

A BONE FROM BILL

Assessing the state of the union, Clinton's speech touches on ENDA and hate crimes bill by Bob Roehr

President Bill Clinton's *State of the Union* address seemed to have something for everyone—including a bone for gay men and lesbians.

"Discrimination or violence because of race or religion, ancestry or gender, disability or sexual orientation is wrong and it ought to be illegal," said the chief executive during his Jan. 19 address. "Therefore I ask Congress to make the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and the Hate Crimes Prevention Act the law of the land."

The television camera caught U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, an openly gay Democrat from Massachusetts, applauding proudly.

the already protected categories of religion, race and national origin.

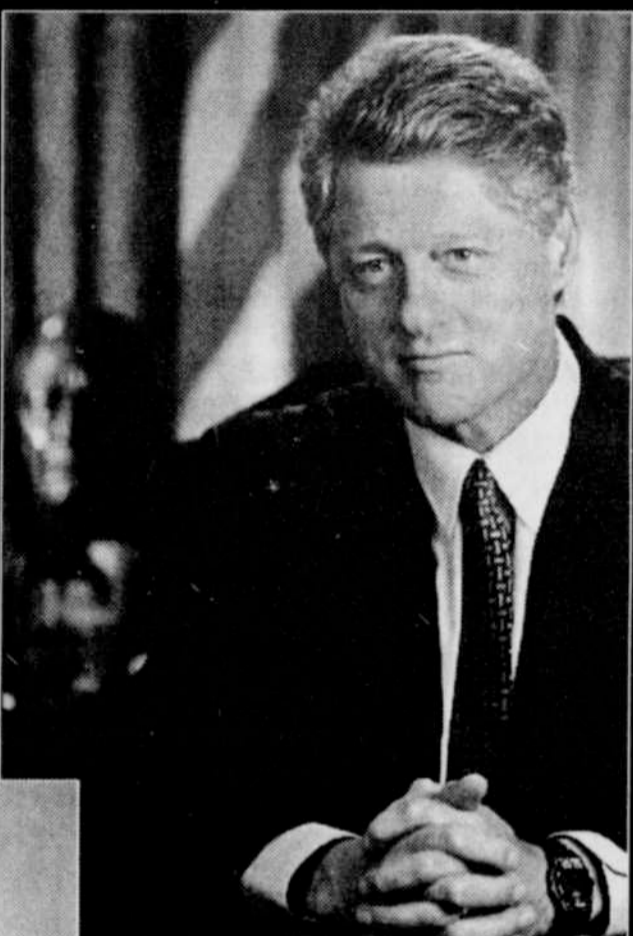
It would allow the FBI to intervene in cases where local law enforcement is either unable or unwilling to solve a crime or protect the victims from further attacks. The measure would also expand the circumstances in which the FBI could involve itself in a case.

"We hope to work with Congress to see that this bipartisan legislation, which is popular with the public and backed by the president, can get passed this year," says Winnie Stachelberg, HRC's political director.

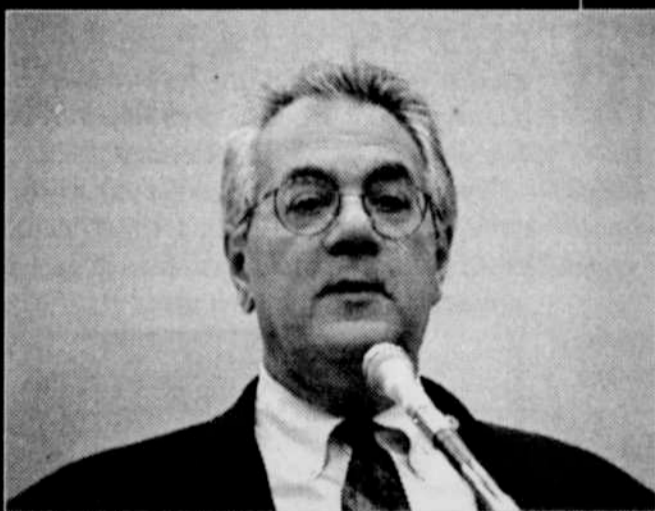
During his address, Clinton passed up several other opportunities where he could have

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—from President Clinton's State of the Union address



President Bill Clinton (above) and Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass.



Frank and officials from the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay and lesbian political group, had labored to get a mention included in the address.

"President Clinton's call to end violence and discrimination against gay Americans is a testament to his long-standing commitment to civil rights and was an act of bold leadership," says HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch. "Establishing the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and the Hate Crimes Prevention Act as national priorities reinvigorated momentum for both bills in the 106th Congress."

If approved by Congress, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment. In 1996, the act came within one vote of passing the Senate.

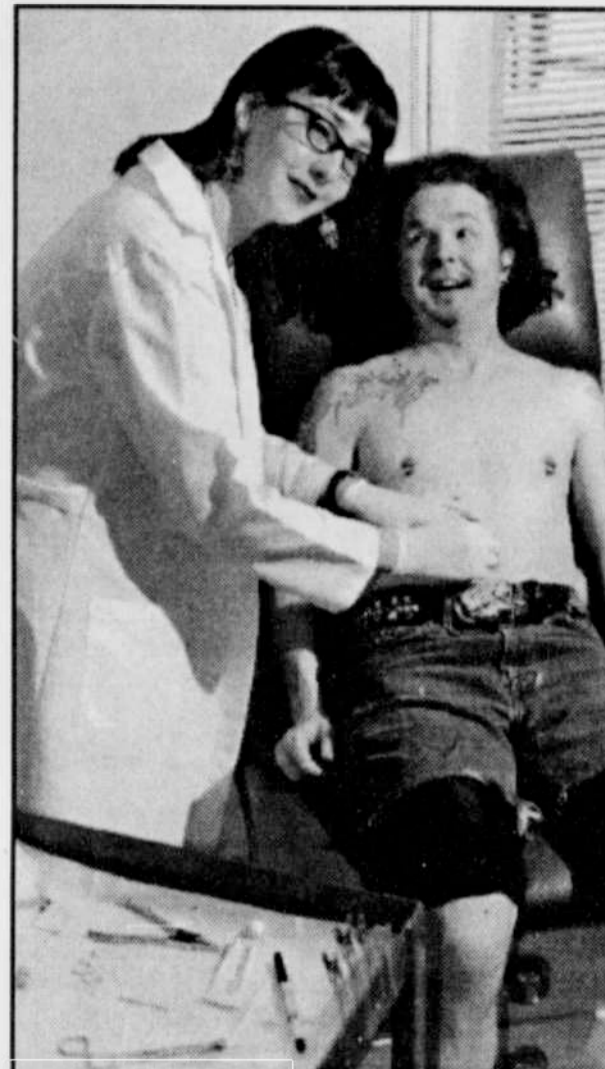
The Hate Crimes Prevention Act seeks to protect gay and lesbian people from bias-motivated attacks. The measure would add sexual orientation, as well as gender and disability, to

included gay men and lesbians. For example, some feel his call for "sensible discipline policies" in schools could have also included a safe learning environment for queer youth. Additionally, the many mentions of family did not deviate from the nuclear variety to embrace alternatives.

The Republican response, meanwhile, may have frightened some queer folk. Rep. Steve Largent, a Republican from Oklahoma, asked: "What does the GOP stand for?"

Largent is an ultraconservative and staunch ally of James Dobson, head of Focus on the Family. Largent explained that individual liberty "comes from God and [is] his blessing on this land. Freedom reigns only as we act responsibly toward God, each other, and his creation."

He said his governmental priorities include building a missile defense system for the United States and "protecting the unborn" by ending partial birth abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide.



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