

# Religious right set for major impact

## Reed says group is 1/4 of electorate

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COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

Drawing parallels with the civil rights movement, Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed predicted yesterday that religious conservatives will use their numbers to dramatically influence American politics.

In a speech at the National Press Club, Mr. Reed said religious conservatives make up a voting bloc as large as one-fourth of the electorate — a powerful constituency that deserves a bigger political voice on Capitol Hill.

The religious right — united by faith and energized by controversial issues like abortion, homosexual rights and privatizing public schools — could help propel Republicans to major victories in the November elections and be an even greater force in 1996.

Over the next few weeks, the Christian Coalition plans to send out 33 million voter guides across the country to mobilize voters on issues important to conservatives. The guides will not endorse specific candidates, however.

"Religious values are not a threat to democracy. They are essential to democracy," Mr. Reed said in an address that frequently touched on the religious aspects of the civil rights struggle and how it compares to the emergence of the Christian right today.

"Even as the American people are yearning for a return to their spiritual roots, a strange hostility greets those who bring their religious beliefs into the public square," he said.

Mr. Reed's remarks pinpoint the difficulty the coalition may have playing a larger role in the political arena without compromising its core beliefs or forcing candidates to adhere to strict religious litmus tests.

"His life must be our model," said Mr. Reed, who believes the Bible is the "infallible word of God."

"We must not seek to dominate, but to participate. Our goal must not be power, but protection of our homes, of our families and of the



Ralph Reed says the Christian Coalition has power in numbers.

liberty we all cherish," he said. But he insisted politicians should be judged by their records rather than whether they believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Although he said the coalition is nonpartisan, Mr. Reed proclaimed his support for such Republican themes as a balanced-budget amendment, term limits and less government.

And he blasted liberal Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, Massachusetts Democrat, for questioning GOP challenger Mitt Romney's position in the Mormon church, which for years denied minorities and still denies women the priesthood. Mr. Reed said it was "utterly ironic" that a Kennedy would use such a tack considering President John F. Kennedy, a Catholic, had to contend with religious bigotry in his 1960 election campaign.

He also noted that the media, when reporting on religious conservatives, focus more on their opposition to abortion and homosexual rights instead of their charitable work with the poor.

"If you want to understand our movement, you must not simply cover our political activity or our political organizations. You must go into our churches, into our synagogues and into our homes," Mr. Reed said.

He urged the nation not to view the movement by the actions of the "disturbed and demented" who kill abortion doctors, or Christian leaders who substitute the language of extremism over good taste, like those who put out posters during the 1992 presidential campaign that read "To Vote for Bill Clinton Is to Sin Against God."

He said these people are as representative of the Christian right as the "terrorism" of the Black Panthers was to the mainstream civil rights movement.

"We are no different than any other social movement," Mr. Reed said. "We have elements that do not speak for us, nor we for them."