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Page Scandal: Political Corruption Precedes Sexual Corruption **by Sheldon Richman**

For the sake of those vulnerable 16-year-old boys and girls who come to Washington each year, we should abolish the congressional page program immediately. I'm not referring only to the danger posed by the sexual predators in Congress. There's a more widespread danger that hardly anyone cares about: the congressional page program encourages high schoolers to worship and lust for power. In 20 years only three congressmen have been known to engage in sexual improprieties with pages. But nearly all congressmen teach pages that raw government power is a good thing. In a society that thinks of itself as free, this is intolerable.

Actually there is a connection between sex and power in the page program. Some pages may permit congressmen to make sexual overtures precisely because no one who wants to be near power will advance by alienating a member of Congress. If we want to keep these kids sexually safe, let's disabuse them of their admiration for power.

The *Washington Post* illustrated the problem in a recent article about pages. Quotations from former pages make it clear that these high schoolers risk being corrupted because they are encouraged to think that wielding power is "cool." But power — forcibly taking money from people (taxes), spending it in ways they would never approve, and regulating their lives — is not cool. It violates individual freedom. The more power the government has, the less freedom the people have. But the pages are misled into believing otherwise. This indoctrination must stop or they will be scarred for life.

Observe how the pages are seduced by power. In the *Post* article one young man said that Foley showed up at the page graduation and gave him his e-mail address. "I started contacting him right away," the former page said. "I knew a congressman that I ... talked to online. That was pretty cool."

Do we really want our young people admiring politicians? If they are going to have a role model, shouldn't it be someone who at least makes an honest living?

When Foley got sexually explicit with one former page, the young man was afraid to ask him to stop. "I didn't want to piss off a member of an institution that I really revered," he said.

This particular ex-page, said the *Post*, “played along, then slowed his responses until Foley took the hint and stopped.” But he never reported Foley. He said, “I figured maybe someday I will want to be involved in Congress. I didn’t want to make an enemy.”

As the *Post* commented, “Most of all, his [Foley’s] interest in the boys coincided with the ambitions of many of the teenagers, who craved contact with members in hopes of fostering political careers of their own.”

Political careers of their own! See what I mean? Their susceptibility to sexual corruption by pathetic, lonely, middle-aged male politicians is made possible by their *political* corruption. Who is teaching them that power is romantic? Sending these kids to Washington only reinforces their budding power lust and makes them marks for political sexual predators.

“Pages are taught to speak to a member only when spoken to,” the *Post* writes. This institutional arrogance, which demands that congressmen be treated like aristocracy, feeds the pages’ hero worship and creates a dangerous mystique that can lead only to mischief. One former page said, “There’s something that really feels good about getting to hang out with people who are powerful and well-known.” I fear for this young man. Not only will he be vulnerable to sexual exploitation; he probably won’t object when government violates his rights.

The Foley scandal is instructive because it exposes the risks that young people take whenever they go to Washington to work in the seat of power. We certainly must condemn congressmen who take advantage of that power and impose themselves on those kids. But the more fundamental danger is that Washington teaches them that power over their fellow human beings is something worth having.

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