

Studds, Crane should step down

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Opinions of many, who are willing to make them public, have been spread over pages of newsprint in the matter of Congressman Gerry Studds (D. Mass.) and Rep. Daniel Crane's (R. Ill.) indiscretions in soliciting sex among the pages in the House of Representatives, Washington. Most of the opinions we have heard held more sympathy than censure for Studds, and what censure has surfaced is directed at his lapse in judgment.

For his associate, Rep. Crane, there seems to be less sympathy, at least in our local press; his political career, it appears, may be truncated. As for supervisor of pages James Howarth, the facts of his dereliction of duty have been overshadowed by vicarious thrills elicited by revelations that teenagers have been sexually molested and exploited by elected officials.

Receiving most publicity and comment is the question of whether public officials are to be held accountable for private actions. Some feel that those who hold the public trust have a duty to adhere to strict standards of conduct and that, as members of Congress, the highest legislative branch of government in our country, their behavior must be exemplary.

Others decry insensitivity to rights of personal privacy and point with pride to past accomplishments on the part of Gerry Studds, legislator. The accomplishments are held up as arguments to retain his services.

Sexual exploitation of minor children is usually called statutory rape: i.e., sexual intercourse with a person below a certain age constitutes the crime of rape, even though the person consents to the act.

In the cases of Reps. Crane and Studds, since the parties involved were 17 years of age and living in the District of

Columbia where the age of consent is 16, it may be argued no rape was committed. But by Studds' own admission, and by testimony of the unidentified page, the youngster was plied with vodka until four o'clock in the morning in the District where the age at which persons may buy hard liquor is 21 years. At 18 they may purchase beer and wine with less than 14% alcoholic content.

Aside from whether we would knowingly choose a homosexual person to represent us in Congress, however, we would examine influences such incidents have on young people, young people who are the nation's hope for the future. What examples are held up for them?

Most parents strive to instill in their children a respect for their elders. An effort is made not only to teach lessons of discipline and self-discipline, but to ensure a correlative respect for rights of other individuals, for authorities such as police officers, the clergy, and teachers who take children into their care many hours each week. And among those authority figures are elected officials.

Pollsters report how the public rates our President. Again and again, the President scores at the top of lists of those most respected by American youth. Parents encourage their children to look up to, to emulate, elected public officials. It is part of the socializing process in a democracy.

For a teenager to be chosen to serve as page in the halls of Congress is an honor awarded only to a select few. Most Americans never meet their Presidents; enormous numbers of Americans never meet or talk with their senators or representatives.

Young people selected as Congressional pages find themselves thrilled to be in the nation's capital, find themselves thrown into personal contact with people they grew up

reading about, admired as heroes, featured and quoted in newspapers and news magazines, watched on television. To politically-oriented youngsters, the influence of these mentors is incalculable.

Young pages come from all over the country, from cities and suburbia and farms, from towns small and large. They leave behind assorted homes, backgrounds, life-styles. Among them are to be found the sophisticated and worldly-wise; among them, too, are the naive and wholesomely ingenuous. Washington D.C., itself a jaded milieu, impresses self-possessed adults; the coolest teenager could easily be overwhelmed.

Supervisor of pages James Howarth's assignment is to ensure the youngsters do not fall easy prey to Washington-wise exploiters; Congressmen are responsible for the protection as well as the education of the pages. In the cases of Crane and Studds, that responsibility was perverted.

Of the seventeen-year-old people you know, how many are prepared, no matter how intelligent and well-informed, to deal appropriately with improper sexual advances by people they perceive as authority figures? For that matter, how well could you deal with such a situation?

There is no dispute that Gerry Studds has fulfilled his role as representative for the 10th District in admirable fashion; Rep. Crane may be equally as competent a legislator. How can we trust representatives with our votes, however, when we can't trust them with our most precious possessions—our children?

In the youth of America lie our hopes for the future; can our youth hold government and its representatives in high esteem when those representatives withhold their esteem from our children and from us?

Studds, Crane, and Howarth have violated our trust as certainly as they have stood before us and admitted violating these youngsters. Crane's abject confession invites contempt. Howarth's position is shadowed by the spotlights shining on Crane and Studds. Studds excuses himself, pleading "errors in judgment" and dodges the issue with reminders of "consenting individuals." He throws himself on the mercy of his constituency but, at the same time, justifies and defends his behavior with, "It is not a simple task for any of us to meet adequately the obligations of either public or private life, let alone both."

Assuredly, it is not. All three failed to do so in our view. People so much in the public eye **must** be above moral reproach; if they find that impossible, their obligation is to retire from public life.

Studds' unwillingness or inability to control his aberrations does not necessarily make him a bad man, but does make him unfit and unable to hold himself up as a proper example for either youths or adults in his constituency. It is not asked that he be a man without fault or weakness; we all have these. It is asked and expected that such faults and weaknesses as those he recognized in himself deter him from seeking and holding public office, where the public will hold him in high respect and then be deeply disillusioned.

History is replete with examples of societies in decay, societies in which morality lost its meaning to leaders and followers alike. When a public official entices any youngster to participate in sexual intimacies, that official displays moral degeneration. In these cases, worse yet, the youngsters in question were under the care and protection of these men.

We do not condone child-molestation nor do we consider anyone in any job irreplaceable.