

# Dobson leaves leadership role at Focus

**Anti-gay leader will keep radio show, speaking appearances**

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

It could be the end of an era, as evangelical leader James Dobson leaves his post at the anti-gay Focus on the Family.

On Friday, Feb. 27, the Colorado Springs, Colo.-based fundamentalist group announced Dobson's resignation in a monthly worship service for their 950 employees.

Dobson, 72, will step down as chairman of the Focus on the Family board, but will remain as host of group's popular radio show. He'll also write a monthly newsletter and be available for speaking opportunities, according to Jim Daly, Focus president and chief executive officer.

The resignation is the latest in a series of events in a succession plan that began more than six years ago when Dobson stepped down as president and CEO. Dobson's wife, Shirley, will also step down from her post on Focus on the Family's board of directors.

"One of the common errors of founder-presidents is to hold to the reins of leadership too long, thereby preventing the next generation from being prepared for executive authority," Dobson said in a statement, published by The AP. "...

Though letting go is difficult after three decades of intensive labor, it is the wise thing to do."

LGBT leaders and activists were quick to praise Dobson's departure.

"James Dobson's legacy of lies has caused significant pain for gay and lesbian people and their families," said author and syndicated columnist Wayne Besen, executive director of Truth Wins Out. "We hope his departure will eventually signal a shift in tone and end Focus on the Family's destructive attacks against gay and lesbian Americans."

Neil Giuliano, president of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, said it is "important to remember [Dobson's] history of false and defamatory claims about our community."

He added, "For more than 20 years, James Dobson has used his expansive, well-funded media platform to promote defamatory and false information about the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people."

Giuliano urged the media to "not allow Dobson to turn [the news of his departure] into yet another media platform for him to advance his intolerant divisive attacks on gay and lesbian Americans and their families."

Besen said it is time for Focus on the Family to abandon their anti-gay programs,

including the "ex-gay" Love Won Out conference, which recently stopped in Charlotte for a one-day event (see story on page 7).

In a humorous response to the news, Durham, N.C.-based blogger Pam Spaulding posted a YouTube video of the one-hit wonder band, Steam, singing the 1969 hit "Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye."

"The old man who has spent his adult life trying to turn the U.S. into a theocracy is finally throwing in the towel," she wrote. "I guess after blowing the coffers on Prop 8 and having to lay off staff, it's time to exit. It's just a part of the 'succession plan' they say."

Progressive leader, Rev. Barry W. Lynn of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, said he doubted Dobson's resignation would "make much of a difference in the day-to-day operations of that organization."

"For years, FOF has been the leading voice of religious extremism and intolerance in America. It has led the attack on the legal rights of gay and lesbian Americans, worked assiduously to undermine reproductive rights, assaulted the religious neutrality of public schools and labored to replace science with far-right, fundamentalist dogma," Lynn said. "Despite my differences with him, if Dobson were truly retiring, I would wish him well. But I

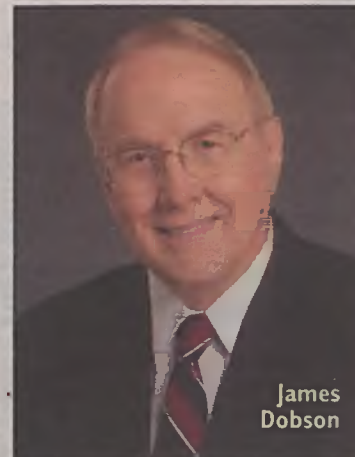
know that Dobson and so many other leaders of the Religious Right intend to remain active, working to force their exclusionary worldview onto the rest of us."

Lynn said that Focus on the Family "is merely rearranging the deck chairs on its big, intolerant ship."

Dobson's departure comes at a time when Focus on the Family finds itself at a crossroads. According to The AP, Focus on the Family officials have admitted the group is facing difficulty raising money and support from young families, a key constituency if Focus is to remain active and solvent. Just last fall, Focus on the Family laid off 200 employees, the group's largest employee cutback ever.

Retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Patrick P. Caruana, a longtime Focus board member and a former executive

with defense contractor Northrup Grumman, will replace Dobson as chairman of the board. "I don't see any dramatic departure from what Focus stands for," Caruana told The AP of Dobson's leaving the board. "There are obviously younger people the ministry would like to reach, and we're on track to do that."



James Dobson

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