



Rabbi Weiner's Nov. 2006 Bulletin Article

I am aware that as you read these words, Election Day is only several days away. I want to encourage all of you to vote and support the candidate of your choice. However, no one should read into this article an endorsement of either party or its candidates.

As I write these words, the scandal involving Congressman Marc Foley is on my mind. It raises all types of issues; possible mistreatment and harassment and even abuse of children, violating the boundaries of acceptable behavior between children and adults, abuse of power and privileged position. It even extends to the leadership of the House of Representatives, as evidence mounts that the Congressional leadership might have known about this activity, and failed to protect the young adults involved. It is a sad state of affairs that not only has brought dishonor and possibly a criminal indictment against an elected official, but shame upon the entire Congress itself. There must be punishment, and those guilty must be held to account if for no other reason than a message must be sent to both guilty and innocent alike that where children are concerned we will simply not tolerate such behavior.

But my problem is that this is not the first time that this type of crime has been committed under the exact same circumstances. By a strange twist of fate Congressman Gerry Studds, a long time Representative from Massachusetts died just several days ago. Obituaries published in our nation's newspapers extolled his career as a public servant, and his committee chairmanships. But they also recalled that in 1983 he admitted to a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old participant in the very same Congressional Page program that is now under such public scrutiny. Yet after admitting his illicit activity with a minor, and being censured by the House of Representatives, he was reelected five times.

I am certainly not asserting that Congressman Foley be let off the hook because others similarly dishonored themselves. What I am suggesting otherwise is that by allowing the late Congressman Studds to go unpunished we send a clear message that justice is meted out selectively. And nothing is more dangerous, and more likely to undermine confidence in the great principles of our nation.

There is a story in the First book of Samuel (chapter 15) when the prophet Samuel rebukes King Saul for not carrying out G-d's specific commands. When Samuel actually confronts Saul, Saul protests and defends his actions. Samuel

responds to him “You may look small to yourself, but you are the head of the tribes of Israel” In other words, as a leader of many, responsible for the welfare of a nation, more is expected from you. And the penalties for violation of the high ethical and moral standards demanded of leaders are severe. And in time Saul kingdom was removed from him.

May all our elected officials, of whatever party or political leaning, similarly be held accountable when they betray and dishonor their high office, and by extension, the people they serve as well.



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