



## There's No Pleasing the Fringes

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By [Froma Harrop](#)

The only openly gay congressman, Barney Frank, has long been subject to homophobic attacks. Happily, the Massachusetts liberal is master of the precision-guided comeback, which he unleashes with devastating results.

**No one has earned more stripes promoting gay rights than Frank, but the Democrat now finds himself targeted by, of all groups, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.** And as usual, he's not holding return fire.

"For some of these people, you can never be an ally," Frank told me. And the proper response is to "call their bluff."

"Who are they going to run against me?" he asks. "Larry Craig?"

At issue is Frank's decision to remove language on "gender identity" from a bill that protects gay men and lesbians in the workplace. This is a reference to the "transgender" community -- people who do not identify with the gender assigned them at birth. Cross-dressers are one example.

Frank insists that the bill can't pass if it includes the transgendered. America is not yet ready to take that step. In response, gay advocates (though not all of them) have bitterly accused him of stripping the rights of this besieged group.

Frank marvels at their poor grasp of political reality.

"They think that getting a bill protecting sexual orientation is easy," he says. "We started on the gay and lesbian thing decades ago."

Frustration over his party's militants is not a new theme for Frank. In his 1992 book, "Speaking Frankly: What's Wrong With the Democrats and How to Fix It," Frank notes that the far left often spoiled the Democrats' ability to win the presidency. By making the party seem soft on national security, crime and the work ethic, it scared away the swing voters needed to win.

And the fringe groups will never be content. They keep the party on perpetual "political probation," he writes. Thus, Democrats waste much energy "making sure that the left wing of the party is emotionally secure."

Frank recently told antiwar activists holding vigils outside House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's home in San Francisco that they've seen too many showings of "The Wizard of Oz." They think Pelosi is

Glenda the Good Witch, he said, who can wave her wand and make the Iraq war go away. Changing the war's direction requires compromise.

On things like appropriations, he notes that Democrats don't have the votes to override presidential vetoes. "We're going to have to accept inadequate funding for a whole range of issues."

Frank sees the campaign to push transgender rights into the anti-discrimination bill as creating a potential "Terri Schiavo" moment for the Democrats -- that is, a situation where the fringes drag their party into a crusade that makes the broader public think its leaders are out of their gourds.

The radicals have no idea what it takes to get things done in the real world, Frank complains. And they have wacky expectations.

"We're supposed to pass with votes from Indiana, Nebraska and South Carolina a better bill than we have in Massachusetts and New York," Frank says. The latter two states have laws banning discrimination against gay men and lesbians but say nothing about transgendered people.

"Like America is supposed to be easier than New York," he adds.

Last year, the Democrats regained power by winning congressional seats far from New York and San Francisco -- including moderate-to-conservative areas that voted for George Bush in 2004. Democrats hope to expand on those victories next year, but that won't happen if they let the far left define them.

The babysitting has got to stop, Barney Frank says. And if that means displeasing people who were never terribly loyal to begin with, so be it.