

NATION

Hodel to head Christian Coalition

Initially spurned
Robertson offer

By Ralph Z. Hallow
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Former Interior Secretary Donald P. Hodel, popular with religious conservatives and a major fund-raiser for GOP candidates, will become president of the Christian Coalition on Monday.

Mr. Hodel, 62, will succeed coalition founder Pat Robertson, who will become board chairman of the 2.8-million-member organization, Mr. Robertson and Ralph Reed, the Coalition's executive director, announced yesterday.

Mr. Hodel, who served as Reagan administration energy secretary from 1982 to 1985 and then as interior secretary from 1985 to 1989, had been confidentially approached earlier and turned down the offer.

At a news conference in a room in the Capitol provided by Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Mr. Robertson and Mr. Reed introduced Mr. Hodel and former Rep. Randy Tate, 31, Washington Republican, who will take over as executive director on Monday.

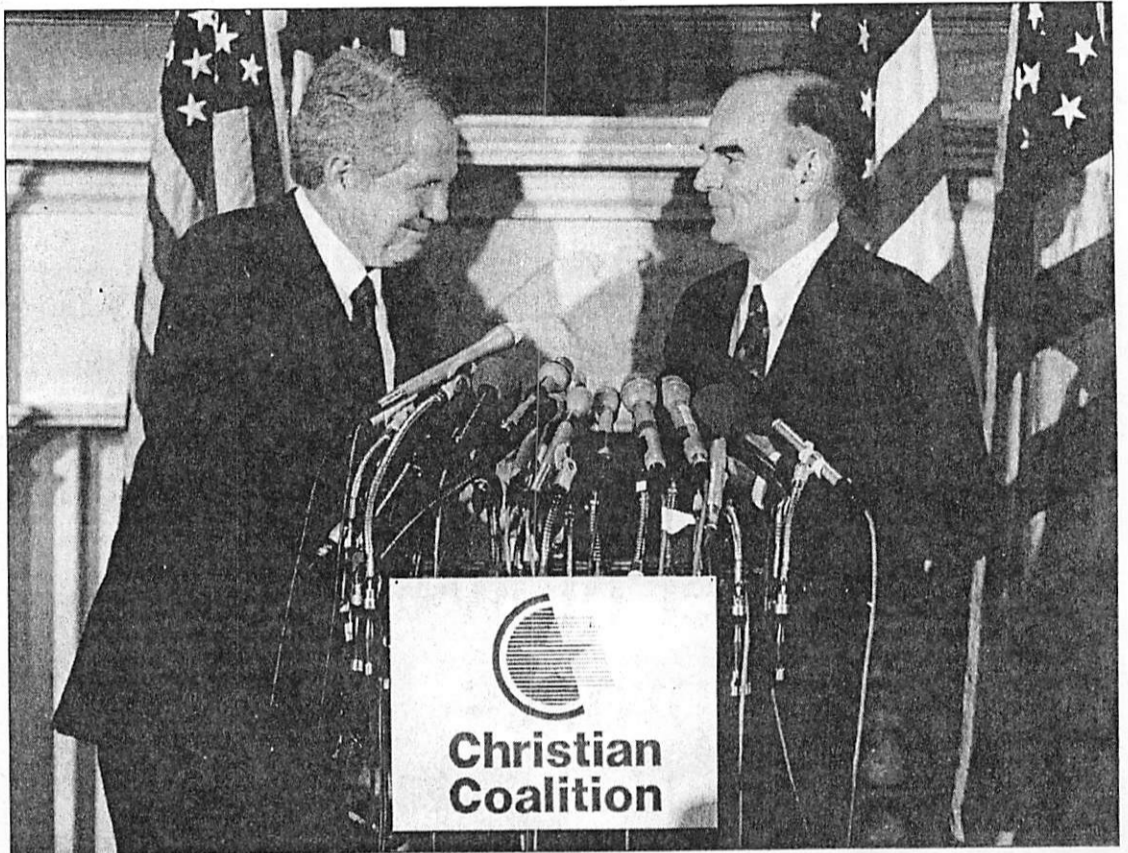
The Coalition realized it was unlikely to find in one person the top management and grass-roots expertise of the departing Mr. Reed and that two persons would be needed to replace him.

If one were as senior as Mr. Hodel, his title would have to be weightier than executive director. The solution was for Mr. Robertson to free up the president's post.

Few ideological opponents of the Coalition took official notice of the changes yesterday. However, Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said he expects "more extremism, gutter politics and partisanship from a tax-exempt, supposedly nonpartisan group."

News of the appointment of Mr. Tate circulated without the official acknowledgment of the Coalition on Tuesday.

Sen. Dan Coats, Indiana Republican, and former Sen. William Armstrong, Colorado Republican, had been top choices to succeed Mr. Reed, but Mr. Coats told the Coalition it would have to wait six months for his decision.



Photos by Kenneth Lambert/The Washington Times

Christian Coalition President Pat Robertson (left) introduces his successor, Donald P. Hodel, yesterday.



Randy Tate (left) and Ralph Reed, whom he replaces as executive director, attend a Hill press conference.

Mr. Armstrong, already a board member of another Robertson enterprise, recommended Mr. Hodel, who had turned down the search committee. Mr. Reed asked him to change his mind.

Then, two weeks ago, Mr. Hodel flew to Hot Springs, Va., for a weekend of talks with Mr. Robertson and his wife and Mr. Reed. The following Monday, he relented and said he would take the post.

"I am here today because I believe that the moral and cultural problems we face as a nation are as real a threat to the promise of America as any we have ever

faced," Mr. Hodel said yesterday.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich roundly endorsed both appointments in a statement released at the news conference.

"Today's announcement is like a baseball team that just lost Cal Ripken announcing that it picked up Ken Griffey Jr. and Barry Bonds to take his place," he said.

Describing Mr. Tate and Mr. Hodel as "politically astute, media savvy and experienced in the management of large organizations," he said he couldn't think of a better team.

Many of the senior GOP legislators Mr. Hodel will be dealing with have benefited from his fund raising. "When he was interior secretary, he was tireless in going around the county raising money for [GOP] candidates," said Charlie Black, consultant to several GOP presidential campaigns.

"He is a guy of high prestige who would appeal to Robertson as somebody who is mature, can mind the store and oversee the operation," said Donald J. Devine, who served with Mr. Hodel in the first Reagan term as head of Office of Personnel Management.