

US political notes: Pat Robertson favors assassinations, Congress promotes religion in schools

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Pat Robertson calls for assassinations

Religious broadcaster and Christian Coalition President Pat Robertson called for lifting the executive order which bans the use of assassination as an instrument of US government policy, in remarks Monday during the taping of his "700 Club" television program.

"I know it sounds somewhat Machiavellian and evil, to think that you could send a squad in to take out somebody like Osama bin Laden, or to take out the head of North Korea," Robertson said. Expanding the list of targets, he added, "But isn't it better to do something like that, to take out Milosevic, to take out Saddam Hussein, rather than to spend billions of dollars on a war that harms innocent civilians and destroys the infrastructure of a country?"

There was little reporting or commentary on Robertson's statement in the press. Neither of the announced Democratic presidential candidates made an issue of it. No Republican candidates felt it necessary to disavow Robertson's view, although the broadcaster and millionaire is a prominent Republican and mounted a significant campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988. On the contrary, nearly all the Republican presidential hopefuls are vying for the backing of the Christian Coalition in the 2000 campaign.

It is easy to imagine, however, the outcry in the American media if an equally prominent public figure in, say, China, had called for unleashing that country's intelligence apparatus to "take out" the political opponents of Beijing.

Republican payoff to David Duke

Louisiana Governor Mike Foster has agreed to pay a

\$10,000 fine for concealing a huge payoff to former KKK leader David Duke. The fine will be imposed by a state ethics panel which meets August 19 to formalize an agreement with Foster's attorneys. Foster will admit violating campaign finance rules but deny any intentional wrongdoing.

During the 1995 state gubernatorial election in which Foster was the Republican candidate, he paid \$152,000 to Duke, funneling some of the cash through Foster's own construction company. While the cash was ostensibly provided to obtain Duke's mailing list of contributors from his earlier statewide campaigns as a Republican candidate for US Senate and for governor, the price was grossly inflated. The real purpose was to give Duke a financial incentive to stay out of the 1995 election campaign. Duke ultimately chose not to run, either as a Republican or an independent, and endorsed Foster in the general election.

Senator joins US Taxpayers Party

One month after he quit the race for the Republican presidential nomination, US Senator Robert Smith of New Hampshire announced August 10 he had joined the extreme-right U.S. Taxpayers Party and would seek to run as its presidential candidate. Smith said that he would center his campaign on the banning of abortion, prayer in the schools, opposition to gun control and US withdrawal from trade agreements like NAFTA and international institutions like the World Trade Organization.

Smith is expected to win the U.S. Taxpayers Party nomination at its convention next month, where the party may change its ballot name to the Conservative Party. The party's 1996 candidate, Howard Phillips, was on the ballot in 39 states and won 180,000 votes.

Smith said he would appeal to conservatives who felt that the Republican Party had abandoned right-wing social issues.

House passes bills to boost religion

The House of Representatives has passed a series of bills in recent weeks to promote religion in the public schools, in open defiance of the constitutional separation of church and state. Most significant was the passage of the so-called Religious Liberty Act, barring government interference with the individual practice of religion in publicly funded facilities such as schools and colleges.

This bill was adopted by a margin of 306-118, as dozens of Democrats and liberals joined with the Republican majority. The bill was promoted by fundamentalist groups who claim that school authorities have violated the rights of Christian students seeking to practice their religion on school property, through prayers at assemblies, graduations and other ceremonies. Such charges are worse than preposterous in a country as saturated with religious hokum as the America of 1999.

Other bills passed by the House would permit states to display the Ten Commandments in public schools and allow religious groups to receive federal funds for counseling teenagers and to participate in other federally-backed social programs. Introduced into Congress but not yet voted on are constitutional amendments to overturn the Supreme Court decision banning organized prayer in the schools and to allow government funds to be used to support parochial and other religious schools.



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