

Living with skeletons

Rep. Barney Frank didn't generate any protests from members of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association when he told them President Clinton "is not perfect."

The openly homosexual congressman from Massachusetts told his audience that imperfection shouldn't be held against the president. As a matter of fact, Mr. Frank said he had encountered only one politician in his lifetime whom he considered to be perfect. And no, he wasn't referring to himself.

"By the time I ran for reelection, I thought I was not perfect," Mr. Frank acknowledged. "There are a couple of things in my record."

His audience broke up.

Much to ponder

To the producer of "Fixin to Die: A Visit to the Mind of Lee Atwater," our first question was: Why was the play rejected by the University of South Carolina as a "savagely" portrayal of the late Republican?

"It's sort of like the movie 'Patton,'" Beegie Truesdale opined

INSIDE THE BELTWAY

By John McCaslin

yesterday from the Church Street Theater, where the controversial one-man, one-act show opens Friday and continues through Nov. 5. "People take away from it what they want to.

"But I can tell you this," she hastens to add. "At the first performance in Charleston, several of Lee's old buddies showed up ready to kick my butt about the play so-called 'savaging' Atwater, and they walked away feeling pretty good about it."

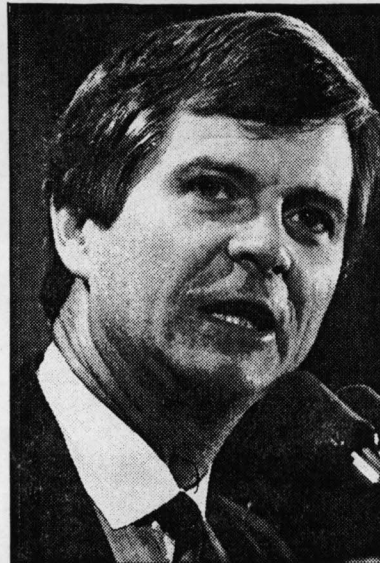
The portrayal of the former Republican National Committee chairman and George Bush's successful 1988 presidential campaign manager is structured from Mr. Atwater's actual words — taken from interviews, letters and conversations. To say it has generated debate about the state of politics today would be an understatement.

In fact, Ms. Truesdale has been trying to bring the "politically incorrect" show to Washington for over a year.

"Did he cross the line?" she asks about Mr. Atwater, the influential mastermind of the political arena who died of cancer in 1991 at age 40. "We are left with two different points of view: Liberals say this play proves he was racist; Lee's friends say the opposite."

In an interview with this columnist yesterday, playwright Robert Myers, who conducted extensive research across the United States to track down the "real" Lee Atwater, describes the fun-loving, blues-pickin' Southerner as "inherently dramatic, because politics itself is a form of drama."

He credited Mr. Atwater for being one of the driving forces



The words of the late Lee Atwater have been adapted into a controversial stage production.

behind the Republican revolution that since his death has swept the country, for understanding the "importance of race in politics," and for showing "how political consultants like himself can become important figures in the political arena."

"Fixin to Die" had standing-

room-only audiences during several runs in Los Angeles and Charleston. Friday night's opening in Washington is by invitation only.

If you're wondering about the title, "Fixin to Die" is an old blues tune by Bucka White. It was one of Mr. Atwater's favorites.

Tribute or memorial?

Former President Ronald Reagan has been asked to reject plans to affix his name to the quarter-of-a-billion-dollar "gilded cage for government bureaucrats" now under construction in the heart of the nation's capital.

The president of a group founded more than a decade ago in the wake of Mr. Reagan's Grace Commission, Tom Schatz of Citizens Against Government Waste, writes to the former president: "While we applaud the sentiment, there isn't a less fitting tribute imaginable to yourself, and to all that your presidency stands for, than the Federal Triangle Project.

"Misconceived from the start, years behind schedule, millions of dollars over budget, lavish beyond comparison, and due to open just in time for an expected