

For GOP evangelicals, Bachmann talks the talk

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [June 28, 2011](#) issue

Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour warned several hundred Christian conservatives gathered in Washington recently not to expect a "perfect candidate" to emerge from the field of Republican presidential contenders. "There's only been one perfect person that ever walked on this earth," Barbour said, sounding as much like a preacher as a politician. "And there ain't gonna be another one in this election."

None

of the half dozen or so rivals for the GOP nomination who addressed the June 3-4 Faith and Freedom Coalition conference walked on water, of course. But for many of the fiscal and social conservatives assembled by Ralph Reed's new group, one candidate seemed to rise above the rest.

"I

am here to support Michele Bachmann," said Phil Dacosta, a 42-year-old Southern Baptist from Atlanta. "I don't care about anyone else."

Dacosta

called himself heartbroken that former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee won't run for president this year. As Huckabee's campaign coordinator in Georgia, Dacosta helped the former governor win his state's GOP primary in 2008, one of eight states Huckabee took that year with strong support from conservative Christians.

But with Huckabee out,

Dacosta said he's confident that fellow evangelicals will turn their eyes and organizing power to Bachmann, a three-term congresswoman from Minnesota. "She comes from us, not to us," said Dacosta, an industrial engineer and passionate political activist. "She speaks our code, and we believe her."

Dacosta was hardly the only Bachmann believer at the Faith and Freedom Coalition meeting. A Tea Party favorite who is also popular among conservative Christians, the Minnesota congresswoman is expected to announce her political intentions later in June in her native state of Iowa.

The Washington gathering also signaled continuing difficulty in putative front-runner Mitt Romney's quest to engage conservative Christians.

Harold White, a 62-year-old former train conductor who lives in Marietta, Georgia, said negative stories about Romney's Mormon faith have been making the rounds on his local Tea Party listserv. "We are moving away from Romney and Huntsman," said White, referring to former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, who is also Mormon. "Their Mormon beliefs are just so different from Christianity."

Bachmann, on the other hand, seems poised to make a strong run among Christian conservatives, who constitute a quarter of the general electorate and an even greater percentage of GOP primary voters. At an April gathering at the late Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, Bachmann won the straw poll with 23 percent of the vote, besting even Huckabee, a former Southern Baptist pastor.

Addressing the crowd on June 3, Bachmann drew several loud ovations as she recounted her efforts to ban gay marriage in Minnesota, repeal the new health care law and defund Planned Parenthood.

She also denounced President Obama's "shocking" policy toward Israel and described her family's struggle to homeschool her five biological children and raise 23 foster children. Finally, Bachmann lowered her head and led the crowd in a two-minute prayer, including a supplication that "Father God, we want all men to come to know you."

Asked why he attended the Washington gathering, Bruce Nave, a politically active industrial contractor from Phoenix, said,

"Michele pretty much summed it up."

"She is talking about our issues," said Nave, 58. "Our government is getting out of control, and we are not going to be silent anymore."

Like many at the Washington gathering, Nave described himself as both an ardent evangelical and proud Tea Party member. The Faith and Freedom Coalition, founded by veteran GOP activist Ralph Reed, represents the "perfect synergy" of the two conservative and politically active groups, Nave said.

Reed said on June 3 that his group aims to train volunteers to reach 17 million evangelical voters who were not registered or did not vote in 2008.

"We are going to teach you some basic fundamentals," he said, "so you can go back to your states and communities not only [to] be able to execute these plays and run this system, but also execute the biggest victory ever seen in American history."

Aileen Milton, 59, said Reed delivered a presentation earlier this year about his fledgling group to her Tea Party cohort in The Villages, a sprawling retirement community in Florida.

Wearing a button advocating "fair taxes" in Florida, Milton said she cares deeply about issues like abortion but is more concerned with the economy and with defeating Obama in 2012. "The country is moving in the wrong direction," she said, "It is becoming socialist." —RNS