



For Immediate Release:
December 6, 2007

Media Contact:
Matthew Matassa
Communications Director
303-830-7400 x14 / 303-588-2872
Matassa@MatthewShepard.org

“If not here, where? If not now, when?”

Judy and Dennis Shepard on Withdrawal of Hate Crimes Legislation:

“We are truly dismayed to find that Congress now will put aside its leadership on passage of federal hate crimes legislation that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.

“At this time of year that fills us all with hope for humankind, we are sad to find that a Congressional majority of each House who have already adopted the Matthew Shepard Act cannot yet come together.

“If not here, where? If not now, when?”

“Make no mistake; this is a small triumph of process over principle. We are dedicated to redoubling our efforts next year to achieve our vision of a hate-free America that truly includes everyone. This has never simply been about Matthew Shepard and our family, this legislation is a gift delayed but never forgotten for all America’s families.

“We thank our friends, allies and champions in Washington and around the world who have struggled so hard this year. We know that we will unite once again next year to achieve passage of this milestone human rights legislation.”

Background:

The originally legislation is formally entitled, the *Matthew Shepard Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act* (S. 1105). This summer, it was offered as a bipartisan amendment by Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) to the Department of Defense authorization bill that was approved by both Houses of Congress. The virtually identical House version of the bill passed overwhelmingly on May 3rd, 2007 with a bipartisan vote of 237 to 180 as an appropriate and measured response to the unrelenting and under-addressed problem of hates crimes against individuals based on sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and disability.

Prior federal hate crimes law permitted the federal prosecution of a hate crime *only* if the hate crime was motivated by bias based on race, color, religion, or national origin and the assailant intends to prevent the victim from exercising a "federally protected right" such as the right to vote or attend school.

Hate crime legislation was first enacted in 1968 when our country witnessed acts of violent hate focused at the African-American community. When Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered in 1998, the current hate crime statutes did not apply to the crime. Without the federal resources needed, finding justice for this horrific act cost Albany County, Wyoming more than \$150,000 and forced the local law enforcement to furlough five members of its force.

The Matthew Shepard Foundation was founded by Dennis and Judy Shepard in memory of their 21-year-old son, Matthew, who was murdered in an anti-gay hate crime in Wyoming in October 1998. Created to honor Matthew in a manner that was appropriate to his dreams, beliefs and aspirations, the Foundation seeks to “Replace Hate with Understanding, Compassion & Acceptance” through its varied education, outreach and advocacy programs. For more information, please visit www.MatthewShepard.org