

# CRS Report for Congress

## Pages of the United States Congress: History, Background Information, and Proposals for Change

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## Summary

For more than 175 years, messengers known as pages have served the United States Congress. Currently, approximately 100 young men and women from across the nation are allowed to serve as pages at any given time. Pages must be high school juniors and at least 16 years of age. Several incumbent and former Members of Congress as well as other prominent Americans have served as congressional pages.

Pages must be appointed and sponsored by a Member of Congress for one academic semester of the school year, or a summer session. They are appointed on a rotating basis pursuant to criteria set by the House and Senate leadership, which determines the Members eligible to sponsor a page. Academic standing is among the most important criteria used in the final selection of pages.

Over the years, there have been areas of concern about the problems posed by having young pages serve Congress. In the 1800s and early 1900s, some House pages were as young as 10 and Senate pages as young as 13. Most of the concerns and subsequent congressional actions addressed the lack of supervised housing, as well as issues such as age, tenure, selection, education, and overall management of the pages. The most recent and far-reaching reforms in the page system occurred in 1982 and 1983, following press reports of insufficient supervision, alleged sexual misconduct, and involvement in the trafficking of drugs on Capitol Hill. Most of these reports were later found to be unsubstantiated.

The page program has again been the focus of attention following recent allegations involving the exchange of inappropriate e-mail messages between a former Member of the House and former House pages. During the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, an investigative subcommittee of the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct investigated these allegations without recommending disciplinary proceedings against any Member, officer, or employee of the House. The committee did, however, issue recommendations to improve the operations of the House page program, including changing the makeup of the House Page Board.

Early in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, legislation was enacted to enlarge the House Page Board and to require it to meet regularly. Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) announced her intention to increase the oversight of the page program; and current and former Members of Congress, as well as former congressional pages, have recently suggested changes to the page system.

This report provides a brief history of the congressional page programs, background information, and proposals for change. It will be updated as needed.

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## History

Serving Members of the United States Congress is a group of young adults known as pages. Pages have been employed since the early Congresses. Eleven Members of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress were former pages, and 10 will serve in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. Today, the pages include males and females who are juniors in high school and who come from all areas of the United States.

The term “page” is of Middle English origin. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century when it meant a youth employed as a personal attendant to a person of rank. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the term also applied to a boy or lad employed as a servant or attendant.

The page system is formally provided for in law (2 U.S.C. 88; P.L. 91-510), although the rationale for the page service or for using high school students is not. It has been widely noted in debates and writings within Congress, however, that pages provide needed messenger services while at the same time providing a unique educational opportunity for the select few chosen. In recent years, Congress has determined that juniors in high school are at an optimum age to be a page and are most suited for the services provided Members of Congress. At the same time, serving as a page has been seen as offering young adults an opportunity to learn about Congress and contributing to the development of leadership qualities in these young men and women.

Over the years, there have been areas of concern about the problems posed by having young pages serve Congress. In the 1800s and early 1900s, some House pages were as young as 10 and Senate pages as young as 13. Later, they were as old as 18. Most of the concerns and subsequent congressional actions addressed the lack of supervised housing, as well as issues such as age, tenure, selection, education, and overall management of the pages. The most recent and far-reaching reforms in the page system were implemented in 1982 and 1983, following press reports of insufficient supervision, alleged sexual misconduct, and involvement in the trafficking of drugs on Capitol Hill. Most of these reports were later found to be unsubstantiated.

As a result of the allegations, however, both the House and Senate established Page Boards to supervise the page program in their respective houses. In addition, the House and Senate, for the first time, provided supervised housing for their pages, took over the education of the pages from the District of Columbia school system and

established separate page schools, and developed more educational and recreational opportunities for their pages.

Pages are not unique to the United States Congress. A majority of state legislatures and some foreign legislative assemblies employ messengers similar to congressional pages.

## Duties

Pages serve principally as messengers. They carry documents between the House and Senate, Members' offices, committees, and the Library of Congress. They also prepare the House and Senate chambers for each day's business by distributing the *Congressional Record* and other documents related to the day's agenda, assist in the cloakrooms and chambers, and when Congress is in session, sit near the dais where they may be summoned by Members for assistance. House pages also raise and lower the flag on the roof of the Capitol. Senate pages perform special duties every four years when they take part in the ceremony counting the electoral votes after a presidential election. Two pages, usually one from each party, carry the wooden boxes containing the ballots from the Senate to the House chamber where the votes are tallied.

## House Pages<sup>1</sup>

Currently, there are 72 House page positions, 48 for the majority party and 24 for the minority party. The House page program is administered by the Office of the Clerk and supervised by the House Page Board, chaired in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress by Representative Dale Kildee (D-MI). Other members of the Page Board include Representatives Diane DeGette (D-CO), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), and Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL), as well as the Clerk and the Sergeant at Arms of the House.<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to recent legislation, another Member of the House will be appointed to the Board to equalize the number representing the two parties as will a former page and the parent of a current page.

In the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Page Board established new criteria for the appointment of House pages. These include requirements that Members select applicants from their home states, a limit on page service to one semester only, and the creation of an admissions panel (composed of the Clerk of the House, staff from the Page School and dormitory, and floor staff representing both parties), which interviews all prospective pages. The House leadership has final approval of all students selected for the program.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, please refer to [<http://pageprogram.house.gov>].

<sup>2</sup> *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 153, Jan. 24, 2007, p. H915; and Feb. 5, 2007, p. H1169.

House pages are paid at the annual rate of \$18,817. Automatic monthly deductions are taken from their salaries for federal and state taxes, Social Security, and a residence hall fee of \$400, which includes five breakfasts and seven dinners per week. The pages are required to live in the supervised House Page Dormitory near the Capitol. They are responsible for the cost of their uniforms — navy jackets, dark grey slacks or skirts, long-sleeved white shirts, standard-issue ties (navy with red and white stripes), and black shoes — and transportation to and from Washington, DC.

During the school year, they are educated in the House Page School located in the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress. The page school, which is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, offers a junior-year high school curriculum, college preparatory courses, and extracurricular and weekend activities. Early-morning classes are usually held five days a week prior to the convening of the House.

## **Senate Pages**

There are 30 Senate pages, 18 of whom are selected by the majority party and 12 by the minority party. The Senate Sergeant at Arms supervises the Senate page program along with the Secretary of the Senate, the two party secretaries, the Senate page program director and the principal of the Senate Page School.

Senate pages are paid at the annual rate of \$20,491. Automatic deductions are made from their salaries for taxes and Social Security as well as the \$600 residence hall fee, which includes breakfast and dinner seven days a week. Pages must pay their transportation costs to Washington, DC, but their uniforms are supplied. The uniforms consist of navy blue suits, white shirts, plain, navy-blue ties for boys, dark socks, and black shoes.

The Senate provides its pages supervised housing and education in the Daniel Webster Page Residence near the Hart Senate Office Building. Pages, who serve during the academic year, are educated in this school, which is also accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. The junior-year curriculum is geared toward college preparation and emphasis is given to the unique learning opportunities available in Washington, DC. Early morning classes are held prior to the convening of the Senate.

## **1982-1983 and Subsequent Changes and Reforms**

### **House of Representatives**

In mid-July 1982, following unfavorable press reports concerning congressional pages, the Speaker and the Republican Leader of the House of Representatives appointed a Page Commission to study all aspects of the House page system, including whether it should be continued, the need for supervised housing, and the

need, if any, for improved education.<sup>3</sup> The commission was directed to report recommendations as soon as possible.

The commission held hearings in July and August 1982 during which some Members of Congress, current and former pages, and congressional officials testified.<sup>4</sup> In mid-August 1982, the commission delivered its report to the Speaker, recommending continuation of the House page system with modifications. These included requiring pages to be juniors in high school and at least 16 years of age, placing responsibility for the page program with a page board; developing a code of conduct for pages; centralizing housing for the pages with supervision by resident counselors and security provided by the U.S. Capitol Police; improving the page education and recreation program; developing reasonably standard selection criteria; and prohibiting employees of Members or committees from serving in the page system.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of 1983, many of these recommendations had been implemented, including the appointment in November 1982 of the first House Page Board.<sup>6</sup> In September 1983, the House cancelled its contract with the District of Columbia Board of Education and hired its own teachers to operate a new school for its pages. By 2001, the House had moved its pages from temporary supervised housing and moved them into a residence facility newly renovated for them.

## Senate

Early in the 97<sup>th</sup> Congress (1981-1983), the Senate Management Board, composed of the Secretary and the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate, the Architect of the Capitol, and the staff directors of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee and the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee, directed its staff to conduct an extensive review of the Senate page program in an effort to identify elements of the program that could be improved.

In July 1982, the Management Board recommended to the joint Senate leadership certain changes in the Senate page program, including limitation of page appointments to high school juniors, a more innovative academic program with better facilities, encouragement of Senators to appoint as pages individuals with outstanding academic credentials, a supervised single housing unit for Senate pages, and consolidation of responsibility for Senate pages.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Congressional Record*, vol. 128, July 20, 1982, p. 17041.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Congress, House Speaker's Commission on Pages, *Hearings Before the Speaker's Commission on Pages*, part 1, 97<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., July 22-24, 1982, Aug. 4, 1982 (Washington: GPO, 1982), 381p.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Congress, House Speaker's Commission on Pages, *Report to the Speaker*, committee print, 97<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 1982), 54 p.

<sup>6</sup> *Congressional Record*, vol. 128, Nov. 30, 1982, p. H20831.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate Management Board, *Memorandum*, July 14, 1982, 3 p.

By the end of 1983, most of these recommendations had been implemented. Senate pages were required to live in the same supervised facility as the House pages, they were provided better overall supervision, meal service, and organized recreation. The Senate also voted to limit pages to 11<sup>th</sup> grade students.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Senate formalized the longstanding practice of having the Sergeant at Arms and the two party secretaries administer the page program. Subsequently, the Senate established its own Page Board composed of the Secretary of the Senate and the Sergeant at Arms.<sup>9</sup> In 1995, the Senate pages moved into their own supervised housing (separate from the House pages), Daniel Webster Hall, which is located on the Senate side of the Capitol. At the same time, in 1995, the Senate cancelled its contract with the District of Columbia School System and opened its independent page school in Webster Hall.

## Recent Developments

Early in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, legislation was enacted to enlarge the House Page Board to include equal representation from the majority and minority parties as well as the inclusion of a former page and the parent of a current page. P.L. 110-2, which was signed by the President on February 2, 2007, also requires regular meetings of the Page Board on a schedule established jointly by the House leadership.<sup>10</sup>

After nearly 25 years, Members of Congress and others in and out of government have been reexamining the page system and considering changes and alternatives. The debate follows the resignation of a Representative on September 29, 2006, after reports of alleged improper communications between the Member and a former page. The examination and discussions have centered more on the oversight of the page program rather than on its retention. The program's value has always been lauded by those Members of Congress who served as pages, as well as by other former pages.

On October 5, 2006, the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct voted unanimously to “establish an Investigative Subcommittee regarding any conduct of Members, officers, and employees of the House related to information concerning improper conduct involving Members and current and former [congressional] pages.”<sup>11</sup>

The Subcommittee issued its report on December 8, 2006. Although expressing concerns about the conduct of some Members, officers, and employees of the House,

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<sup>8</sup> *Congressional Record*, vol. 129, July 29, 1983, p. 21646.

<sup>9</sup> According to the office of the Senate Sergeant at Arms, other Senate officials responsible for the Senate page program attend the meetings of the Senate Page Board.

<sup>10</sup> *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 153, Jan. 19, 2007, pp. H764-H768.

<sup>11</sup> [[http://www.house.gov/ethics/Press\\_Statement\\_Page\\_Subcomm.htm](http://www.house.gov/ethics/Press_Statement_Page_Subcomm.htm)], and *Washington Post*, Oct. 6, 2006, pp. A1, A4. The FBI and Justice Department are also investigating the allegations.



it concluded that none of them “violated the House Code of Official Conduct.”<sup>12</sup> Although the Subcommittee recommended no further disciplinary proceedings, it noted that its report

... should serve as a strong reminder to Members, officers, and employees of the House that they are obligated to pursue specific and non-specific allegations of improper conduct between a Member or House employee and a participant in the House Page Program.... The failure to exhaust all reasonable efforts to call attention to potential misconduct ... is a present danger to House pages and to the integrity of the institution of the House.<sup>13</sup>

The report also contained recommendations for reforming the operation of the page program.

## Proposals for Change

In the report of its investigation of allegations involving Members of the House and pages, the Investigative Subcommittee of the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct recommended a review of the current House page program to ensure the safety and well-being of the pages.<sup>14</sup> The Subcommittee also suggested that (1) the Page Board meet regularly to ensure the proper management of the program and that the Clerk and the others, who oversee the program, have the necessary resources to address unforeseen issues; and (2) consideration should be given to having equal representation from both parties on the Page Board.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after the Subcommittee issued its report, Speaker-elect Nancy Pelosi announced that she would proceed not only to require the Page Board to meet regularly, but also add equal party representation to the board as well as a parent of a current page and a parent of a former page.<sup>16</sup>

In October 2006, as a result of the allegations and published reports of improper conduct, some Members of Congress called for a suspension of the House page program until a full evaluation is completed.<sup>17</sup> One Representative, who is also a former page, said, “the pages aren’t responsible for this scandal. Members of

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, *Investigation of Allegations Related to Improper Conduct Involving Members and Current or Former House Pages*, 109<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., H.Rept. 109-733 (Washington: GPO 2006), pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> “Pelosi Set to Take Steps to Protect House Pages,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 12, 2006, p. A6.

<sup>17</sup> John McArdle, “LaHood: Send The Pages Home,” *Roll Call*, Oct. 5, 2006, pp. 1, 23; Steve Tetreault, “Porter Urges Suspension of House Page Program,” *Las Vegas Review Journal*, Oct. 4, 2006, p. 4A.

Congress are. And any reforms that go forward ought to have primary focus on our behavior, not that of the pages.”<sup>18</sup>

One Member suggested the assistance of outside congressional scholars to review the program.<sup>19</sup> Another proposed creating a process for investigating alleged misconduct involving a minor.<sup>20</sup> Most of the discussion, however, focused on the congressional page boards in general and the House page board in particular, and the need for the pages to have an advocate separate from Congress when there is a problem.

Ideas have ranged from having equal party representation on the House Page Board,<sup>21</sup> to having former Members of Congress as co-chairs of the House Page Board,<sup>22</sup> to a new process of oversight to include a page board composed of Members and staff and an outside overseer.<sup>23</sup>

One former page recommended “getting Congress out of the page business” with the creation of a single congressional page board composed primarily of former pages.<sup>24</sup> The board would have offices in the House and Senate, and have the ability to report any wrongdoing involving the pages directly to the two congressional ethics committees, which would be required to investigate the complaints. According to this former page, “. . . the greatest resource and protection for the page academy can be found in its alumni. Former pages now hold considerable power throughout the legal, business and media worlds.”<sup>25</sup>

Another idea suggested was for the creation of a United States Page Foundation to help fund the page program and offer support to current and former pages.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rep. Tom Davis, “Don’t Punish Our Pages — They Are Not the Problem,” *Roll Call*, Oct. 10, 2006, p. 10

<sup>19</sup> McArdle, “LaHood: Send the Pages Home,” pp. 1, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Rep. Mark Kirk, “Congress Must Remember Kids Come First,” *Roll Call*, Oct. 10, 2006, p. 8; [[http://www.house.gov/list/speech/il10\\_kirk/houserules.html](http://www.house.gov/list/speech/il10_kirk/houserules.html)].

<sup>21</sup> Rep. Davis, “Don’t Punish Our Pages — They Are Not the Problem,” p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Rep. Kirk, “Congress Must Remember Kids Come First,” p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Norman Ornstein, “For House Ethics Committee, Now is Do-or-Die Time,” *Roll Call*, Oct. 12, 2006, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Turley, “Get Congress Out of the Page Business,” *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 2006, p. A27.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Turley, “A Page Protection Act: The Path to Saving a Historic Program,” *Roll Call*, Oct. 5, 2006, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Rep. Davis, “Don’t Punish Our Pages — They Are Not the Problem,” p. 10; and Turley, “A Page Protection Act: The Path to Saving a Historic Program,” 13.

## Issues and Alternatives

It is hoped that changing the make-up and requiring regular meetings of the House Page Board will have an impact on public perception of congressional oversight of the page program. This action is viewed as a major step toward restoring to the program the confidence of parents of potential pages and that of the general public. It also reinforces the House's commitment to a safe environment for its pages. Having parents as Board members will improve communication between those with authority for the program and offer better opportunities for concerns about the pages' well-being to be addressed. The Page Board can be a solid foundation for ensuring that the safety and well-being of the pages will be considered in a cohesive and comprehensive manner.

Any major changes to the page program, especially changes that would suspend or replace it, could have an impact that reaches far beyond the program itself. Eliminating the program could reflect negatively on Congress. There would also be a need to address the necessity of the duties currently performed by the pages, as well as who would perform those duties in their absence, and at what cost. The disposition of the buildings currently used to house and educate the pages would likewise need to be assessed.

Over the years, when Congress has discussed the page system and any changes, most of the dialogue has been about improving their supervision, housing, and education as well as the appropriate age range. In 1982, the Speaker's Commission on Pages addressed the nature and value of the page system and looked at alternatives for the page services.<sup>27</sup>

The commission discussed maintaining some form of the present system; assigning the services to augmented staffs of Members, officers, and committees; contracting for the page services with outside firms; or a combination of all these alternatives.<sup>28</sup> The commission rejected the augmentation of existing staffs not only because it would not be cost effective, but could also cause problems with a more decentralized system. Contracting with outside messengers was also rejected because of the increase in cost and the potential problems presented by the irregular congressional schedule and security requirements in Congress.

The commission concluded that the page services are necessary for the efficient operation of Congress, and that the "present system ... has worked satisfactorily for nearly 200 years."<sup>29</sup> The Members noted that substantial improvements would be needed to retain the present system.

The commission also addressed the age and term of service of pages with concerns for the moral and legal responsibilities of Congress. The Members

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<sup>27</sup> U.S. Congress, Speaker's Commission on Pages, *Report to the Speaker*, committee print, 97<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 1982), pp. 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

considered using senior citizens or retired military personnel as pages. This alternative was rejected because the nature of page work and the sometimes strenuous duties would make messenger duties inappropriate to the age and experience of this age group, and these individuals have other opportunities for public service.<sup>30</sup> The use of college students was also rejected because of questions raised about their level of enthusiasm for page work and their desires for more substantive work.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to limiting the ages of pages to high school juniors in 1983, Congress had last addressed the page age issue between 1966 through 1970, when it was considering other internal reforms.

In 1966, the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress recommended limiting congressional page appointments to those individuals who had completed high school and were not over 21.<sup>32</sup> The House took no action on this recommendation, but the next year the Senate voted to limit all page appointments to those who had completed the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and were not over age 22.<sup>33</sup>

In the 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, when the House Rules Committee reported the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, it contained a provision limiting House and Senate pages to those who had completed the 12<sup>th</sup> grade but were not over age 21.<sup>34</sup> When the House took up this portion of the legislation, it voted to keep the then-existing age limit of 16-18.<sup>35</sup> When the Senate took up its version of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, it voted to keep 14 to 18 as the age range of its pages.<sup>36</sup>

Raising the ages of pages is something Congress could consider again. In doing so, Congress would face the issues of whether older workers would be willing to perform the page duties and work at the current salary levels of pages, and the need for supervision and support. Most post-high-school and older congressional interns are unsupervised and are responsible for their own room and board.

In considering retaining high school age pages and having an outside group manage their supervision, Congress could look to the example of established programs like the Close-Up Foundation and Presidential Classroom. For a fee, these organizations have brought thousands of middle school and high school students to Washington, DC, over the years to promote informed participation in government through educational programs. These organizations supervise the students while they

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Congress, Jt. Committee on the Organization of Congress, *Report Pursuant to S. 2, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess.* (Washington: GPO, 1966), p. 51.

<sup>33</sup> Congressional Record, vol. 112, Mar. 7, 1967, p. 5683.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Congress, House Rules Committee, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970*, report to accompany H.R. 17654, H. Rept., 91-1215, 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 1970), p. 128.

<sup>35</sup> *Congressional Record*, vol. 116, Sept. 16, 1970, pp. 32229-32233.

<sup>36</sup> *Congressional Record*, vol. 116, Oct. 6, 1970, pp. 35014-35016.

are in Washington and provide them housing and meals.<sup>37</sup> As noted earlier, in 1982, the Speaker's Commission on Pages rejected outside messengers because of potential problems presented by the irregular congressional schedule and security requirements in Congress.

The importance of the page program has been emphasized over and over. Many of the sentiments expressed are similar to the following from one Senator who stated, "Of one thing we may be certain, as we watch our young friends go about their daily tasks here: the Senate could not function very well without them."<sup>38</sup>

Moreover former pages and others in and out of government say that being a page is a rewarding chance for high school students to view government in action and participate in a leadership building experience.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> [<http://www.closeup.org/>]; and [<http://www.presidentialclassroom.org/>].

<sup>38</sup> Robert C. Byrd, *The Senate 1789-1989, Addresses on the History of the United States Senate, Volume Two (Bicentennial Edition)*. S. Doc. 100-20, 100<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 1989), p. 390.

<sup>39</sup> Rep. Tom Davis, "Don't Punish Our Pages — They Are Not the Problem," p. 10; and Turley, "Get Congress Out Of The Page Business," A27.