



# Media Reality ✓ Check

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ABC, CBS, NBC Sound Like Perpetual Motion Machine Manufacturing "Foley Fallout" Against GOP

## Foley Feeding Frenzy: Nets Air 150+ Stories

The Mark Foley instant-messaging scandal is playing out like a massive October Surprise for Democrats. On Wednesday's *Good Morning America*, ABC News anchor Christopher Cuomo spoke insistently: "Less than a month before the elections and the Mark Foley scandal just keeps growing." Reporter Jake Tapper added: "This is the scandal that will not go away."

To measure the aggression of TV assignment editors on the Foley story, MRC analysts counted the number of stories devoted to the scandal and the repetitive insistence that Republicans are in deep political danger and may need GOP leaders to resign. On the ABC, CBS, and NBC morning and evening news programs, from the story's emergence on Friday night, September 29, through Wednesday morning, October 11, the Big Three networks have aired **152 stories**. (A fraction of the stories were brief anchor updates.) The breakdown:

- **ABC: 50** (*World News*, 20; *Good Morning America*, 30.)
- **CBS: 46** (*CBS Evening News*, 15; *The Early Show*, 31.)
- **NBC: 56** (*NBC Nightly News*, 20; *Today*, 36.)

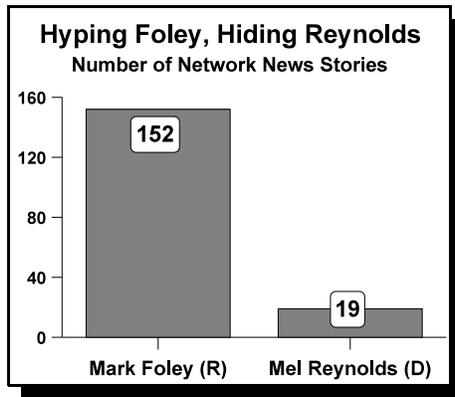
Is this feeding frenzy what the networks would do for any scandal where a middle-aged Congressman is caught talking dirty to a teenager? No. Consider the case of Rep. Mel Reynolds (D-Illinois). In 1994, Reynolds was indicted over a consensual sexual relationship with a girl named Beverly Heard, beginning when she was 16. Heard testified that Reynolds gave her cash at each meeting and supplied her with his pager number and apartment keys.

In taped phone conversations, they even plotted group sex with a 15-year-old Catholic high school girl Heard had said wanted to have sex with him. Reynolds responded on tape: "Did I win the Lotto?" He asked Heard to take naked photos of the girl. He was indicted on August 21, 1994, and convicted on August 23, 1995 on 12 counts of sexual assault, obstruction of justice, and solicitation of child

pornography. Here's how the same networks handled that congressional sex scandal.

The 1994 indictment of Reynolds (total: three stories): **ABC: zero. CBS: two** (one anchor brief in the evening, another one in the morning). **NBC: one evening story.**

The 1995 conviction of Reynolds on all 12 counts (total: 16 stories): **ABC: one. CBS: five** (one evening anchor brief, three morning briefs, and a full morning story). **NBC: 10** (one evening anchor brief, six morning anchor briefs, a morning story, and two morning interview segments).



Please note that this adds up to 19 stories over more than a year, not 12 days. If the Foley story advanced to an indictment, how many more hundreds of stories will these three networks air?

There are obviously some differences in the two sex scandals. Foley's Web interactions were with a congressional page, while Mel Reynolds was dealing with a minor in private. But Foley's scandal is based on sex *talk*, while Reynolds not only had an active sex life with one teen, he was trying to add more teen sex partners.

There's one obvious similarity: Reynolds was in the Democratic majority in 1994. The networks did not erupt in a frenzy asking: what did Speaker Thomas Foley do to protect the children? When would Democrats force Reynolds to resign? No one did. He was re-elected in 1994.

In the fall of 1994, with the ethical scandals hanging over Democrats, like the indictment of crooked Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (who did not resign, but ran for re-election), the Reynolds scandal might have had partisan resonance. But the networks weren't interested in that kind of partisan resonance. — *Tim Graham*

**L. Brent Bozell III**, Publisher; **Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Tim Graham**, Editors; **Geoffrey Dickens, Brad Wilmoth, Megan McCormack, Mike Rule, Scott Whitlock** and **Justin McCarthy**, Media Analysts; **Michelle Humphrey**, Research Associate; **Michael Chapman**, Director of Communications. Sign up for daily *CyberAlerts* at [www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org).