

WE'RE SORRY FOR SPIKING THE NEWS

The NYT has a really weird story out today which tries to explain why news outlets don't publish "open secrets" about public figures.

Old-fashioned as it seems, there are still tacit rules about when an open secret can remain in its own netherworld, without consequence to the politician who keeps it. But now that any whisper can become a global shout in an instant, how much longer can those rules apply? And should they, anyway?

[snip]

In the mainstream media, the recent standard for pursuing open secrets has been murky, but generally guided by the notion that private behavior matters when it is at odds with public declarations. Mr. Foley's bawdy flirtation with pages was fair game not least because he had sponsored legislation seeking to protect children from online predators. Mr. Craig supported a 2006 amendment to the Idaho Constitution barring gay marriage and civil unions and has voted in Congress against gay rights.

Of course, the article gets a bunch of things wrong. The mainstream media let Craig and Foley (and continues to let David Dreier and others) off the hook for years, in spite of their clear hypocrisy. And Jim McGreevy was not outed because of hypocrisy—he was outed because of the clear impropriety of hiring his boyfriend (and here again, the example of Dreier is worth raising). Nor does the mainstream media ever point out the hypocrisy, in this case, of the Republican Party, which likes to mobilize the base by cultivating homophobia while remaining quite tolerant (up to a point—Dreier couldn't become majority leader, after all) of barely-

closeted gay men. At some point, the hypocrisy of the Republican party needs to become part of the story.

And perhaps most curiously, the article doesn't discuss the reasons to report legal wrongdoing—even if it involves personal behavior. That is, shouldn't the media have reported on Foley's behavior with congressional pages, since those pages were underage? Shouldn't the media report that David Vitter has admitted to breaking the law?

And, finally, the article doesn't quote either of the two people who ought to be quoted for the story, Mike Rogers and Lane Hudson. Are they afraid to talk to the guys who proved the mainstream media complicit?