

Let the People Decide about Hastert and the GOP Stewardship of Congress

Let democracy and the wisdom of a crowd (November voters) determine the outcome of this matter, not some "ethics" committee or "independent" counsel

by Terry Michael, October 10, 2006

Unlike some conservative-favored media outlets that seem to be hallucinating they practice journalism, The Washington Times showed old-fashioned journalistic integrity in urging Speaker Dennis Hastert to resign.

They allowed principle, rather than partisan editorial leanings, to guide their advice to the Speaker. But they got it wrong.

I would submit, as Congressman Tom Reynolds might put it, that the question of Mr. Hastert's continued leadership should be "taken to his supervisor," the House Republican Conference.

Call me an old-fashioned little "d" democrat, but I'm willing to leave moral and ethical judgments about an official's personal conduct to the wisdom of crowds--the electorate, in this case.

Through their democratically selected Republican representatives, let the citizenry decide whether Hastert should stay or go. In fact, I wish Mr. Foley had chosen to be judged by the people of his district in Florida, rather than hide behind a smarmy, lawyerly "I was drunk and molested" defense.

A Democrat involved in a page-related sex scandal a few decades ago, gay Congressman Gerry Studds, stood before his voters and was repeatedly returned to Congress. His straight Republican colleague, Dan Crane, who had sex with a female page, was fired immediately by those who had sent him to Washington. Gay Democratic Congressman Barney Frank and gay Republican Congressman Jim Kolbe both won approval of their constituents after they were outed while in office.

In all those cases, a crowd casting ballots probably showed more wisdom than some House "ethics" committee or "independent" counsel could ever muster.

Democrats seem to be sent to Congress by voters who believe men are dogs, but what else is new. Republicans tend to make their way to these ten surreal square miles surrounding the United States Capitol at the behest of voters who not only believe men are dogs, but they should go to hell for it.

The problem Mr. Hastert is facing is not ABC News or liberal Democrats. It's a significant number of the party's base voters, who appear to despise gays and lesbians, and who demand that the party accept their bias as a legitimate "religious" belief. And it's also many--I think a majority--of those pesky voters in the center, who conclude Republicans are more than a little bit intolerant and are being a tad bit hypocritical.

As a Democrat, albeit a libertarian Democrat (there are about six of us,) I side with the view that men are indeed canines, but it's a lot more important for congressmen to decide whether to send 18-year-olds to their deaths in the desert than it is to monitor whether dirty-old-men are sending "what are you wearing" instant messages to 16-year-olds at the beginning of the sex- sophisticated 21st Century.

For that reason, even as a partisan Democrat, I wish these Foley Follies had not produced an October surprise gift for my party, which may conclude it was rewarded with power by a sex scandal, rather than by an electorate that has turned against this awful war with a vengeance. Timid Democratic candidates continue to avoid engaging a real debate about the war in Iraq, relying on their consultants' advice to sit on a lead, rather than actually lead.

But back to my Republican friends. My advice to you, for what it's worth, is to stop playing with the fire of anti-gay bigotry. I say that as a Democrat who's not exactly proud of my party's countenance of religiously-justified slavery and segregation for a century-and-a-half.

You fan the flames of hate too long, and you end up in political hell.

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