

Do Tell: Bill Clinton's Greatest Promise and Compromise to the Queer Community

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Introduction and Historiographic Context

On May 18th, 1992, future U.S. President William Jefferson Clinton stood before hundreds of LGBTQ+ attendees at the Palace Theater in Hollywood and argued that America needed Queer people because they were willing to serve their country. Nominee Clinton claimed he would act, and act he did: more than one year after his presidential inauguration, Bill Clinton issued the Department of Defense Directive 1304.26 on February 28th, 1994, otherwise known as the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. This policy mandated that the armed forces could not ask a service member or applicant if they were gay or bisexual and ordered that service members could not disclose their sexual orientation under threat of being discharged. This policy was not what Bill Clinton promised his Queer supporters two years earlier. While broken promises are nothing new in politics, this action was seen as a substantial betrayal given how hard Clinton fought for their vote. The former governor of Arkansas actively sought to gain the support of the Queer community by promising to repeal the ban on gays in the military since the early days of his campaign. However, once in office, Clinton failed to do this and instead instituted a weaker policy that discriminated against the people he promised to champion.

Historian George Chauncey argues that World War I brought

many rural men into urban settings that exposed them to more Queer people in larger numbers. Despite efforts to stop these interactions, soldiers and sailors were having relations with other Queer people.¹ Similarly, historian Margot Canaday argues that the state, as a regulatory and administrative power, chose to police homosexuality. Looking at WWI, Canaday notes how the military began to fear stigmas associated with homosexuality.² The institution had to choose whether to punish “homosexual acts” (framed through the lens of sodomy) or homosexual “status” (those deemed physically or psychologically perverted). This policing and negative treatment of Queer people in the military worsened during the World War II.

Allan Bérubé traces the experiences of gay men and women during World War II with the rise of psychiatric classifications, new regulations were put into place to screen out potential homosexuals. Despite threats of incarceration, this did not stop Queer people from joining the military. At the beginning of the war, those individuals that were found to be homosexual were sent to prison. This policy proved to be too cumbersome, and so the U.S. military elected to discharge homosexual personnel without trial.³ Separation from the armed services became the standard procedure for those found or suspected of engaging in homosexual acts; by 1945 the military had discharged nine thousand service members with the label of their record. This laid the precedent for how the U.S. military would handle Queer service members throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

This paper examines newspapers and magazines from 1992 to 1994 and how both the mainstream and Queer media relayed information regarding Bill Clinton, the 1992 presidential election and the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. These include articles from the *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Advocate*, and *Out Magazine*. This essay uses comparative analysis to highlight the differences between these sources.

It should be noted that this article uses “Queer” as an umbrella term for those who identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and

1 George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic Books, 1994), 143.

2 Canaday, *The Straight State*, 87.

3 Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (The Free Press, 1990), 128.

Transgender, as well as other sexual and gender identities. While the Queer community has always been diverse within the United States, the Gay community of the early 1990s was perceived to both the public and more importantly the political establishment as a mostly white, middle to upper-class population whose needs did not threaten the American economic system.⁴ It is both whiteness and socio-economic status that would solidify the Gay community as a voting bloc worth pursuing, yet only seen through the white male lens.

Clinton's Courtship of the Queer Community

During the lead-up to the 1992 election, the media presented Bill Clinton's garnering of Queer support as courting or "seeking to attract, as by solicitous attention or offers of advantage the Gay Community. The *Washington Post* notes "Bill Clinton's aggressive courtship of the gay vote" as do multiple articles in *The Advocate*.⁵ This act of courting also served to contrast Clinton with his political opponent George H.W. Bush. One article notes that "while Bill Clinton is actively courting gay support, President Bush is dismissing gay voters and embracing people who oppose civil rights for gays and lesbians;" another says "in contrast to Bush, Clinton assiduously courted the gay vote since entering the race last year."⁶ Both mainstream and Queer news publications used this term, implying that the Queer electorate was desired, which would have been a new sensation for this presidential race. This stark contrast in stance between Republicans and Democrats over Queer issues developed over the course of the election. In February of 1992 the issue seemed more bipartisan with "Republicans ... [contending] that the Democrats alone will not further gay rights." However, by August, gay Republicans were not confident that Bush would support the Queer community.⁷ Until this election cycle Queer people had been "ignored" by Republicans.⁸ As Queer issues took center stage in the national debate this was no longer feasible. Republicans chose to take an anti-gay stance, making Clinton's courting even more appealing to the Queer community.

4 Peg Byron, "Meet Mixner the Fixer", *Out*, October 1, 1992, 59.

5 Michael Isikoff, "Gay's Mobilizing for Clinton as Rights Become an Issue" *The Washington Post*, September 28, 1992.

6 Daniel Wilson, "Out in the Cold," *The Advocate*, August 25, 1992, 39.

7 John Gallagher, "Do the Democrats Get It?," *The Advocate*, February 11, 1992, 35.

8 Michelangelo Signorile, "What If We Win," *The Advocate*, October 20, 1992, 15.

To gain their vote, Clinton promised to appoint an AIDS “czar” to focus on the epidemic, as well as support civil rights legislation. One of Clinton’s earliest promises was to overturn the ban on gays serving in the military, a position he first articulated in October 1991 and repeated throughout his campaign.⁹ He reiterated this pledge in February 1992 in an interview with *The Advocate*, “[i]f elected, I would reverse the ban on gays and lesbians serving in the United States.”¹⁰ Clinton often returned to this point, reminding the public of the facts. In his speech at the Palace Theater fundraiser, he said that “there was no basis in national security for discriminating based on the sexual orientation of Americans who wish to serve in the military, I said I would act.”¹¹ At that same fundraiser he released campaign documents stating that he supported and would sign “an Executive Order banning all discrimination against gays and lesbians in federal employment and contracting, including the military.”¹² The last part “including the military” was underlined, stressing how seriously Clinton took this issue.

The result of Clinton’s promise was an outpouring of support, both financially and socially. Queer people campaigned for Clinton and helped to register new voters.¹³ Queer media largely agreed that Clinton had “clearly demonstrated that this is an issue he personally cares about.”¹⁴ While there was optimism over Clinton’s promises, not everyone within the Queer community was as enthusiastically supportive of him. Regular *The Advocate* contributor Michelangelo Signorile wrote, “I predicted that this supposedly pro-Queer candidate would sell us out as soon as it became politically expedient.”¹⁵ While Signorile’s pessimistic view would turn out to be correct, it was not a view shared by most of the Queer community. This lack of pushback from Queer constituents against Clinton was noted even by the mainstream media.¹⁶ As Clinton appeared staunch in his support of these issues, many took him at his word; it was only after the elec-

9 Chris Bull, “And the Ban Played On”, *The Advocate*, March 9, 1993.

10 Gallagher, “Do the Democrats Get It?”, 36.

11 Bill Clinton, 1992, “Let Us Rise to the Challenge” Palace Theater.

12 Clinton For President, Campaign Materials.

13 Isikoff, “Gay’s Mobilizing for Clinton as Rights Become an Issue.”

14 Bull, “And the Ban Played On”, 38.

15 Signorile, “What If We Win?”, 15.

16 Isikoff, “Gay’s Mobilizing for Clinton as Rights Become an Issue.”

tion that Clinton's voting record on Queer issues in Arkansas came under scrutiny.

Clinton did not court the Queer community alone. Bill Clinton had many friends across the country that would rise in support of his presidential campaign, deemed "FoB"s or a "Friends of Bill". One of these friends was a gay man named David Mixner, who met Clinton in 1969 as a part of a group that was protesting the Vietnam war.¹⁷ According to Mixner, Clinton called him in 1991 to solicit his support and by extension, the support of the Queer community in his upcoming presidential race.¹⁸ Mixner was a member of ANGLE (Access Now for Gay and Lesbian Equality), which allowed him to network and fundraise with the Los Angeles gay community. Mixner became the mouthpiece for the Queer community and was perceived as capable of convincing Clinton to support its needs. The relationship was not one-sided as Clinton said, "I want people like David in the government."¹⁹ Thus, the media deemed him²⁰ the "Fixer", someone who would be able to help Clinton resolve the issues plaguing the Queer community.²¹ Mixner was mentioned by name throughout multiple articles, often quoted as a political source, and officially joined the National Executive Committee of the Clinton for President Campaign.

Clinton would secure Queer support in part through two fundraisers. The first was held at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Beverly Hills on February 28th, 1992 and was notable for a few reasons. First; it was co-chaired by ANGLE and raised \$60,000, bringing the group to national prominence and demonstrating Mixner's influence. Second, it was the first major fundraiser for a presidential candidate conducted by a group representing the Queer community, demonstrating that he was not afraid to be associated with this population. Mixner noted "with that appearance Bill Clinton nailed down the Los Angeles community."²² While he had their support, the presidential candidate would need the support of the broader Queer community.

17 David Mixner, *A Stranger Among Friends* (Bantam, 1996), 88.

18 Mixner, *Stranger Among Friends*, 204.

19 Clinton, "Let Us Rise to the Challenge."

20 Byron, "Meet Mixner the Fixer."

21 Bull, "And the Ban Played on," 39.

22 Mixner, *Stranger Among Friends*, 226.

23 Karen Ocamb, "L.A. Gays net Clinton \$60000" 1992.

A few months later, Clinton would achieve this through the second fundraiser held on May 18th, 1992, at the Palace Theater in Hollywood. In attendance were five hundred gay men and women, a significantly large Queer crowd for a presidential campaign event. Flyers at the rally, plastered with Clinton's face, quoted him saying, "I have a vision, and you're part of it".²⁴ Clinton took the stage and gave a speech reaffirming his commitment to the Queer community, saying "[w]e don't have a person to waste...I want people like David Mixner and Roberta Achtenberg, Dr. Scot Hit, some of you in this audience, to be a part of a Clinton Administration, not because of or in spite of your sexual orientation, but because America needs you."²⁵ These kinds of promises had never been made so explicitly to the wider Queer community before by someone of such political prominence.

The fundraiser at the Palace Theater received much more mainstream attention than the fundraiser at the Beverly Wilshire just months before. Those in the mainstream media noted that "[a]nything Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton said to the audience of gay and lesbian activists who turned out at a fundraiser for his campaign in Hollywood on Monday night seemed less important than the simple fact he was there."²⁶ Attending this fundraiser showed clear support for the Queer community and revealed the novelty of a presidential candidate seeking such backing; on the other hand, they were seen as a potentially valuable voting bloc.

Clinton's courting of the Queer community also had a financial incentive. Members of the community had faced disdain or apathy from both major political parties, offering little reason to warrant monetary support. In 1984, Tom Harkin who would run against Clinton in 1992 "returned a \$2,000 check from [...] a gay political group."²⁷ In the 1992 election, Clinton, saw the opportunity to galvanize a new voting bloc, and in contrast to Harkin would "accept a \$5,000 from HRCF in 1991."²⁸ This is why Clinton called Mixner for his assistance and ultimately benefited from it. The Beverly Wilshire fund-

24 Clinton For President, Palace Fundraiser Material see fig 1.

25 Bill Clinton, Palace Theater, May 18, 1992.

26 Ronald Brownstein, "Clinton Addresses 600 at Rally of Gays, Lesbians", *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1992.

27 John Gallagher, "Do the Democrats Get It?", *The Advocate*, February 11, 1992.

28 Gallagher, "Do Democrats Get It?"

raiser yielded him \$60,000, and the Palace Theater event an additional \$50,000.²⁹ Clinton at this point had raised nearly \$900,000 in California, with over a ninth of it coming from these two fundraisers alone.³⁰

By the end of Clinton's campaign, news outlets reported that "gays and lesbians poured more than \$2 million into the Clinton campaign coffers,"³¹ with post-election estimates placing total donations as high as \$3 million.

Clinton carried this momentum into the election. The Queer community had accepted his courtship and turned out in record numbers to support him at the polls. Post-election polling corroborated this: "74% of voters who identified themselves as gay, lesbian,

or bisexual ... supported Clinton. The margin makes [them] the electorate's third most pro-Clinton voting bloc, following only Jews and blacks."³² Queer people saw Clinton's inauguration on January 20th, 1993, as a time for celebration.³³ Everyone was riding high; both Clinton and the Queer community viewed his win as a major success.

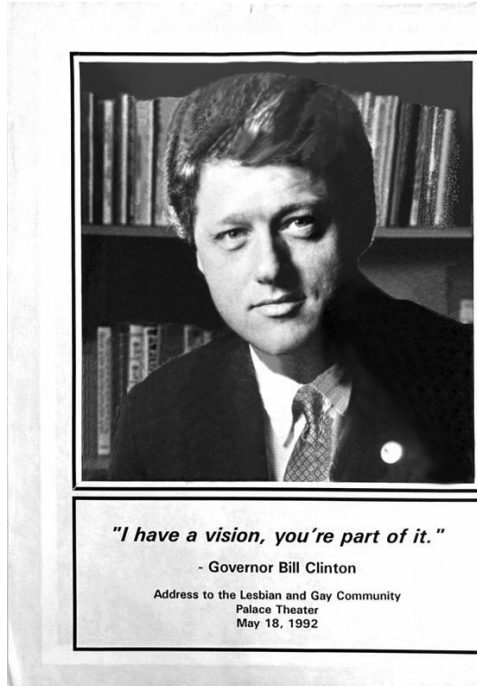


Figure 1: Photo of Bill Clinton with quote "I have a vision, you're part of it." Coll2013-091, Box 4, Clinton Campaign 2:28, R. Scott Hitt Papers, One Archive at the USC Libraries, Los Angeles, CA.

29 George Raine, "Clinton Promises 'real war' on AIDS", *San Francisco Examiner*, May 20, 1992.

30 Ocamb, "L.A. Gays net \$60,000 for Clinton".

31 John Gallagher and Chris Bull, "Washington's New Attitude", *The Advocate*, January 26, 1993, 36.

32 John and Bull, "Washington's New Attitude" 36.

33 "A sailor's song," *The Advocate*, January 12, 1993.

Clinton's Compromises as President

Between January and May 1993, as Clinton began his first term in office, media coverage of him – although overall positive - became far more mixed. Many Queer people were ecstatic over his electoral victory, saying “[a]lthough the struggle for gays in the military is not over ... I’m feeling a lot of optimism and a need to celebrate.”³⁴ Clinton’s victory equated a victory for the Queer community. However, not everyone shared this optimism. Playwright Larry Kramer said, “I predict that it won’t be too long before we are all screaming at Bill Clinton in the way that we have been forced to scream at anyone who is in the position of power.”³⁵ While Kramer did not claim how Clinton would anger the Queer community, in the previous twelve years U.S. presidents had done little to help combat the AIDS epidemic. Ronald Reagan had not addressed the disease for six years following its identification and only established the Watkins Commission after pressure from gay rights groups and congressmen.³⁶ As Clinton was inaugurated, it was reasonable to question how his ascension into a hegemonic system would affect his decisions.

Queer news outlets presented little concern that Clinton would renege on his promise to end the ban on gays in the military. Many Queer people echoed Mixner in their accounts of how supportive Clinton was in personal interactions with them, such as Mike Rankin, who worked with and came out to Clinton.³⁷ On top of this, many of the Democratic frontrunners had shown increasing support for the Queer community during the primaries. The reporting stated, “Clinton is expected to issue an executive order stopping discharges based on the Pentagon ban fairly early after taking office.”³⁸ The framing of this issue shifted from the ban on gays in the military to the Pentagon’s ban. This conceptualized the oncoming fight as being between the Queer community and Clinton against the Pentagon.

Clinton’s support of the Queer community was seen as so unyielding that some questioned not whether he would support them, but how far his support would extend; some believed he would

34 “A sailor’s song”, *The Advocate*.

35 Larry Kramer, “So They Said”, *The Advocate*, January 12, 1993.

36 Robert Self, *All In The Family* (Hill and Wang, 2012), 393.

37 Mike Rankin, “Coming Out to Clinton,” *The Advocate*, January 26, 1993.

38 John and Bull, “Washington’s New Attitude” 38.

go so far as to sign a national gay and lesbian civil rights bill.³⁹ Queer people pointed to how they had electorally supported his campaign, believing they were owed reciprocation. They believed his support was given though others, were wary of what Clinton would do once he took power.

Contrasting this support was a growing wariness of Clinton's past. While many sources acknowledged Clinton's time as governor of Arkansas, his voting record there had not been scrutinized as thoroughly. This deeper look into Clinton's political background showed his "12-year record as governor of Arkansas, ... did little to mollify or even acknowledge the state's gays and lesbians." Some of his former constituents were shocked by how supportive he was of Queer rights, considering how ambivalent he had been regarding them as governor. Gay rights activists in Arkansas "were flabbergasted when ... Clinton told reporters in Los Angeles that he supported a ban on anti-gay discrimination ... [because] Clinton had never given a clue that he would support a similar law in Arkansas."⁴⁰ Only after the election did Clinton's past ambivalence return to center stage, becoming an omen of things to come.

While Clinton had maintained support within the Queer community and media, that support soon soured as the actual fight for gays within the military began and he made his first compromises. The administration was not prepared for the battle to come, in part because it did not anticipate this would be its first major challenge.⁴¹ They began on the defensive when those in the military and their allies in Congress began the move to codify the ban into law. This level of unpreparedness was not entirely the Clinton administration's fault; there had been little pushback from the media or his own party regarding his intentions to overturn the ban. Sam Nunn, the Democrat senator from Georgia, joined forces with Colin Powell, an Army general and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; together they became the faces of upholding the ban on gays serving in the military. While the Clinton administration could have been better prepared, there was no indication that overturning the ban on gays in the military would overshadow the other promises he had made

39 Marianne Seggerman, "Bill and the Bill", *The Advocate*, January 26, 1993.

40 John and Bull, "Washington's New Attitude" 36.

41 Gallagher, "Clinton Moves Swiftly to End Pentagon Ban".

during the lead-up to the election. The Queer community also found itself under-prepared, and in retrospect, leaders of the community noted, “few in the gay rights movement anticipated last year that one of Clinton’s many campaign promises would erupt into such a political brawl.”⁴² While activists were better prepared for this fight, the administration did not incorporate them into its staffing or planning, which left both sides scrambling.⁴³ Clinton held meetings with Nunn and Powell to advance his agenda. Despite this initial negativity, when speaking with activists on January 25, Clinton said, “the meeting had not changed his mind,” and he was still committed to overturning the ban.⁴⁴

The first warning sign came on January 29th, 1993, when President Clinton issued a suspension on the ban on gays in the military and ordered Secretary of Defense Leslie Aspin to draft an executive order.⁴⁵ Aspin needed to have the executive order done by July 16th, but instead of issuing the order immediately, Clinton chose the more moderate approach of issuing a suspension. This action allowed “a compromise with senate armed services committee chairman Sam Nunn (D-GA) and other supporters of the ban in the Pentagon and in Congress, [allowing] discharge proceedings against many gay and lesbian service personnel [to] continue.” This compromise indicated Clinton’s willingness to work with Nunn to find a solution that would satisfy both sides.

From Promise to Policy: The Making of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

It was at this time the phrase “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” began to appear, a label that encapsulated Clinton’s attempts to create a compromise. Clinton believed that silence would fix the issue, that silence on both the commanding and the service member sides would result in less discrimination.⁴⁶ Clinton did not seem to understand how disparate the two halves were. Asking commanders to remain si-

42 Bettina Boxall, “Gay, Lesbian Leaders See Silver Lining in Military Defeat”, *The Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1993.

43 Mixner, *Stranger Among Friends*, 283.

44 John Gallagher, “Clinton Moves Swiftly to End Pentagon Ban,” *The Advocate*, February 23, 1993.

45 Chris Bull, “Clinton and Congress face off Over the Ban”, *The Advocate*, March 9, 1993.

46 “Clinton Compromise”, *The Advocate*, June 29, 1993.

lent was different from asking service members for silence. This policy did not stop commanders from discriminating against Queer people; rather it reinforced control and suppression. Clinton's removal of the ban on gays in the military was intended to limit one manner of discrimination in the military. Eliminating the flat ban would never have been able to remove all discrimination and homophobia from the military but would have constituted progress. However, this compromise of allowing Queer people to serve in silence still allowed the military to remove soldiers simply for being Queer. Clinton did not see or acknowledge this power disparity and instead described the compromise as "not everything I would have hoped for, nor everything that I have stood for, but it is plainly a substantial step in the right direction."⁴⁷

Clinton's struggle over the ban dominated the news cycle, forcing him to put his domestic agenda "on hold." This lack of progress on other issues lent credence to claims such as those made by Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) who "accused Clinton of pandering to gays and lesbians to the detriment of other Americans."⁴⁸ This political gridlock only heightened frustrations and the push for a quick solution. If Clinton wanted to move his domestic agenda forward, he would need the support of the entire Democratic party, now divided over his attempts to overturn the ban on gays in the military.

Word quickly got out that Clinton planned to accept the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. The reaction from within the Queer community was predominantly negative, with the decision seen as a betrayal and Clinton as "a smiling, backstabbing fraud."⁴⁹ Some of the immediate criticism arose from how the new policy still discriminated against Queer people. As one article states, "homosexuals have been drummed out of the military for pursuing discreetly the same behaviors that straights in the military are encouraged in some cases to pursue openly."⁵⁰ The new policy sought to penalize Queer sex whilst turning a blind eye to heterosexual sex. The common argument from

47 Bill Clinton, "Clinton: 'The Issue is Not Whether There Should be Homosexuals in the Military'", *The Advocate*, March 9, 1993.

48 Bull, "Clinton and Congress face off Over the Ban," 19.

49 Larry Kramer, "The Honeymoon is Over", *The Advocate*, May 4, 1993.

50 Gerald Rosanbalm, "Sex and the Military", *The Advocate*, June 15, 1993.

Queer critics was that sex, regardless of the gender of the receiving party, should be banned in the military.⁵¹ Clinton and his staff sought to calm these critics: during a White House question-and-answer session on May 27th, Clinton was quoted as saying, “[m]ost Americans believe if you don’t ask and you don’t say and you’re not forced to confront it, people should be able to serve.”⁵² Clinton was reiterating ideas, hoping to placate his base of Queer support.

On July 19th, the White House officially announced the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. The mainstream media presented the policy as progressive, if flawed. The *LA Times* wrote, “President Clinton ... eased restrictions barring homosexuals from joining the military, hailing the change as ‘an honorable compromise’ even though it leaves in place powerful tools to investigate gay men and lesbians for discharge on a wide range of misconduct findings.”⁵³ While putting “honorable compromise” in quotes belies skepticism of how well the policy would fare, the general tone was not particularly condemnatory, generating questions about how it would be implemented and enforced. According to the White House, going to a gay bar would not be enough for discharge if there was no dancing or holding hands.⁵⁴ However, this is contested when even hugging a member of one’s same gender might be enough for discharge.⁵⁵ The Los Angeles City Council was critical, saying it would turn Queer people into “second class citizens.”⁵⁶ On the other hand, many within the military and Congress were quite pleased with the policy. It is unsurprising that Sam Nunn praised the policy, as it was up to him and Congress to finalize the law.⁵⁷ The *LA Times* reported that “the [a]dministration had managed remarkably favorable press coverage for what had been perhaps its most enduring political embarrassment until then-

51 Jeff Yarbrough, “The Life and Time of Randy Shilts”, *The Advocate*, June 15 1993, 36.

52 Bill Clinton, “Clinton Compromise”, *The Advocate*, June 29, 1993.

53 Melissa Healy, “Clinton Eases Ban o Gays in Military bu Restricts Conduct Armed Forces”, *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1993.

54 David Reyes and Dave Leshner, “Clinton Policy Disappoints Many in O.C.”, *The Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1993.

55 Jodi Wilgoren, “O.C. Gay Veterans Debate Meaning of New U.S. Policy”, *The Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1993.

56 Times Staff Writer, “Lift Gay Ban, L.A. Council Urges”, *The Los Angeles Times*.

57 Karen Tumulty, “Powell Defends, Nunn Parises Order on Gays,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1993.

its fumbled management of the gays-in-the-military issue.”⁵⁸ Once Clinton had abandoned a staunch pro-gay attitude, his reception by the media warmed considerably. Clinton was rewarded for compromising, even though he expected backlash from the Queer community. This opposition was so expected that according to White House insiders, the announcement was delayed because of the annual Pride celebrations in June, afraid a parade would turn into an anti-Clinton demonstration.⁵⁹

The media presented Queer reaction to the policy as mixed. At one end of the spectrum was a complete and utter rejection of Bill Clinton: their reaction was that of anger and calls for action. Some believed that Clinton “[would] never keep any of the promises he made,” calling on the community “to operate as if Bill Clinton [had] now become the enemy.”⁶⁰ Some directed their criticism at Clinton himself, while others on the policy, calling the compromise “re-packaged discrimination.”⁶¹ While the mainstream media presented Clinton’s policy as a compromise, many Queer people expected the new policy would not be an improvement over the old. Others felt played, claiming, “[w]e’ve been had. Should we use that same [voting] power to remove him? I think we should try.”⁶² Queer people were both crediting their ability to get Clinton into the White House and acknowledging how collective action could remove him. However, impeachment is not a process conducted by collective action, but by Congress. Impeachment also implies committing a crime. While the breaking of a campaign promise is not illegal, it felt like a violation.⁶³

The second type of reaction was defensive. Some within the Queer community were either forgiving or attempted to frame this loss in a positive light.⁶⁴ “The media attention and publicity for the Queer community, specifically over the issue of Queer people serving in the military, was beneficial if not successful. Even so, this argument tends to overstate the influence of media visibility and

58 Thomas Rosenstiel, “New Analysis White House Gets its Act Together with Media”, *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1993.

59 “On Second Thought”, *The Advocate*, August 10, 1993.

60 Larry Kramer, “A First Step to Power”, *The Advocate*, Jul 13, 1993.

61 Lee Werbel, “Compromise on Gays in Military”, *The Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1993.

62 Glenn Miner, “Ban-Aid Solutions”, *The Advocate*, September 7, 1993.

63 Larry Goodermont, “Taking Sides”, *The Advocate*, November 2, 1993.

64 Bozall, “Gay, Lesbian Leaders See Silver Lining in Military Defeat”.

downplays the failure of Clinton and his administration to execute his campaign promises. This sentiment implied that, although Clinton's work overall was considered poor, he still retained some support within the Queer community, portraying Clinton himself in a neutral light.

The third type of reaction was resignation. A contingent within the Queer community claimed that Clinton had done "everything he had the power to do" or that "it was not really within his power to do so."⁶⁵ This reaction framed Clinton as someone bound by the system he was in, acknowledging that he did not have the power to unilaterally make that decision. This stance represented the conceptual opposite of "Clinton is the enemy"; here Clinton was still viewed as an ally to the Queer community. His failures to fulfill his campaign promises reflected that he too was subordinate to systems of power and that politicians considered compromises to be acceptable to gain perceived progress.

Regardless of position whether gay or straight, supporters or opponents of the ban Clinton's handling of the issue was unpopular, with 56% of Americans disapproving of it.⁶⁶ In June, Clinton claimed, "I don't see how any serious person could claim that I have snubbed the gay community."⁶⁷ Clinton framed the conversation around being "snubbed," or as upholding an obligation to the Queer community without understanding the frustrations of many Queer people. He believed he had made progress on the issue, saying on July 20th, "I am the first president who ever took on this issue. Is that a sign of weakness? It may be a sign of madness, sir, but it is not a sign of weakness."⁶⁸ Clinton implied that the Queer community should be indebted to him, not the other way around. He argued helping Queer people was a crazy thing to do, but he did it anyway at his own political expense; that was not weak for failing to make good on his campaign promises, but strong for having tried in the first place. Some of Clinton's problems came from "his people-pleasing inability to say no" as one Queer activist saw it, that his inability to stand firm

65 Arthur Leonard and Jody Lockwood, "Ban-Aid Solutions," *The Advocate*, September 7, 1993.

66 "Agenda", *The Advocate*, September 7, 1993, 16.

67 Bill Clinton, "Backdoor man," *The Advocate*, June 1, 1993.

68 Tumulty, "Powell Defends, Nunn Parises Order on Gays".

and instead to bend made compromise inevitable.⁶⁹

On August 26th, 1993, the RAND Corporation published the findings of its study -commissioned by Secretary of Defense Aspin - which had cost \$1.3 million and sought to recommend the best course of action in crafting a policy that would fulfill Clinton's campaign promise and ultimately be implemented. The study had looked at how homosexuality was addressed by foreign militaries, the domestic police and firefighter forces, surveys on public opinion, the spread of HIV, unit cohesion, and anti-homosexual violence. Their findings stated that "sexual orientation, by itself, as not germane to determining who may serve in the military. The policy would establish clear standards of conduct for all military personnel, to be equally and strictly enforced, to maintain the military discipline necessary for effective operations." The study argued the best option would be a policy that targeted all military personnel, that strict and consistent leadership would be needed to avoid anti-homosexual violence, while disproving the myth that Queer people would fracture unit cohesion by arguing leadership and job pressures would make this problem negligible. Another myth—that HIV would spread within the military—was disproven by the fact that military screenings already identified all cases.⁷⁰ The study confirmed what Queer people and activists had been saying prior to the unveiling of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," that Clinton chose a compromise that did not fully align with what he asked for. In the end, it didn't matter; the RAND study did not make political waves, and "people ... moved on to other issues".⁷¹ Clinton himself handed the issue over to Congress, indicating he was done with the issue.

The Senate, led by Sam Nunn, passed the first version of the bill on September 7th, 1993, and was "far more restrictive than the one proposed by President Clinton."⁷² The bill fell in line with Nunn's opinions and stance on the subject, which came as a surprise to Clinton, who claimed that Congress's version was "nearly identical" to his.⁷³ However, there were some key differences that Queer

69 Torie Osborn, "A Meeting with the President," *The Advocate*, January 25, 1994.

70 Rand Corporation, "Sexual orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy: Options and Assessment," National Defense Research Institute, 1993, 250.

71 John Gallagher, "Terrible Timing," *The Advocate*, October 5, 1993.

72 Chris Bull, "Sellout?," *The Advocate*, September 7, 1993.

73 Bull, "Sellout".

activists and the media were able to discern. For example, the bill in Congress “reverse[d] Clinton’s prohibition against asking enlistees about their sexual orientation by giving the secretary of defense the authority to reinstate the question when deemed necessary” and also “eliminate[d] language in Clinton’s plan that prohibit[ed] military officials from conducting anti-gay witch hunts.”⁷⁴ Both changes gave more power to the military to remove Queer people from its ranks. On September 28th, the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994* (Public Law 103–160) passed in the House on a vote of 301–134.⁷⁵ It is clear that even lawmakers were not knowledgeable about the differences between the provisions in the law and Clinton’s version; Rep. Bill Jefferson changed his vote after the fact because he thought he was voting for the one Clinton had proposed.

Bill Clinton’s fall from grace in Queer community and media also saw the fall of David Mixner. At first painted in a sympathetic light as someone fighting for the Queer community betrayed by Clinton, the longer he remained in the public eye, he saw the release of reports that claimed that Clinton “[had] tried to silence David Mixner.”⁷⁶ It became clear that Mixner did not have the access to Clinton that had made him so popular during the campaign. As time progressed, further doubt was casted upon Mixner as “Mixner may indeed be an FOB (Friend of Bill), but President Clinton has yet to give him a post in his administration.”⁷⁷ While Mixner stated that he did not want a post within the administration, it was discouraging that one of the highest profile Queer people within the campaign was not given a job, in contrast to many other straight campaign officials.⁷⁸ In response to the suspension of the ban, Mixner would establish the Campaign for Military Service to fight for overturning the ban. This group was unsuccessful and was seen as cannibalizing from established Queer lobbying groups, hurting Mixner’s political acumen and leaving him vulnerable to increasingly harsh criticism. On the one hand, he and other politicians were criticized for doing “nothing to hold [Clinton’s] feet to the fire”; on the other hand, when Mixner did

74 Chris Bull, “Down by Law,” *The Advocate*, October 19, 1993.

75 John Gallagher, “Don’t Know, Can’t Tell,” *The Advocate*, November 2, 1993.

76 Kramer, “The Honeymoon is Over”.

77 “Close; No Cigar,” *The Advocate*, May 18, 1993.

78 Mixner, *Stranger Amongst Friends*, 308.

vocally oppose Clinton and the administration, he was characterized as “berating Clinton, a man who just months earlier he had repeatedly and publicly called a personal friend.”⁷⁹ It would be his outspoken criticism of Clinton that would result in “his welcome at the White House [being] worn out, and his currency among gay rights activists was seriously devalued.”⁸⁰ Without access to Clinton, and despite his high profile during the campaign, Mixner faded from the public eye. In retrospect, it seems that Mixner’s access to Clinton may have been exaggerated by both the media and himself.

Aftermath and Legacy

The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy became infamous for being a homophobic way of policing sexuality within the military. Within two years, it was clear that this policy discriminated against Queer people rather than benefiting them. It was noted that there was “[n]o mechanism for holding commanders accountable, or for stopping abuses of the security clearance process by which routine checks turn into dragnets for homosexuals.”⁸¹ The policy threatened many Queer people with discharge from the military, with watchdog organization Servicemembers Legal Defense Network reporting that within the first year “it [had] responded to calls from over 400 service members and helped more than 125 under the new regulations alone ... and that thousands of lesbian and gay service members are still investigated, charged, harassed, dismissed, threatened or forced to resign without getting outside help.”⁸² While this was a major failure of Clinton’s, he would make some of his campaign promises, such as increasing funding for AIDS and electing a czar to investigate the disease.⁸³ However, Queer support for him would never be as pronounced or unified, with support dropping further when he signed the Defense of Marriage Act which held that marriage was only between a man and a woman. The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy would be in effect for almost two decades until it was repealed on September 20th, 2011.

79 Mixner, *Stranger Amongst Friends*, 308.

80 John Gallagher, “Friend of No One?”, *The Advocate*, November 30, 1993.

81 Sara Miles, “Don’t Ask, It’s Hell”, *Out*, February 1, 1995.

82 John Gallagher, “Dream On”, *The Advocate*, July 27, 1993.

83 John Gallagher, “At Last, A Promise Kept,” *Advocate*, November 16, 1993.