

October 21, 2004

## Robertson Says Bush Predicted No Iraq Toll

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

**T**he evangelical broadcaster Pat Robertson has set off a partisan fight by telling a television interviewer that [President Bush](#) serenely assured him just before the invasion of Iraq, "Oh, no, we're not going to have any casualties."

Mr. Robertson, offering that account in an interview televised Tuesday night on CNN, said Mr. Bush made the comment when they met in Nashville in early 2003. At that meeting, he said, he warned the president to prepare the public for casualties.

Mr. Robertson, a former marine who ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988, said that he had had "deep misgivings" about the war. But, he said, closely paraphrasing Mark Twain, the president looked "like a contented Christian with four aces."

"I mean, he was just sitting there like 'I am on top of the world,' " Mr. Robertson said.

"The Lord told me it was going to be a), a disaster, and b), messy," he continued, adding that he wished Mr. Bush would acknowledge his mistake.

As the White House disputed Mr. Robertson's recollection, Democrats pounced yesterday on the chance to make Mr. Bush contradict a prominent supporter.

"Is Pat Robertson telling the truth when he said you didn't think there'd be any casualties, or is Pat Robertson lying?" Mike McCurry, a spokesman for [Senator John Kerry](#), asked at a campaign stop in Waterloo, Iowa.

"I think given the prominence of Reverend Robertson's remarks today, it would be important for the president to indicate whether in fact he told Pat Robertson that he didn't believe there'd be casualties in Iraq," Mr. McCurry said.

White House officials denied that Mr. Bush had ever uttered the remark. Karl Rove, Karen Hughes and Scott McClellan all told reporters in Eau Claire, Wis., that Mr. Robertson was mistaken.

"Of course the president never made such a comment," said Mr. McClellan, the White House press secretary. "The president both publicly and privately was preparing the American people for the possibility of a military conflict and the possibility that sacrifices may be necessary."

Mr. Rove, the president's chief political adviser, said he had attended the Nashville meeting and had not heard such a remark. "I was right there," Mr. Rove said.

Sometime political and theological allies of Mr. Robertson quickly dismissed his account.

"I think he speaks for an ever diminishing group of evangelicals on most issues," said Dr. Richard Land, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Mr. Robertson, who has frequently recounted what he says God has told him on matters of public interest, is out of step with most evangelicals in his doubts about the war, Dr. Land said.

In the CNN interview, Mr. Robertson reversed himself on one prophecy. On his "700 Club" television program in January, he declared that Mr. Bush would win re-election "in a walk," and added, "I really believe I'm hearing from the Lord it's going to be a blowout election in 2004."

On Tuesday, however, he conceded, "I thought it was going to be a blowout, but I think it's razor thin now."

Still, he said, he believes that Mr. Bush will win in the Electoral College.

Pollsters say Mr. Robertson's views of the war are a mirror of a growing skepticism among evangelical Protestants about the invasion of Iraq, though they still support both the invasion and the president much more strongly than do other groups.

In a New York Times/CBS News poll conducted in mid-September - after the conventions but before the debates - a majority of evangelical Protestants said they thought Mr. Bush was not being entirely honest about the way things were going in Iraq: 48 percent said Mr. Bush was mostly telling the truth but hiding something, and an additional 15 percent said he was lying. Only 34 percent said he was telling the entire truth.

Still, in a Pew Research poll released yesterday, 67 percent of white evangelicals said the United States had made the right decision in using force in Iraq, as against only 24 percent who said the decision had been wrong and 10 percent who did not know or declined to answer. Seventy percent said they planned to vote for Mr. Bush, and 22 percent for Mr. Kerry.

*Jodi Wilgoren contributed reporting from Waterloo, Iowa, for this article, and Elisabeth Bumiller from Eau Claire, Wis.*

[Copyright 2004 The New York Times Company](#) | [Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Back to Top](#)