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What You Say in Cyberspace Might Incriminate You

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This news report that hugged global headlines today should serve as a timely reminder to all [netizens](#) to be more circumspect and prudent in their conduct in cyberspace.

“I am deeply sorry and I apologize for letting down my family and the people of Florida I have had the privilege to represent.” This was the simple statement of American Republican congressman Mark Adam Foley, who served his legislative district in Florida for six terms, when he tendered his abrupt resignation last Friday (29 September 2006), thereby ending his flourishing legislative career, *following the revelation of a scandal involving inappropriate e-mail exchanges between him and some teenage male legislative pages.*

Allegedly, Foley’s electronic messages included *asking a page if he made him ‘horny’, and in another wanting to take off the teenager’s clothes, or asking for a photo of the boy.* He transmitted the messages using his personal account in America On Line (AOL), “Maf54“, the same account he allegedly uses to communicate with Florida Governor Jeb Bush.

[ABC](#) news released in its website nine pages of the alleged excerpts of Foley’s messages. (<http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/BrianRoss/story?id=2509586&page=1>; with a strong advisory for readers to exercise utmost discretion because of the sexually explicit language)

In a report, Republican congressman, John Shimkus of Illinois, who oversees the legislative page program in the US Congress, said that he learned of Foley’s inappropriate electronic messages in the late 2005 and took immediate action to investigate the matter.

[CNN](#) reports that the page program, which brings young people from around the country to work on Capitol Hill, came under intense scrutiny in 1983, after two

lawmakers — Rep. Gerry Studds, a Massachusetts Democrat, and Rep. Dan Crane, an Illinois Republican — were censured following their admission they had consensual sexual relationships with 17-year-old pages. Neither lawmaker resigned, but Crane was defeated for re-election in 1984. Studds survived the scandal and continued to serve in the House until retiring in 1996.

Ironically, Foley was the founder and co-chair of the *Congressional Missing and Exploited Children's Caucus*. He did play key roles in passing recent legislation on child protection such as the “*Volunteers for Children Act*” (that gives organizations working with youths access to FBI fingerprint checks to make sure that child molesters are not hired), the “*Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act*” (a bill already approved by the US Congress that seeks to overhaul the national monitoring system for predatory pedophiles by closing legal loopholes), and co-sponsored legislative measures to eliminate child pornography and exploitive child model sites on the Internet.

So the next time you hit that keyboard in your computer to send on-line messages, think again.