

Dangerous liaisons

Q: What drives some politicians into sexual situations they know could jeopardize their political careers?

A: Lust

By Todd Simmons

When Emmett Stagg cruised through Dublin's Phoenix Park one night last November and asked a young man to get into his car, he wasn't doing anything scores of men hadn't done before in an area better known for its hustlers than for its greenery or bicycle paths.

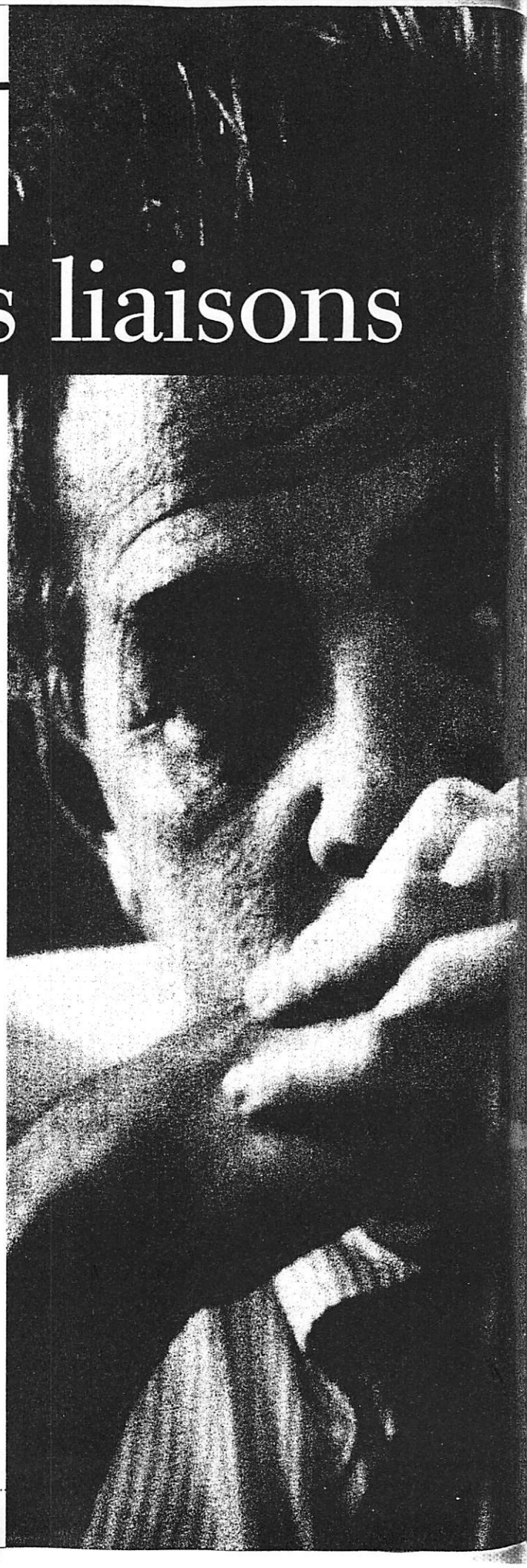
What made Stagg's adventure noteworthy—to the police and ultimately to the public—was that he's married, has two children, and serves as a minister of state in the Irish government. Still, the Irish press's kid-glove treatment in reporting on the private lives of public officials kept Stagg's identity from the public for months.

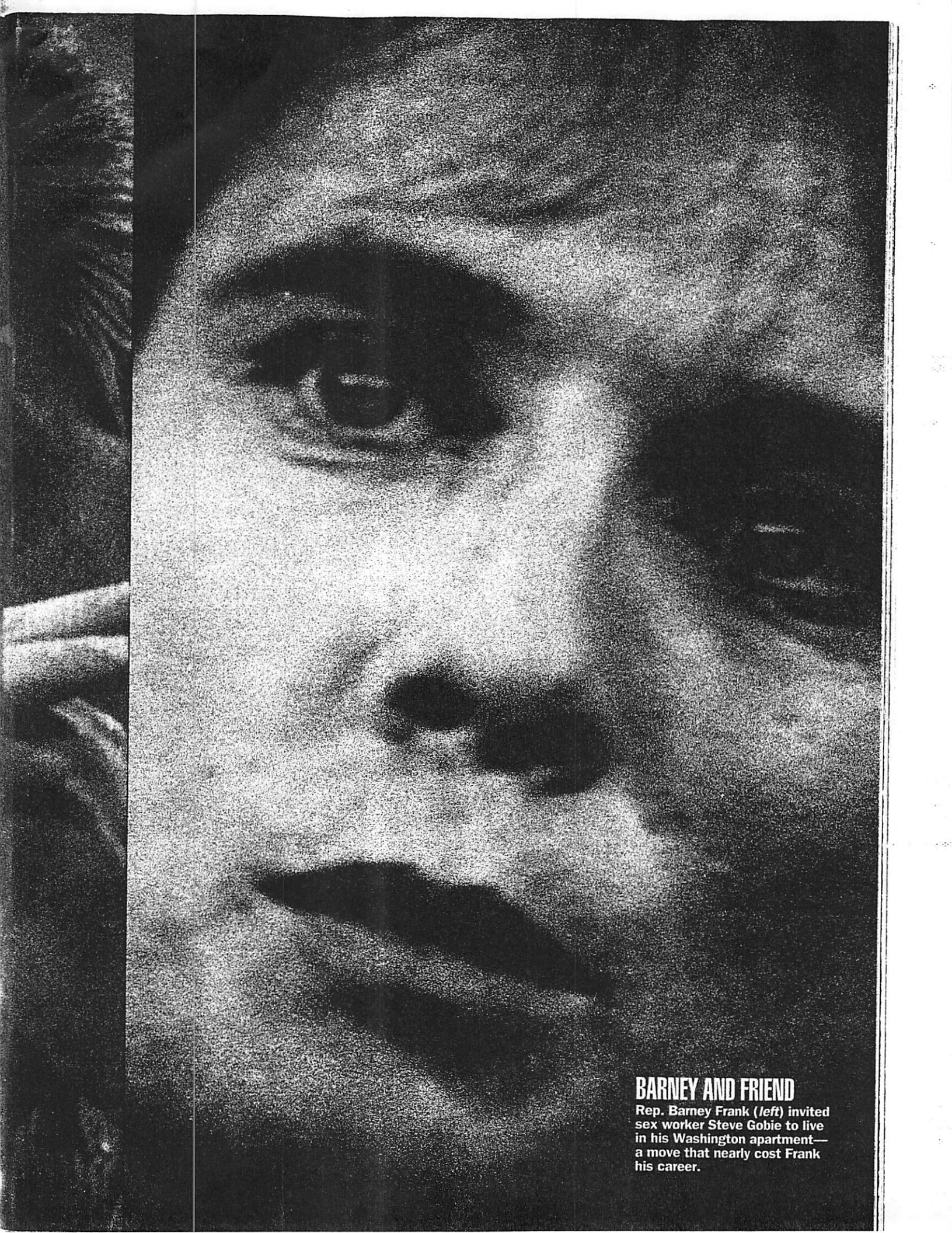
But after months of rumors swirling around the Irish politician over the incident, Stagg finally came forward in March and admitted to his "undoubtedly indiscreet" action. However, he insisted that "no wrongful act occurred." Prime Minister Albert Reynolds, in turn, accepted Stagg's admission and publicly called for "charity and restraint" from those judging the event.

Yet the question remains: What would drive a well-known, successful politician, gay or straight, to put his or her political career on the line for a few moments of sex? Some experts say the answers range from sheer arrogance to complete desperation.

University of South Florida psychology professor Louis Penner says it's easy for politicians to believe they can get away with whatever they want, given the environments in which they operate. "These are people who are being told all day long that they're great," he says. "They've been able to achieve virtually everything they've set out to do. Often they don't have objective views of themselves. Such a politician might believe that even if he does get caught, he can talk his way out of it because, after all, he can do anything."

Former U.S. senator Gary Hart is a good example, argues Penner. In 1987 Hart denied rumors that he was involved in extramarital affairs with women and challenged reporters to





BARNEY AND FRIEND

Rep. Barney Frank (*left*) invited sex worker Steve Gobbie to live in his Washington apartment—a move that nearly cost Frank his career.



GENE BAGNATO

Robert Bauman

The former U.S. representative from Maryland blamed his lack of discretion on alcoholism.



ELLEN SHUB

Gerry Studds

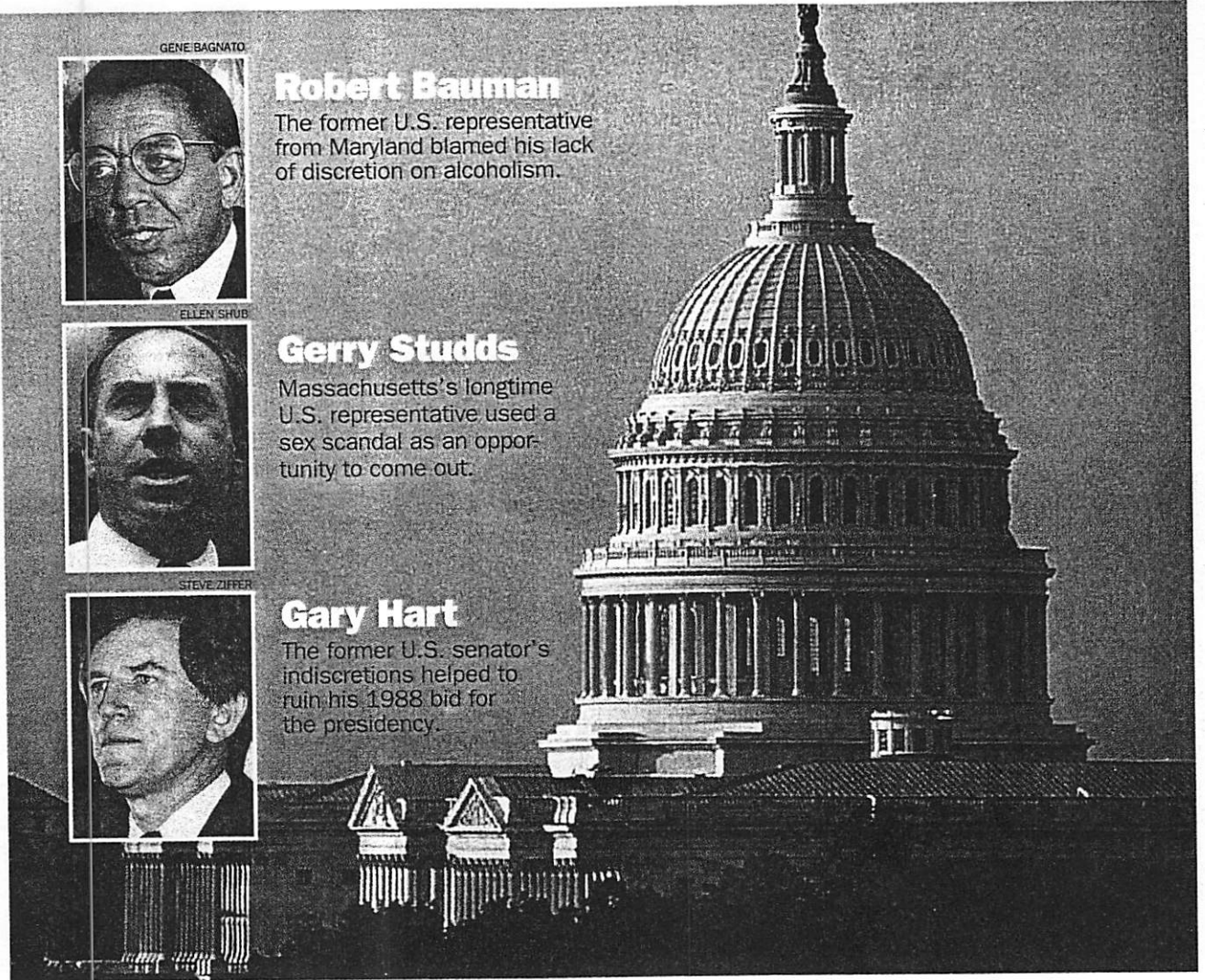
Massachusetts's longtime U.S. representative used a sex scandal as an opportunity to come out.



STEVE ZIFFER

Gary Hart

The former U.S. senator's indiscretions helped to ruin his 1988 bid for the presidency.



disprove him. Within weeks a team of *Miami Herald* reporters uncovered the Colorado senator's dalliances with Donna Rice, and the senator's bid for the presidency was over.

However, the Hart scenario is less common among gay and lesbian politicians, who are more likely to be ensnared by the hypocrisy of the closet than by unabashed hubris, says David Fleischer, training coordinator for the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, a Washington, D.C.-based group that provides funding and training for openly gay political candidates. He explains that closeted gay pols sometimes believe they can compartmentalize their lives into distinct public and private entities with no overlap. "But lying about something as fundamental as sexual orientation is very risky business," says Fleischer. "Just because you're hiding doesn't mean you'll be able to

suppress your orientation. You can't will yourself to be something you're not. And if you have no way to express your sexuality, that's a very hard way to live."

Few know this better than Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), perhaps the best-known openly gay public official in the United States. Frank served eight years in the Massachusetts legislature before he was elected to Congress in 1980. Despite his political success he claims his life was empty. "People thought I cared so much about public life that I didn't have time for a private life," he told *Newsweek* in 1989. "[But] if you don't have a private life, it just doesn't work. The most satisfying public life is no substitute for a private life."

At an emotional nadir in the '80s, Frank turned to hustlers for sex. He became attached to one he met in

1985, Steve Gobie, whom he asked to live with him. Gobie repaid the favor by launching a prostitution ring out of Frank's Washington apartment. When Frank discovered the enterprise in 1987—the year he became the first gay federal official to publicly declare his homosexuality—he ended his relationship with Gobie and threw the hustler out.

Two years later Gobie went public with the story, mirroring Frank in a scandal that nearly cost him his career. Pundits predicted a political death for Frank, and some gay activists turned on him, accusing Frank of hurting the gay rights cause.

Undaunted and claiming he was "suckered" by a con artist during a period of emotional vulnerability, Frank won reelection in 1990 and 1992. "I think my honesty was helpful in overcoming it," says Frank. "People kept predicting that more

was going to come out. But basically I told everything that first week. It also helped that I could say to people, 'Look, this is the way I lived when I was closeted. But it doesn't happen anymore.'"

In fact, "those who choose to remain closeted over their sexuality often engage in self-destructive behavior," says Fleischer. Former U.S. congressman Robert Bauman, for example, was turned out of office after he solicited sex from an underage boy, citing alcoholism as the reason for his poor judgment.

Penner speculates that some closeted politicians might engage in indiscreet sexual behavior because they want to get caught. For such a person, "taking part in risky sex may be a way of subconsciously trying to out oneself," he says.

Former Washington, D.C., power broker Marvin Liebman, who came out in the pages of *National Review* four years ago and who knows Bauman, believes Penner's theory could apply in Bauman's case. "He really

went out of his way to get caught," says Liebman, who adds that Bauman—a married man with a family—made little secret of his forays with young men at gay bars in Washington. "I think that's the way it works sometimes," explains Liebman. "Some public figures want to come out. I should know. I was in the closet for 67 years."

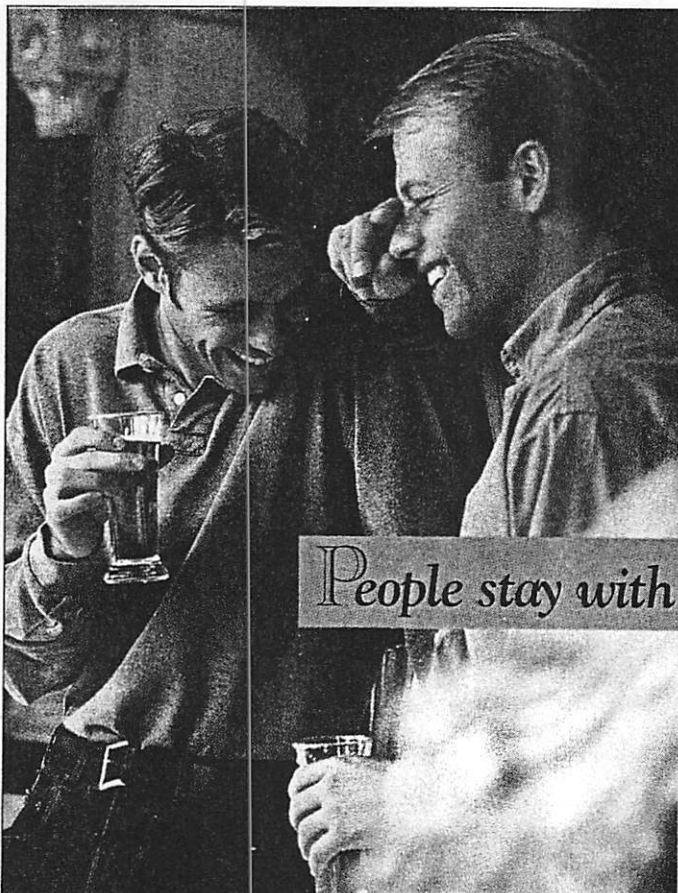
Frank disagrees. "I certainly didn't want to get caught," he says. "There's a physical craving you have for sex, particularly if you've been denying it for a long time. The absence of any other outlet may lead you to engage in risky behavior."

Fleischer and Frank, however, agree that gay politicians end up paying a higher price than their straight counterparts when they get caught for sexual misconduct. Says Fleischer: "It underscores people's worst stereotypical fears about gays."

Yet Gregory King, spokesman for the Washington, D.C.-based Human Rights Campaign Fund, the country's largest gay and lesbian political orga-

nization, says such incidents "have to be judged on a case-by-case basis." He points out that in the early '80s a sexual scandal involving congressional members and house pages surfaced, implicating both representatives Gerry Studds (D-Mass.) and Daniel Crane (R-Ill.). Studds, who was revealed to have had sex with a 17-year-old male page a decade before, used the incident to come out. Voters rewarded his honesty with five subsequent reelections, and Studds is now the only openly gay U.S. representative ever to chair a standing House committee.

Meanwhile, Crane, who was linked to an underage female page, was not subsequently reelected. Says King: "As a rule, I think gays and lesbians are held to a higher standard. But I have a sense that as voters come to know gays and lesbians, they're more accepting than they were ten years ago. The point is, voters don't like scandals, and it doesn't really matter whether the scandal is gay or straight." ●



At our hotels you'll find people from all walks of life enjoying a sense of hospitality that goes beyond the definition. Sure, you'll find a welcoming reception, relaxing accommodations and friendly service, but to us comfortable means more than a well-appointed guest room. It means you feel great about who you are and where you're staying. With us you'll be comfortable... and you'll feel comfortable.

People stay with us without any reservations.

Call for reservations in Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon.



We're proud to offer AT&T In-room Long Distance Service for all your AT&T Calling Card, AT&T Universal Card and operator-assisted calls.

SEATTLE: **Days Inn Town Center** • **Sixth Avenue Inn** • **Meany Tower Hotel**
800 • 899 • 0249 800 • 899 • 0250 800 • 899 • 0251

PORTLAND: **Portland Inn** • **Riverside Inn**
800 • 899 • 0248 800 • 899 • 0247