



## Haggard scandal troubles “family values” GOP

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With Mark Foley's congressional sex scandal still troubling Republicans, one of the nation's top evangelical leaders is now accused of paying for gay sex. Heading into Tuesday's elections, liberals and some conservatives are saying the Republican party that prides itself on family values has a hypocrisy problem.

Ted Haggard, a staunch foe of same-sex marriage and occasional participant in White House conference calls, resigned as president of the National Association of Evangelicals and head of his Colorado church following allegations he met monthly with a gay prostitute for three years. Haggard denies having sex with the man but admits receiving a massage and buying methamphetamine.

Five weeks ago, Republican congressman Foley -- a vocal advocate for exploited children -- resigned from Congress because of the discovery of sexually tinged messages he had sent over the Internet to teenage male assistants.

Pennsylvania Republican congressman Don Sherwood, a married father of three, has been burdened by revelations about his five-year affair with a mistress who says he physically abused her. **"The attention focused on these cases will inescapably lead people to think about these people's hypocrisy," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "They make a career out of defaming gay people and preaching family values, when it's clear that it's just a veneer."**

Stephen Bennett, a conservative activist who describes himself as a former homosexual, also suggested the Haggard case would have political consequences. "Will this affect the elections next Tuesday? ... You better believe it," he said in a statement from the Huntington, Conn., base of Stephen Bennett Ministries. "The more and more hypocrisy I see each day, the more I realize next Tuesday we are going to get exactly what we deserve."

Other conservatives disagreed -- saying support for same-sex marriage bans and for Republican candidates would not be diminished. And John Green, a senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, said Haggard is not close enough to President George W. Bush to be an ally, merely a supporter. "We have great sympathy and disappointment, and can even be demoralized when a leader falls into sin," said Wendy Wright, president of Concerned Women for America. "That doesn't mean we're going to vote against an amendment to protect marriage."

Republican pollster Whit Ayres acknowledged that religious conservatives are discouraged about several issues this fall, but "are they so discouraged they're going to participate in any movement to have [Democrats] Howard Dean and Nancy Pelosi run the country? No."

The allegations against Haggard emerged only a few days before Coloradans vote on two ballot measures dealing with marriage and gay rights. One, backed by Haggard, specifies that marriage is only between a man and a woman; the other would provide many rights to same-sex couples through domestic partnerships.

Eight states are considering ballot measures to ban same-sex marriage. Such measures, which are proposed state laws that must be approved or rejected directly by voters, are often held in conjunction with general elections.

Both the pro- and anti-ban campaigns in Colorado declined to comment on how the Haggard case might affect voting on the measures. A Colorado College political science professor, Bob Loevy, suggested that there could be a burst of support for the marriage ban if voters felt the accusations against Haggard were timed to sway the referendums. Referring to conservative voters in Colorado Springs, Haggard's hometown, Loevy said: "They don't get disenchanted easily."

Colorado Springs is the base of the influential Christian ministry Focus on the Family, which has campaigned vigorously against same-sex marriage. Its founder and chairman, James Dobson, said he was "heartsick" over the Haggard allegations. "We will await the outcome of this story, but the possibility that an illicit relationship has occurred is alarming to us and to millions of others," Dobson said.

"The situation has grave implications for the cause of Christ."

White House spokesman Tony Fratto said Haggard was on the weekly calls between Bush aides and evangelical leaders only "a couple" of times.

The minister has visited the White House, but "there've been a lot of people who've come to the White House," Fratto said. He expressed confidence that evangelical voters can distinguish between an individual's problems and the Republican agenda.

The National Association of Evangelicals represents a political constituency that has been staunchly Republican in recent years. In 2004, according to exit polling, 78 percent of white born-again evangelical Christians voted for Bush, and 72 percent voted for a Republican candidate for the House of Representatives.

An Associated Press-America Online News poll in October showed a mild decline in evangelical support for Republicans, and 43% said they were dissatisfied with the Republican leadership in Congress. The poll found them no more or less likely to turn out on Election Day than voters in general.

David Kuo, a born-again Christian and former White House aide who wrote the book "Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction," said Haggard's situation is magnified by his and other evangelicals' involvement in Republican politics. "It's religious hypocrisy with a political rocket booster," said Kuo, who thinks politics is corrupting Christianity. "It's tragedy enough if a pastor falls, but this is not about a pastor falling. This is about a politician falling, and the politician is bringing down Jesus with him." (AP)