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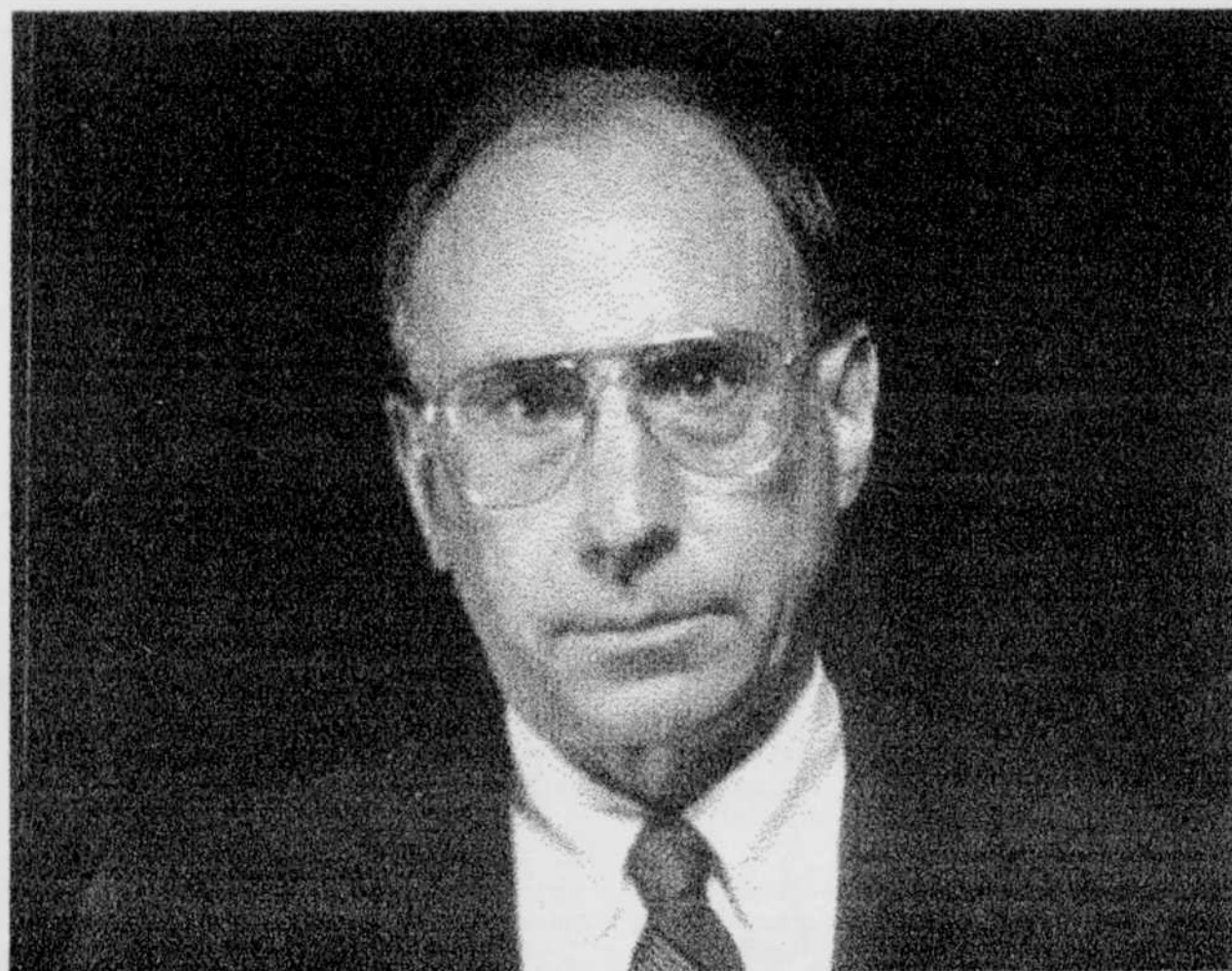
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national news



Gerry Studds

Studds hoists anchor

The Massachusetts lawmaker announces that, after 23 years of service, he will not run in '96

by Bob Roehr

Rep. Gerry Studds (D-Mass.), one of three openly gay members of Congress, will not run for re-election. Studds made the announcement to some 200 supporters in Edgartown, on the island of Martha's Vineyard, where he had held his first town meeting 23 years ago.

"It is now time for me to chart a new course: by no means to retire, but to find new endeavors," he said, adding that these would be personal as well as professional challenges.

Studds was first elected to Congress in 1972 and was re-elected six times after being censured by the House in 1983 for allegedly having sex with a 17-year-old male congressional page. Studds became the first openly gay U.S. representative when he came out on the floor of the House during the 1983 scandal.

Studds, 58, most recently won re-election with 69 percent of the vote. He lambasted Republican control of Congress, but said it did not affect his decision. He said he had been considering retirement even before the 1994 campaign.

He was the first openly gay member of Congress and the first to chair a committee, Merchant Marine and Fisheries. From that position, with jurisdiction over the Coast Guard, Studds led early efforts to lift the ban on gay men and lesbians serving in the armed forces.

He has been a leader in the fight against AIDS. He sits on the House Commerce Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Ryan White CARE Act and research programs at the National Institutes of Health. He has fought for increased AIDS funding and against anti-gay amendments.

"It's a great loss," said Mario Cooper, president of the AIDS Action Council. "He has been a

respected and effective advocate able to talk to all sides."

"He's been a quiet champion who tried to bring people together," said Alexander Robinson, AIDS lobbyist for the American Civil Liberties Union. "He represented his district well and showed that gay and lesbian politicians are not single-issue people.... He has been an example for aspiring gay and lesbian politicians that you could be re-elected and be openly gay."

For Daniel Zingale of the Human Rights Campaign, "At the top of the list is his lead and co-sponsorship of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. It was a critical strategic shift that breathed new life into our civil rights movement."

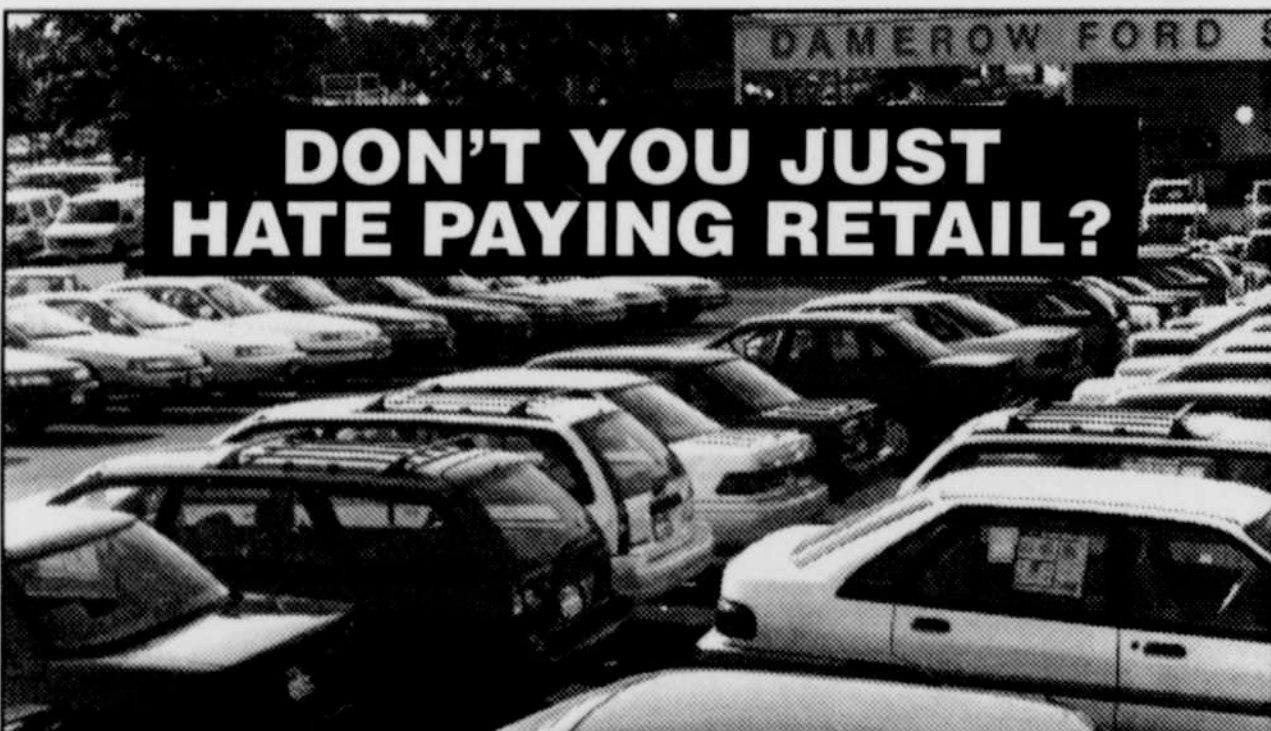
Dixon Osburn, co-director of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, called Studds "the knight in shining armor" for gay men and lesbians in the military. "He has always been in the forefront of the battle, in Congress or behind the scenes, trying to ameliorate the situation for service members. He challenged Clinton to stand by principles and lift the ban through executive order."

Staffer Mark Agrast has worked for Studds for the past

three years. "He is congressman to the gay world, [receiving] calls and letters from people looking for help or looking for reinforcement.... He is an example that there is nothing a gay person cannot achieve," Agrast said.

A second openly gay member of Congress, Steve Gunderson (R-Wis.), announced during his 1994 re-election campaign that this would be his last term. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) would be the only openly gay member of Congress when that body convenes in 1997, if he runs and is re-elected.

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