

Pat Robertson, Who Gave Christian Conservatives Clout, Dies at 93

A Baptist minister and a broadcaster, he turned Christian conservatives into a powerful constituency that helped Republicans capture Congress in 1994.

By Douglas Martin

June 8, 2023 Updated 8:39 a.m. ET

Pat Robertson, a Baptist minister with a passion for politics who marshaled Christian conservatives into a powerful constituency that helped Republicans capture both houses of Congress in 1994, died on Thursday at his home in Virginia Beach, Va. He was 93.

His death was announced by the Christian Broadcasting Network, which Mr. Robertson founded in 1960.

Mr. Robertson built an entrepreneurial empire based on his Christian faith, encompassing a university, a law school, a cable channel with broad reach, and more. A product of a family with politics in its veins, he waged a serious though unsuccessful campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988 in which he resigned as a Baptist minister in the face of criticism about mixing church and state.

The loss did not dampen his political fervor; he went on to found the Christian Coalition, which stoked the conservative faith-based political resurgence of the 1990s and beyond.

Whether in the pulpit, on the stump or in front of a television camera, Mr. Robertson could exhibit the mild manner of a friendly local minister, chuckling softly and displaying an almost perpetual twinkle in his eye. But he was also given to statements that his detractors saw as outlandishly wrongheaded and dangerously incendiary.

He suggested, for example, that Americans' sinfulness had brought on the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States, and that the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010 was divine retribution for a promise that Haitians had made to serve the Devil in return for his help in securing the country's independence from France in 1804.

He said that liberal Protestants embodied "the spirit of the Antichrist" and that feminism drove women to witchcraft. He called for the assassination of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. He maintained that his prayers had averted hurricanes.

In December 2020, amid intensifying efforts by President Donald J. Trump and his supporters to overturn the November election, Mr. Robertson told viewers of his television show, "The 700 Club," that a lawsuit filed by the Texas attorney general challenging results in four states was a "miracle."

"They're going to the Supreme Court to say, 'This election was rigged and you've got to overturn it,'" Mr. Robertson said, citing unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud. He declared that "God himself" would intervene.

Barely two weeks later, he changed course. "The president still lives in an alternate reality," he said, adding: "I think it would be well to say, 'You've had your day and it's time to move on.'"

A complete obituary will appear shortly.