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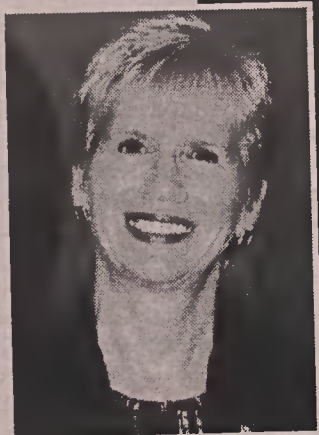


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Clinton calls 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' 'inevitable' in new book

Despite lack of attention to other LGBT issues, book delves in to controversial military policy

by Steve Rawls

WASHINGTON, D.C. — In his new autobiography, "My Life," former President Bill Clinton talks little about the gay and lesbian issues and individuals that figured so prominently during his presidency. He does recall in print, however, the public and Congressional debate over his promise to the lift the military's ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual service members.

President Clinton writes that he met with the Joint Chiefs, all of whom opposed lifting the military's ban. "(T)hey maintained that letting (gays) serve openly would be, in General Powell's words, 'prejudicial to good order and discipline,'" Clinton writes. In a new revelation, however, Clinton also says that the joint Chiefs, despite their personal opposition, "made it clear that if I ordered them to take action, they'd do the best job they could."

As well, Clinton focuses on the incendiary pro-ban argument that Sen. Robert Byrd (D-WV) made in a closed-door meeting: "He believed homosexuality was a sin; said he would never let his grandson, whom he adored, join a military that admitted gays; and asserted that one reason the Roman Empire fell was the acceptance of pervasive homosexual conduct from Julius Caesar on down."

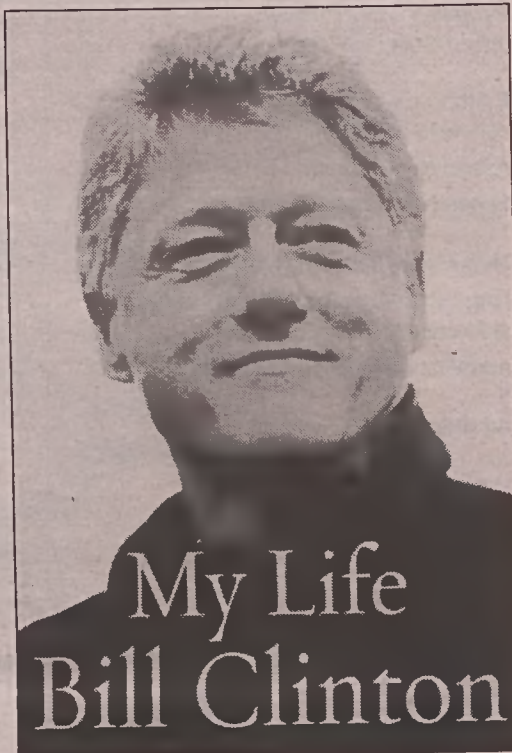
Clinton also recalls meetings with members of the influential Senate Armed Services Committee, many of whom opposed lifting the ban, including the Committee's Chairman, Sen. Sam Nunn. Clinton writes that he believed Nunn's arguments, and the arguments of others opposed to allowing open service, "could have been used with equal force against Truman's order on integration."

While Clinton notes that a slim majority of Americans supported his position on lifting the ban, most members of Congress viewed the support as insufficient. "Congress," he writes, "thought it was a dead-bang loser for them."

"With congressional defeat inevitable," Clinton says, "(Defense Secretary) Les

Aspin worked with Colin Powell and the Joint Chiefs on a compromise," that became known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

Though not stated specifically in "My Life," Clinton's own opposition on the military's gay ban has only strengthened since leaving office. In a statement made to Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) in October 2004, Clinton said that "Simply put, there is no evidence to support a ban on gays in the military." Since



1993, Clinton told SLDN, "Our nation as a whole has moved significantly ... toward recognizing the full citizenship of gay Americans." He also urged Americans to "keep striving for the time when serving in our military is an honor open to everyone regardless of sexual orientation."

"President Clinton, like the overwhelming majority of Americans, has learned first-hand the detrimental impact the military's gay ban continues to have on our armed forces," said C. Dixon Osburn, Executive Director of SLDN. "Congress should revisit this policy and repeal 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' once and for all."



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