many Americans do not know where Laramie, Wyoming, was until about a year ago Matthew Shepard, an openly gay 21-year-old university student, was savagely beaten, burned, tied to a wooden fence in a remote area, and left to die in subfreezing temperatures.

There is nothing about these cases that reflects poorly on those individual towns across America. In fact, hate crimes like these, unfortunately, are happening in towns big and small, major metropolises, small neighborhoods all across this country.

Since 1991, when the Department of Justice started keeping hate crime statistics, they found after surveying hundreds of police department law enforcement agencies around this country that about 4,600 hate crimes had been committed. When they did a similar survey in 1997, they found that that number had nearly doubled to over 8,000.

This is an epidemic, Mr. Speaker. Matthew Shepard made us all gasp in horror. But now we in Congress have an opportunity to act.

Not so long ago, in 1990 and 1994, this House did act in passing the Hate Crime Statistics Act and Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act. But we have seen again and again that that law needs to be strengthened. We learned frankly from cases all across this country that there are problems with the current law that we are obligated to fix.

The Federal prosecution of hate crimes can only happen if the crime is motivated by race, religion, national origin, color, and the assailant intended to prevent the victim from exercising a very narrowly defined protected right, like voting or attending school.

The law is so narrowly written that we are seeing problems with prosecutions all around this country. In 1994, a Federal jury in Fort Worth, Texas, acquitted three white supremacists of Federal civil rights charges arising form unprovoked assaults on African-Americans, including one incident where the defendant knocked the man unconscious as he stood near a bus stop.

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Some of the jurors revealed after the acquittal that although they were absolutely convinced that the crime was racially motivated, they could not find that it fit into one of these narrow racially protected activities. The same happened in 1992 when two white men chased a man of Asian descent from a nightclub in Detroit and beat him to death. The Department of Justice, with a great deal of help from the State and locality, tried to prosecute it using the current hate crimes law and failed because the law was too narrowly crafted.

We have an opportunity with the bill that is currently before the House Committee on the Judiciary to deal with this problem, to broaden the crimes which the Federal Government, with the help of the States and localities, can prosecute. We have seen over and over again that if the Federal Government brings its forces to bear, that we can make a difference.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes this House is criticized for acting only in the face of abject crisis. I believe that that crisis has been shown to us by the horror of Matthew Shepard. Now is the opportunity for us to act in this time of crisis, to pass the Hate Crimes Enhancement Act, to finally begin to do something to stop that increasing trend of hate crimes. I cannot promise anyone in this Chamber that if we were to pass this act, there will not be people with hate in their hearts, there will not be people who do horrific things in small towns and big cities all across this country. But I do know we have an obligation to act, because what happened to Matthew Shepard was not just a blow to that small town, it was not just a blow to gay rights, it was not just a blow to that person's family, it was a blow to our national family. It was a horror that all of us must address.

IN SUPPORT OF THE HATE CRIMES PREVENTION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COOKSEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. NADLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, we are faced with an historic opportunity once again this year to pass legislation to combat violent hate crimes that continue to plague our country.

Last year, despite the brutal killing of Matthew Shepard simply because he was gay, we failed to incorporate the Hate Crimes Prevention Act into a bill to fund the Justice Department. We must not make the same mistake again this year.

In the year that followed Matthew Shepard's death, thousands of hate crimes were committed and Congress failed to protect gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender individuals and others from these heinous crimes.

Tragically, we are all far too familiar with the violent acts of terrorism that are sweeping our country. The August 10 shooting of a Filipino-American letter carrier, shooting to death, three young children who were shot and two adults at the Los Angeles Jewish community center is one of a series of brutal hate crimes that continue to plague victims, families, communities and the Nation. These violent acts come on the heels of the July 4 shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana, and the burning of three synagogues in northern California.

Congress has been far too slow in responding to the hate crimes that continue to threaten our communities all across America. Week after week we hear horror stories of murderers attacking innocent people because they are, or are perceived, to be members of a certain community, because they are of a particular ethnic group, or thought to be of a particular ethnic group, or race or color or creed or sexual orientation. These hate crimes devastate families and local communities and they also send a chill down the backs of everyone else that belongs to the same group.

Remember, hate crimes are especially odious because they victimize more than just the individual victim, they also are acts of terrorism directed against an entire class of citizens. When a hate crime is committed, it sends a message to every member of the targeted group that they risk their lives simply by being a member of a targeted group. No American should have to be afraid to live in any community because they are threatened with violence because of who they are.

We should instruct the conferees to accede to one version of the Senate language, to agree to add gender and disability and sexual orientation to the Federal hate crimes law. There is a necessity to do this in order so that we can give help to States that have their own hate crimes laws but need Federal assistance in investigating crimes.

The Senate has already passed the Hate Crimes Prevention Act as an amendment to the Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary appropriations bill which is now in the conference committee. Over the summer, I organized a group of 62 other Members of the House, both Republicans and Democrats, to join together and urge the conferees to include the Hate Crimes Prevention Act in the final appropriations bill. I hope we are successful and that we can pass meaningful reform this fall. It is certainly within our grasp, but we need all the help we can get to urge other Members of the House and of the Senate to include this vital legislation, the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, in the final version of the appropriations bill.

We must all redouble our efforts to pass sensible hate crimes prevention legislation this year. We must continue our fight to protect American families from violent bigotry and from vicious acts of hatred. Our constituents and the citizens of this great country expect no less of us.

IN SUPPORT OF HATE CRIMES PREVENTION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today and speak in favor of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999 which is cosponsored by myself and 184 of my colleagues in this House.

Just a few weeks ago, our country was shocked when a gunman entered a Jewish community center in Los Angeles, shooting at innocent children. His intent, and I quote, ''sending a message