

Christian Coalition wants focus on morals

By JIM DRINKARD
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Barely seven weeks before what its leaders call "the most important election of our lifetime," the Christian Coalition cautioned GOP nominee Bob Dole yesterday not to let moral issues get lost in his tax- and budget-cutting message.

"We recognize this campaign, to a very great extent, needs to be about cutting taxes and balancing the budget," coalition director Ralph Reed told nearly 4,000 conservative Christians at the group's annual "Road to Victory" conference.

"But, my friends, man does not live by bread alone. . . . We are not, in the end, measured as a nation by our gross national product or by the Dow Jones industrial average. We are not measured by our checkbook balance. We are measured by the moral fiber of our people and by the integrity of our leaders," he said.

Reed attacked President Clinton about a rise in drug use among young people and his veto of a bill banning a late-term abortion procedure.

Criticism of Clinton was common at the conference. William Bennett, who was education secretary during the Reagan administration, said of Clinton, "I think he is a man who has difficulty with the truth. And I think we should be able to talk about that."

Reed also had a word of caution for Republicans, whose presidential nominee declined an invitation to address the gathering.

"To the Republican Party we say this: If you want to retain control of the House and Senate and you want to have any chance at all of gaining the White House, you had better not retreat from the pro-life and pro-family stands that made you a majority party in the first place," he said.

Some of those attending voiced impatience with what they viewed as Dole's soft-peddling of moral issues.

"I think it's important that the character issue be brought out in this fall's campaign, and I think the top of the ticket should be doing a little more on that," said Andy Williams, a lawyer from Greenville, S.C.

The welcome was barely lukewarm yesterday for Reform Party presiden-



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Ralph Reed, director of the Christian Coalition, spoke yesterday during the group's annual convention in Washington. Saying "man does not live by bread alone," Reed asked the Republican Party not to let economic issues overshadow those of morality.

tial candidate Ross Perot, whose support for abortion rights puts him at odds with the coalition on its top-priority issue. Perot got applause when he said "the strong family unit is the most efficient unit of government."

While Dole was notable for his absence, the lineup of speakers for the

weekend conference included major Republican and conservative figures from Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., to unsuccessful GOP presidential candidate Pat Buchanan and coalition founder Pat Robertson. Republican vice presidential nominee Jack Kemp is to speak today.