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## Congress can't be trusted to protect pages

BY MARK VINCENT SERRANO

**M**ark Foley is not the only one who should be punished for his predatory behavior in targeting teenagers with sexuality explicit conversations online.

While Foley should be the first in line to be fully prosecuted for the actions that led to his resignation from Congress last week, other powerful congressmen who chose to look the other way need to be held accountable, also. Resigning their positions in the congressional leadership would be a start.

The inaction and possible cover-up causes one to suspect the Republican leadership was more concerned with suppressing a scandalous story about one of their own than protecting vulnerable young people who walk the halls of Congress with very powerful men and women.

Just as contemptible, however, are attempts by the opposing Democratic Party to use Foley's victims as pawns for political gain. Because this scandal involves the well-being of young people, it should not be used as a political weapon, yet the Democrats are doing exactly that while a national epidemic of child sexual exploitation continues to worsen.

This issue should not be about winning an election, it should be about protecting children and toughening our laws so such crimes will not be tolerated in supposed venerated institutions.

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before the age of 18. Meanwhile, the Internet has created a new pipeline for sexual predators into the bedrooms of countless children, with one in seven kids reporting having been sexually solicited online in 2005.

Child Lures Prevention, based in Vermont, explains that sexual predators use many "lures" to prey on children. One of the most successful is the "authority figure lure," when a teacher, coach, priest, or parent – or, in this case, a congressman – uses his or her authority to lull the victim into believing sexual conversations and sexual contact between adults and kids is acceptable.

On Tuesday, Foley's attorney announced that the ex-congressman had been sexually abused as an adolescent by a clergyman, and that Foley has never had sexual contact with a minor.

As a sex-abuse victim, Foley, of all people, should know the trauma experienced by victims of sexual assault and exploitation – most of whom typically inflict harm only on themselves through substance abuse, suicide, and other effects, and would never fathom harming a child.

The key questions that investigators should be pursuing now are: Did Foley have any sexual contact with a boy who had been a page, even if the boy had reached the age of consent? Did Foley prey upon any new victims since the Republican leadership first learned about him November of 2005? And did some Democrats potentially know and retain the information for an election-year "October surprise?"

These congressional leaders should have been heading up the effort to identify possible victims, who already may be suffering the very damaging effects of child exploitation and sexual abuse. But because of politicians' addiction to power, it is conceivable that there are other members of Congress who abuse their standing and pursue young pages for sexual gratification while leaders look the other way.

Congress has proven once again that it is not capable of policing itself. It is time to scrap the page program altogether.

As the American public learned at the start of the Catholic clergy sexual-abuse travesties in 2002 – where bishops were caught transferring child-molesting priests to new parishes to prey upon new victims – crimes against children and adolescents are at their most diabolical when the princes of powerful institutions look the other way.

New victims are attacked when those who should be protecting our most vulnerable in society enable the crime with silence and inaction. In the words of Edmund Burke, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

Now there are young people most likely suffering because of the criminal actions of one member of Congress and the delayed response of its leaders. As a result, teenagers should no longer walk the halls of Congress with powerful men who will not hold their own peers more accountable before a scandal becomes national news.

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