

GOP can't avoid abortion debate

By Judy Keen
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The Republican Party, which vows before each presidential election to avoid it, is engulfed in an abortion fight that threatens to rage through August's convention.

In the past week, conservative outrage over hints of changes in the abortion plank has grown. And Sen. Bob Dole has sent contradictory signals about his intentions.

Still, Scott Reed, campaign manager for de facto GOP nominee Dole, said Sunday that he's "not at all" worried.

He said it's healthy to debate openly before the convention. "This is where we need to be."

The latest powerful figure to weigh in is Ralph Reed, execu-



By Matt Mendelsohn, USA TODAY

Ralph Reed: Would accept only minor changes in abortion plank

tive director of the 1.6 million-member Christian Coalition.

Reed said this weekend that he opposes platform changes allowing abortions in cases of

rape or incest. The platform, the official statement of the party's beliefs, now calls for a constitutional amendment banning all abortions.

"The only thing we would allow is a nonsubstantive, minor language change that would not affect principle," he said.

In a new book, *Active Faith*, Reed writes that votes can't now be found in Congress "for the ultimate goal of the pro-life movement, a constitutional amendment." He calls instead for the appointment of judges who oppose abortion and efforts to eliminate state tax subsidies for abortions.

Bay Buchanan, who manages the presidential campaign of her brother, Pat Buchanan, accused Reed of "sending up the white flag of surrender."

Dole has said that he believes the anti-abortion platform should remain. But he has not indicated whether he would accept some changes in the plank's wording.

Dole's choice to chair the platform committee, Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., said he won't retreat from the plank.

Yet Dole also signed off on naming New Jersey Gov. Christie Whitman as one of the convention's chairs.

She, like New York Gov. George Pataki and California Gov. Pete Wilson, has vowed to fight to delete the call for a constitutional amendment.

Meanwhile, Pat Buchanan and other conservative and evangelical leaders have threatened a revolt at the convention if there's any attempt

to change the platform.

Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour called for a truce Sunday. "It doesn't do any good to say bad things about each other," he said on *Fox News Sunday*.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., said Sunday that the debate should be postponed.

"We are ... a right-to-life party but with a very big pro-choice wing," Gingrich said on CBS's *Face the Nation*. "During the platform week they ought to find the widest possible way to bring people together."

But Scott Reed said differing views are "not a problem. Bob Dole has a 35-year record. He's 100% pro-life. The platform will reflect his beliefs."