



Gay Groups React to Foley Scandal

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by Peter Cassels
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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Several national gay organizations have reacted to the controversy over the Sept. 29 resignation of Congressman Mark Foley, R-Fla., following revelations that he sent inappropriate e-mails and instant messages to male congressional pages.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on Oct. 3 issued a statement criticizing some Republicans for inferring that Foley's sexual orientation--his attorney has acknowledged for the first time that his client is gay--is to blame for the scandal.

"Given similar past sordid situations in the page program perpetrated by male members of Congress against female pages, it's absurd to blame the Foley spectacle on his being gay, closeted or otherwise," NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman said. "Given the fact that the current Republican leadership in the House has never hesitated to attack gay people, it's even more absurd for people like Newt Gingrich to say the reason they didn't take prompt action was because they didn't want to be accused of 'gay bashing.' Cut me a break.

"What's clear is that the House leadership elevated holding onto a seat above the interests of young people in the page system. And they want to talk about 'moral values'? Please."

The NGLTF statement referred to an Oct. 1 interview with former House Speaker Newt Gingrich on Fox News Sunday with Chris Wallace. Asked why top Republican House leaders said nothing despite knowing for months that Congressman Foley had sent inappropriate e-mails to at least one teenage page, Gingrich replied, "I think, had they overly aggressively reacted to the initial round, they would have also been accused of gay bashing."

Quoted in an Oct. 3 story on CNSNews.com, the head of the ultra-conservative organization Family Research Council also referred to Foley's alleged sexual orientation. President Tony Perkins said, "[The House GOP leadership] discounted or downplayed earlier reports concerning Foley's behavior-probably because they did not want to appear 'homophobic.' The Foley scandal shows what happens when political correctness is put ahead of protecting children."

In statements, the Human Rights Campaign and the Log Cabin Republicans, the organization of gay party members, condemned Foley for his conduct.

"Gay or straight, Democrat or Republican, it is completely inexcusable for an adult to have this kind of communication with a minor," HRC President Joe Solmonese said in a statement provided to EDGE. "Congressman Foley brought shame on himself and this Congress by his horrible behavior and complete lack of judgment. We strongly condemn his behavior."

In a further statement issued late on the afternoon of Oct. 3, Solmonese also said, "If the Republican leadership cared about the well-being of our country they would level with the American people and call this what it is, inexcusable behavior that has nothing to do with one's

sexual orientation."

On Oct. 2, Log Cabin Executive Vice-President Patrick Sammon called for investigations of Foley. "Mark Foley's shameful actions were reprehensible," Sammon's statement said. "He abused the power of his office, violated the trust of the voters, and exploited young people.

"There should be a thorough criminal investigation by appropriate law enforcement agencies. If Mark Foley broke the law, he should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

"Additionally, there should be a full investigation to see if Congressional leaders responded appropriately to Foley's behavior. This unfortunate and inappropriate situation shouldn't be unduly politicized.

"Preying on young people is shameful, immoral, unethical and illegal, regardless of sexual orientation."

The National Stonewall Democrats, the organization of gay party members, accused the House Republican leadership of dragging their heels on investigating Foley. "They certainly are not leading on it," spokesperson John Marble told EDGE. "They don't seem to be in a hurry to learn what's going on or to protect the children under its care in the page system. I would say that any appropriate investigation should be taken. Whether or not it's criminal, the House leadership should be investigating it as well."