



Congress Drops Hate Crime Bill Covering Attacks on Gays

By [Kevin Wayne](#)

Washington, D.C. - Congress has stripped from the National Defense Authorization Act a provision that would have extended federal civil rights protections to individuals targeted for violent crimes based on their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability.

Senate conferees agreed to strip the Shepard Act from the defense bill, realizing that they lack the votes to pass the measure.

Republicans supported the defense bill but more than 150 GOP House members said they wouldn't vote for it as long as it was linked to the hate crimes bill, which they opposed. With the hate crimes bill removed, the finalized version of the DOD authorization measure is now expected to win easy approval in the House and Senate.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., was named for Matthew Shepard, a gay college freshman who died after he was beaten into a coma in 1998.

Matthew Shepard's parents, Judy and Dennis, released a statement on Thursday in which they said, "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," they added. "If not here, where? If not now, when?"

The Shepards said they 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."

Under current federal law, hate crimes include acts of violence against individuals on the basis of race, religion, color or national origin so today's development is seen as a blow to the gay and lesbian community.