

Concerns Foley Inquiry May Turn Into Gay Witch Hunt

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by 365Gay.com Newscenter Staff

(Washington) LGBT leaders on Thursday expressed concerns that the inquiry into former Rep. Mark Foley's email exchanges with former congressional pages could lose sight of the issues and lead to scapegoating gays.

In an open letter to Speaker Dennis Hastert following his news conference Thursday afternoon, Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese reminded Hastert that if "we are ever going to restore the American people's faith in government and in our elected officials, it falls to you to ensure that this process not be hijacked by anti-gay partisans more interested in their own selfish agendas than doing what is right for our country."

Hastert (pictured) said he takes full responsibility for the inaction of the House to protect the pages. Shortly before Hastert made the announcement the House Ethics Committee held a closed door session.

The committee, which is made up of equal members of the GOP and Democrats, later emerged to say that it had formally begun its investigation and would be issuing subpoenas.

"Gay Americans have watched this scandal unfold like everyone else, but unlike other Americans, we have found ourselves targeted once again by extremists in the Republican Party trying to shift responsibility. Members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community are part of the fabric of our country and to demonize them in the name of politics is disgraceful," Solmonese said in his letter to Hastert.

"Mr. Speaker, when extremists in your party go on national television and assert claims that a person's sexual orientation is responsible for immoral and inappropriate conduct, it sends a clear signal to the American people that they are more interested in pushing their anti-gay agenda than they are in holding our elected officials accountable."

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman also called for the GOP stop targeting gays in the inquiry and stay on the issue of abuse of power.

"The GOP has only one response when it's in trouble — 'blame the gays,'" said Foreman in a statement.

"First, they floated the excuse that past complaints about Foley weren't pursued because Republicans didn't want to look like they were 'gay bashing.' Then, they dispatched henchmen like Tony Perkins and Pat Buchanan to offer the blood libel that gay men are prone to pedophilia. Now — in another signal of desperation — it is clear they plan to poison the debate further with allusions to a shadowy network of closeted gay Republicans who closed ranks to protect Foley," said Foreman.

"The parallels to McCarthyism are chilling. Here it is gays, not communists, 'operating at the highest levels of government.'

“There is no doubt that allegations of Foley’s misconduct were brought directly to the attention of the Republican leadership of the House. They chose to look the other way. They alone are to blame.”

And Foreman had a warning for Democrats.

“While many Democrats may be taking real pleasure in watching the GOP twist and turn, it’s long past time for them — and other leaders — to denounce these shameful, gay-baiting, responsibility-evading tactics.”

Meanwhile, the scandal widened on Thursday when another former page also said he had received sexual emails from Foley. Tyson Vivyan, now 26, told Associated Press he received sexually suggestive computer messages in 1997, years before the communications exposed last week, from an anonymous sender who turned out to be Foley.