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At least it's not Cleveland

I saw an advertisement in the paper the other day imploring me to come up with the five-word slogans that will sell Boston to the world.

Based on creativity, originality, presentation and neatness, I could win both fame andfortune.

I don't remember the last time I entered a contest. I do remember the last time I won one. I was six or seven years old. It was at the annual auto show in Detroit, back when there were more Americans automakers than Japanese ones.

The coveted prize was a toy pickup truck with an AM radio inside. One had to be present to win.

Sent to my parents' chagrin, I issued upon being named the fortunate's loved ones. See, Mom, you have to be there to win.

I drew a new name. The man read it. A scream went up. Each person who had won either the Reader's Digest Sweepstakes or the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes. I don't know anyone who read it. "That's me," I said.

The House of Representatives reacted excessively last week when it censured Jerry E. Studds (D-Mass.) and Daniel B. Crane (R-II). It should have accepted the House ethics committee's recommendation to reprimand the two.

Each admitted having a sexual relationship with a congressional page. Studds, with a 17-year-old boy, Crane with a 17-year-old girl. Each admitted giving the page alcohol before having sex with him or her. Their congressional peers charged Studds and Crane with violating some parental responsibilities, degrading minors and violating their public trust. The House voted, for these reasons, to change the reprimand to a censure — next to expulsion the most serious action the House can take — by a count of 289-136 in Crane's case and 338-87 in Studds'. The censures were then approved with only three votes against in each case.

It is interesting to note that people are more upset by Studds' homosexual relationship than by Crane's heterosexual one. Some critics Studds' "lack of remorse," while Crane appeared before the House tearfully begging his family's forgiveness for his transgression. A much more likely reason is prejudice against Studds' sexual preference.

If anything, Crane's action was the more reprehensible. He is married, with children, and regularly crusades against "morale decay" and such immoral activity as adultery. Crane is a hypocrite who misrepresents himself; Studds is not.

The question with which the House needed to deal is what punishments best fit the two members' "crime." Before Crane and Studds, the House had censured only two of its members since 1921. Both cases involved financial misdeeds. The last censure in the US Senate was that of Joseph R. McCarthy, for his incredible abuses of power during his hunt for communists in the 1950s.

The picture of congressional pages painted by the House and the press is one of fresh-faced innocents lured to the apartments of dirty old men. Such picture bears little resemblance to the reality. As Boston Globe columnist Ellen Goodman pointed out, these pages were no babes in the Capitol. Hanging around Washington politics turns them into hardened, cynical people and onto drugs, alcohol and sex. A former page tells of how some of the male pages would flirt with Studds, then laugh with their peers behind his back.

The most important fact is that neither page involved in the great scandal would criticize the congressmen before the House ethics committee. Ultimately, no page was hurt by Crane's and Studds' action.

The humiliation of two congressmen is not the most significant result of the censure votes. That will pass. Under the rules of the Democratic caucus, however, a censured congressman must be stripped of any committee chair he holds for the duration of that Congress. Studds will lose his chairmanship of the Coast Guard and Navigation Subcommittee of the Merchant Marine and Fisher Committees.

While this may not be the most important chair in the House, Studds has proven himself a good congressman, deserving of the chance to provide the leadership of which he is capable. From that chair, he could serve as an excellent example that sexual preference does not affect a person's abilities. One only hopes that Crane's and Studds' misjudgments — three and ten years ago, respectively — and the House's overreaction, will not plague the two, or impair their abilities or commitments.