of their legislative agenda as possible enacted before the July 4 congressional recess, have paid little attention to organized Christian conservatives.

In a letter this month to the 112,000 members of the clergy on his organization's mailing list, Mr. Dobson said Mr. Barbour and "other GOP leaders intend to abandon the cause of the unborn child and ignore the moral issues that have defined the party for decades."

He accused Mr. Barbour of having been "intransigent and unsympathetic" in a personal meeting they had to attempt to iron things out.

Telling Mr. Barbour of the electoral strength the family-values constituency brought the Republican in November, Mr. Dobson wrote: "Nevertheless, you are prepared to disregard the concerns that brought these men and women to the polls and rewrite the party platform to exclude them. Is that not exceedingly arrogant?"

The need to reform government, although important, was secondary in bringing out the vote in November, Mr. Dobson said in an interview. "The concern that motivates [Christian voters] is the moral decline of this country, and they voted for the GOP because they believed its leaders understood that fact."

Mr. Bauer says the values coalition is particularly alarmed that "almost every major competitor for the [GOP presidential] nomination, from [former Tennessee Gov.] Lamar Alexander on, is saying he's pro-life but also saying it should be a state issue."