

Republican Party Faces Blue Crush

Foley's folly may mean a changing of the guard in Washington

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In light of the recent Washington scandal resulting in the resignation of former Congressman Mark Foley (R-FL) and the rapidly approaching November elections, House and Senate Republicans find themselves needing to play some unexpected defense in an already uphill battle to retain control of Congress.

The GOP, which took control of both houses of Congress in 1994 during a massive 54-seat swing, has held the majority in the House since and is just now showing its first signs of vulnerability.

Dan Wirls, chair of the UC Santa Cruz politics department, believes that much of the GOP's ability to retain the majority in the House is connected to the fact that the Republican Party is much more disciplined and univocal.

"They have a more easily digested set of themes," Wirls said. "The counterpart is always that the Democrats are a mess; that's the conventional wisdom. In the period from Nixon on, [Republicans] are much more aggressive with presidential power and foreign policy."

An ABC News report from early in October exposed that Foley had been sending sexually explicit e-mails and instant messages to a former Congressional page, leading to Foley's resignation. However, Foley's embarrassment represents just the most recent in a number of Republican scandals that have resulted in the indictment and resignation of four Republican congressmen for their involvement with lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Wirls believes that there have been two main fractures in the GOP's ability to retain its recent power—the failed war in Iraq, and now ethical issues within

the Party's leadership.

"This Mark Foley thing is kind of analogous to Lewinsky," Wirls said. "It's easy for the public to grasp."

Congressman Sam Farr (D-CA) feels that the nature of the American system provides a winner-take-all situation for the winner of an election.

"When you have that much power for so long, you get arrogant, and it's led to people breaking the law," Farr said. "Congress has failed to exercise its responsibility to check and balance the executive branch."

Kelly Hayes, fourth-year student and president of the UCSC College Republicans, has a different opinion. "I don't think it's carelessness at all," Hayes said. "I think people are eager to dig out scandals, just because Republicans are in power. I think these scandals are more [prevalent] than they would be if the Republicans weren't in power."



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Farr believes that the impending election will show that "the country is no longer enamored with the so-called 'Republican Promise.' The culture of corruption has been exposed in the Republican Party," Farr said. "These so-called family values turn out not to be as important as people thought."

Hayes trusts that the individual scandals will not influence the upcoming election, and that these scandals do not reflect the policies of the party as a whole.

"They were specific acts. Nobody's perfect, even Congressmen," Hayes said. "Obviously it reflects badly on the Republican Party, but when it comes down to it, it's not really a big deal. I think voters are smart enough to differentiate between individual scandals and

party values."

Wirls agrees that the Foley incident is not necessarily indicative of the GOP, but is unsure of what will happen in November.

"I think that this Foley thing is just one person, but it doesn't take many, so the House is definitely up for grabs," Wirls said.

Farr believes that despite the GOP's compromised position, the election is still far from over.

"You had four Republicans who have broken the law and left Congress. They were all in safe Republican seats," Farr said. "I'm cautiously optimistic, because the American public seems to agree with the Democratic issues, but what concerns me is it's all about who votes. The students are going to be key, students make the difference."

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