

Virginia Apuzzo
Dan Bradley

June 1984

Dear Friend:

On July 14, 1983, U.S. Congressman Gerry Studds (D-MA) walked to the lectern on the floor of the House of Representatives and delivered in strong, confident tones a statement unlike any previously made in our national legislature:

"All Members of Congress," said Studds, "must cope with the challenge of initiating and maintaining a career in public office without destroying entirely the ability to lead a meaningful and emotionally fulfilling private life. It is not a simple task for any of us to meet adequately the obligations of either public or private life, let alone both. But these challenges are made substantially more complex when one is, as am I, both an elected public official and gay."

With those words, Congressman Studds became the first member of Congress to publicly affirm his homosexuality.

Gerry's historic statement came during the course of his response to charges made by the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct that he had engaged in an improper sexual relationship with a 17-year-old male page in 1973, during his first term in office.

Gerry was not the first public official to have difficulties related to his homosexual activity, but he was the first not to hide from his own identity; the first not to cite "alcoholism," "drug problems," "psychological pressures," or even "homosexual tendencies" as an excuse. Gerry Studds simply admitted to an error in his own judgement, and stated without sorrow or shame that he is gay.

In doing so, Congressman Studds set a standard for courage and dignity that will make it far easier for others to be open about being gay. His speech on the floor prompted thousands of letters congratulating him for his decision, and expressing gratitude for the strength and eloquence of his words. Let us quote from three of those letters:

"I saw, heard and re-read many times your speech to the House. I was dumbstruck and moved to tears by your courage, pride, honesty, poise and resoluteness. If I ever, myself, rise even half so well to half so trying a moment, I think I shall consider my life, to that moment, a success and my dues -- such as any might reckon them -- fully paid. At last, a Congressman I can look up to, who represents me! -- From New York

"When I heard your statement to Congress on NPR recently, I lofted my sheetrock hammer across the room and cheered. A Congressman comes out with class! -- sure, measured voice, no half-baked apologies, "gay" rather than "homosexual." You have my deep respect for transforming what must be a lonely, traumatic event into a noble moment for us all ... you have done a fine and brave thing for all of us." -- From North Carolina

"I was proud of you today when I saw you standing before the House making your precise, fine-tuned statement. I was proud of the way you looked, proud of what you said, proud of the way you said it. You affirmed my/our complex presence in this world. I am sorry that such an affirmation is contingent on what is clearly a painful and embarrassing time for you and those you love. Thank you for not running away. Thank you for your courageous, public, personal response ... There are millions of gay people, who are prouder of themselves because of the way you have chosen to publicly respond to the realities of your life." -- From Oregon.

Gerry Studds' decision to be honest and open about himself was, he says, personally the best thing he has ever done. He feels great.

But, not everyone understands. Already a number of candidates have announced their intentions to seek Gerry's seat. In addition, well-financed right-wing groups have targeted him for defeat.

Because we believe it is absolutely essential that Gerry be reelected, we are writing today to ask you to join us in making a contribution to the Studds for Congress Committee.

By making such a contribution, you will do far more than help Gerry Studds win reelection. You will also be telling him that you appreciate his decision to tell the truth about his sexuality and his determination to insist that sexual preference is irrelevant to a person's performance in professional life.

In addition, you will bolster the groundswell of support within the gay community for Gerry -- support which will help sustain him during the coming months. A political campaign is always arduous under the best of circumstances. In 1984, for Gerry Studds, it promises to be brutal indeed.

We know Gerry Studds, and we have followed with interest his career in the Congress. During his 12 years in office, he has gained a reputation for hard work, accessibility, personal honesty, and intense dedication to the vital economic and environmental concerns of his district, which encompasses the coast of Southeastern Massachusetts.

As a senior Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Gerry has wrangled time and time again with the Defense and State Departments over issues of human rights, Central America, nuclear arms and the Middle East.

His list of achievements in these areas is impressive. In recent months, for example, Gerry has:

- pushed through the Congress legislation to require continued progress in the investigation of murdered Americans in El Salvador as a condition of any additional U.S. military aid.
- organized over 50 of his colleagues in opposition to the sale of arms to the brutal military government of Guatemala
- released a comprehensive report on the problem of nuclear arms control, listing eight specific steps that should be taken to ease tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union
- spoken out regularly, and eloquently, regarding U.S. policy toward Lebanon, Grenada, and Nicaragua
- sponsored legislation, endorsed by over 70 of his colleagues, to limit our military activities in Honduras

Above all, Gerry is a leader among Members of the House who sense there is something fundamentally wrong with the misdirected and misguided foreign policy of the Reagan White House.

Although an effective and nationally known spokesperson on foreign and domestic policy, Gerry has always devoted the majority of his time to problems closer to home -- especially when they involve the environment or the sea.

Gerry has a record on oceans-related issues which cannot be matched by any other Member of Congress. He is the author of the 200-mile fishing limit, which has literally prevented the overfishing of valuable fish stocks by foreign fleets; he has also introduced and secured passage of legislation prohibiting the Reagan Administration from drilling for oil in environmentally sensitive areas of the oceans; he has effectively blocked Reagan Administration cutbacks in the budget of the U.S. Coast Guard; and he has written legislation strengthening oil tanker safety requirements, thereby helping to guard against disastrous offshore oil spills. To thank him for his efforts in these and many other areas, the Massachusetts Conservation Council presented him with its highest award in 1981.

Congressman Studds has displayed throughout his career the kind of eloquence and wit so rarely found in politics today; an eloquence which has made him one of our most persuasive defenders of human rights and civil liberties both within the United States and in international affairs; and which -- as evidenced by his speech last July 14 -- grants him the ability to communicate his ideas with a unique and commanding strength. As one of his colleagues said in the Boston Globe, "Gerry Studds is like E.F. Hutton. When he talks, people listen."

His constituents agree. After barely winning election for the first time in 1972, he has steadily increased his margin of victory. In 1982, he received 68 percent of the vote, and carried every town and precinct in his district.

But 1984 promises to be a very different and a far more difficult kind of campaign than he has ever faced before. Because you can be sure that national right-wing groups want him out of office, Gerry's opponents will be very well-financed -- better financed, in fact, than all of Gerry's past opponents combined.

In years past, the generosity of Gerry's supporters in Southeastern Massachusetts has been more than adequate to sustain the kind of grass roots campaigns he is used to running -- campaigns which allowed him to spend only \$120,000 to defeat a well-known and better financed opponent two years ago.

This situation has changed dramatically in 1984.

As a result, it will be necessary for the Studds for Congress campaign to raise far more money than ever before. That is why we are writing to you today -- to ask that you help Gerry Studds in 1984 by making a generous contribution to the Studds for Congress Committee.

In addition to helping Gerry run the kind of campaign that will be necessary to guarantee his reelection, a contribution to the Studds campaign will have another practical effect. It will let Gerry know that we deeply admire and respect the way he has handled himself during the past year. He has given thousands of gay men and lesbians who have faced similar allegations and inquiries into their personal lives reason to be proud.

Please make your check payable today to the Studds for Congress Committee.

We can assure you that your money will be well spent.

Sincerely,


Virginia Apuzzo


Dan Bradley

P.S. Congressman Studds is a co-sponsor of the federal gay rights legislation. He has spoken out frequently on issues of concern to gay men and lesbians.

P.P.S. Please don't set this letter aside thinking you'll act on it later. The need is now! Send in your generous contribution today.