Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. FOLEY).

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding. I would like to associate myself with the words of the gentlewoman from Wisconsin for her leadership on this issue.

Let me say directly to the American public, this is desperately needed legislation. We have in our climate today too much anti-Semitism, too much racial hatred, too much homophobia, and people who are singled out based on those parameters are targeted by those that hate others because of who they are, because of their gender or orientation or color of skin.

This should not be permissive in this society of ours as we enter the 21st century, and we have to deal with this and we have to confront it and we have to educate our children because these crimes are devastating.

We had a boy killed in our community recently in West Palm for the same motivation, because he was gay. We have heard crime after crime similar to these Matthew Shepard cases that are wrenching the heart and soul out of our country.

So I applaud the gentlewoman for her leadership. I join my colleague in urging the Congress to adopt hate crime legislation to federalize these crimes. Because, again, these are not singular acts. These are acts by despicable people who seek out people based on race, gender, sexual orientation. They are mean-spirited and they must be dealt with with the full effect of the law so, hopefully, we can turn the tide on these crimes and get people to recognize that the punishment will be severe, it will be swift, and maybe they will think twice before they inflict their hatred on others.

HATE CRIMES—OTHER NOT-SO-WELL-KNOWN CASES

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

Mr. WEINER. Mr. Speaker, I do not know where Sylacauga, Alabama, is. But in February of 1999, Billy Jack Gaither, a gay man, was abducted and beaten to death with an ax handle and set afire among burning tires in a remote area.

And frankly, Mr. Speaker, I do not know where Texas City, Texas, is either. But that is a place where two black gay men, Laaron Morris and Kevin Tryals, were shot to death and one of the men was left inside a burning car.

And very frankly, Mr. Speaker, I do not know where Kenosha, Wisconsin, is, although I have heard of it. But that is a place where, in May of 1999, a 27-year-old man intentionally swerved his car onto a sidewalk to run over two African-American teens. After hitting the two cyclists, he left the scene and kept driving until stopped by police. Eight years earlier, the same man ran his car twice into a stopped van carrying five African-American men and drove away.

I do not know where those places are. But very frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think 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