

Ralph Reed Launches New Group to Target 'Values Voters'

✖ Former Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed has launched a new political organization that will use the Internet to mobilize a new generation of socially conservative voters, *U.S. News & World Report* God & Country blogger Dan Gilgoff reported.

Reed's Faith and Freedom Coalition will target both faith-based groups that have long supported the GOP as well as Democratic-leaning constituencies, including African-Americans, Hispanics, young adults and women.

"This is not your daddy's Christian Coalition," Reed told Gilgoff Monday. "It's got to be more brown, more black, more female and younger. It's critical that we open the door wide and let them know if they share our values and believe in the principles of faith and marriage and family, they're welcome."

"There's a whole rising generation of young leaders in the faith community, and rather than nab the publicity I did at Christian Coalition, I want to cultivate and train that rising generation," Reed added. "One question is, who is our future Barack Obama, doing local organizing just like he was in the 1990s?"

Reed said the coalition has been active for a few weeks and plans to have state and local chapters, as well as "virtual chapters" that would operate online with the help of social networking technology. "The Internet's first wave was e-mail, and the next wave was social networking, which Obama perfected," Reed said. "There's going to be a third wave, which we're still developing."

Reed said the idea for the organization was born on Election Day, when Democrats made inroads among religious voters who

typically support Republicans. He told *U.S. News* that the coalition plans to be active in the 2010 midterm elections but building the organization would take several years.

"We'll want people deployed in the field for key districts and states for 2010," he said. "But I don't think we'll be where we'll end up five years from now."

The organization is headquartered near Atlanta, in the offices of Reed's consulting firm, but there are plans to open an office in Washington, D.C. The staff will remain small, with former top Republican National Committee staffer Jack St. Martin running day-to-day operations. Gary Marx, who led Mitt Romney's conservative outreach in 2008, will help advise the group.

Reed is serving as chairman of the coalition and registering it as a 501(c)(4), a tax-free designation that allows lobbying and certain political activities, Gilgoff reported.

Since he left the Christian Coalition in 1997, Reed has served as a consultant to George W. Bush's 2000 and 2004 presidential campaigns, mobilizing "values voters" to support the Republican candidate. He pursued his own political ambitions in 2006 when he ran for Georgia's lieutenant governor.

He lost the Republican primary that year, possibly because of his close ties to lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who in March 2006 was sentenced to five years and 10 months in prison after pleading guilty to fraud, tax evasion and conspiracy to bribe public officials. Reed was never charged with wrongdoing.