



## Page scandal exposes GOP's gay identity crisis

### Politics, staffing not always in concordance

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By Kathy Kiely, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — At a State Department ceremony this week, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warmly acknowledged the family members of Mark Dybul, whom she was swearing in as the nation's new global AIDS coordinator.

As first lady Laura Bush looked on, Rice singled out his partner, Jason Claire, and Claire's mother. Rice referred to her as Dybul's "mother-in-law."



By J. Scott Applewhite, AP  
Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, right, swears in Mark A. Dybul, left, as the new coordinator of the U.S. Global AIDS Office during a ceremony at the State Department in Washington. First lady Laura Bush and Dybul's partner, Jason Claire witness the ceremony.

The celebratory moment for a gay couple was emblematic of the political identity crisis facing the Republican Party, two years after an election the GOP won in part by making gay marriage an issue and less than two weeks after revelations about a Republican House member's advances toward teenage boys.

For Republicans, the most difficult problem posed by the e-mail exchanges that former congressman Mark Foley had with pages is not necessarily the flagrant misbehavior of one member. Rather it's the fact that the investigation is exposing a politically awkward fact of life: some GOP leaders practice a more tolerant brand of politics in their office hiring than some in the party have preached on the campaign trail.

"They play somebody different on TV than they are in person," says John Aravosis, a gay blogger who used to work for Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska.



Jeff Trandahl, the former House clerk at the center of the inquiry into the Foley e-mails and a top-ranking appointee of House Speaker Dennis Hastert, is openly gay. So is Kirk Fordham, the former Foley chief of staff who says he alerted Hastert's office last year to his boss' over-chumminess with high school pages.

The revelations have disturbed some conservative activists, who believe that Republicans owe their victories in the 2004 elections to the thousands of "values voters" who trooped to the polls to vote for anti-gay-marriage measures on the ballots of 11 swing states.

"It was the deciding factor in the presidential election," says Phil Burress. He spearheaded the successful effort to pass a gay-marriage ban in Ohio, the state that decided the election for Bush.

"Has the social agenda of the GOP been stalled by homosexual members or staffers?" Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council wrote in an e-mail message to the organization's activists this week. In an interview, Perkins says that while he has not drawn any conclusions, "these are questions that need to be resolved."

Such sentiments have raised concerns that gay staffers will be pressed to leave Republican offices. "It could be another Salem," says former senator Alan Simpson, referring to colonial-era witch hunts. Simpson, a Wyoming Republican, co-founded the Republican Unity Coalition to encourage gay participation in the party.

Gay Republicans insist they shouldn't be blamed for Foley or the fallout. Patrick Sammon, political director of the Log Cabin Republicans, denounced the congressman's behavior toward pages as "despicable."

Justin Nelson, a former GOP House staffer who founded the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, says "it was gay Republican staffers and an openly gay member of Congress" who delivered early warnings about Foley's behavior.

Both Fordham and Rep. Jim Kolbe of Arizona, Congress' only openly gay Republican member, have said they passed on complaints about Foley to the House speaker and clerk offices.

While many conservatives insist their opposition to gay marriage doesn't equate to opposition to homosexuality, some remain suspicious of gays' trustworthiness. Burress says he believes that homosexual men are more prone to pedophilia than heterosexuals. "There's no question about that," he says.

The Rev. Debra Haffner, head of the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing, denies that assertion. "The vast majority of child abusers are heterosexual; the vast majority of abused children are girls," she says.

Former senator John Danforth, a Missouri Republican who has just published a book called Faith and Politics, says his party's successful use of gay marriage as a campaign issue may come back to haunt it. "There are some things that aren't worth doing whether they work or not," he says.

Not all conservatives have had their faith shaken in the GOP, however.

Helen Cindrich, an abortion opponent and conservative activist who is working for Republican Sen. Rick Santorum's re-election in Pennsylvania, says her views about gays and lesbians have evolved as she has met some of them.

"What would you do if you took all those people who are homosexual out of all those offices?" she asks. "There's probably a lot of good people who would be shunned, and that's not the way it's supposed to be." Cindrich acknowledges that not all her fellow conservatives agree with her, but she adds, "I guess I'm learning to take people where they are."