

# The Politics of 'Outing' Politicians

**Exposing Political Figures' Sexual Orientation Can be Seen as Reporting or Personal Attacks**

By GIGI STONE

**Oct. 2, 2006**— - Rep. Mark Foley, R-Fla., resigned Friday in the wake of a burgeoning scandal over sexually explicit instant messages he'd allegedly sent to underage former congressional pages.

While the latest allegations are definitely the most egregious leveled against the former congressman, this was not the first attempt to expose secrets of Foley's personal life. Newspapers, blogs and chat rooms have buzzed about Foley's homosexuality for years.

Foley's situation highlights a controversial practice that has gained traction on the Internet over the past few years -- in the blogosphere and the murky world of chat rooms: exposing, or "outing," public figures for their secretly homosexual lifestyles.

"It's fair to decry the lack of accountability on the Internet," said Jano Cabrera, a Democratic strategist. "The perceived anonymity of cyberspace allows some to make false charges, but that also cuts both ways. The Foley example shows that there are some political figures who feel the Internet shields their reprehensible behavior."

## Republicans in the Crosshairs

Many of the outed targets have been Republican politicians and the people who work for them.

In May 2003, Foley called a news conference to denounce reports in alternative newspapers that he was homosexual, calling his sexual orientation irrelevant to his political duties. He said that the innuendo about his life was "revolting and unforgivable." He called the story a ploy to derail his Senate campaign, which he later abandoned.

In 2005, the former Republican mayor of Spokane, Wash., James West, who died two months ago at age 55, was ousted from office over an alleged gay sex scandal.

Newspaper articles accused him of offering city hall jobs, sports tickets and cash to young men he'd met in an online chat room for homosexuals.

Outing is denounced by many activist groups like the Human Rights Campaign and the Log Cabin Republicans, a gay and lesbian Republican grass roots organization.

"We shouldn't waste time and energy launching personal attack," said Patrick Sammon, executive director of the Log Cabin Republicans. "Outing people distracts us from what is really important: How do we gain new allies among conservatives and people of faith?"

But some journalists believe outing is their duty.

"I don't actually call it outing. I call it reporting," explained Michael Rogers, whose Web site, [www.blogactive.com](http://www.blogactive.com), has reported on Foley's homosexuality for three years.

"I put it there because Foley had a record that was against the gay community. He refused to denounce his vote on the Defense of Marriage Act. It's not about being gay. It's about the hypocrisy."

Rogers also believes that alleged sexual advances toward underage boys could have been circumvented if Foley wasn't in the closet.

"I do believe that he had unhealthy sexual advances to these guys because he was living his life as a closeted gay man," Rogers said. "And that's what informs his actions. Had he lived his life honestly and openly and been proud of who he is, this would never would have happened."

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