

modifications from the Committee's reported version. These modifications are a result of cooperation with the Commerce Committee and are largely technical and clarifying changes. In addition, this amended version of H.R. 2803 extends the system implementation deadline by 3 more months, from an October 1997 deadline in the original bill, to a December 1997 deadline, and includes authorizing language for the stolen parts system that had been included in the 1992 bill but was erroneously removed during the recodification of title 49, United States Code. And on behalf of Mr. HYDE, the Judiciary Committee chairman, and myself, we would like to thank Mr. BLILEY, chairman of the Commerce Committee, for his support and cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill that will strengthen an effective crime fighting tool for State and Federal law enforcement across the country. I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WATT of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I rise in support of the bill.

This is a simple bipartisan bill that is intended to make the Federal Anti-car Theft Program work better. It has the support of the National Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, the Clinton administration, the automobile industry, and the auto insurance industry.

In 1992, Congress passed the Anti-car Theft Act in response to spiraling auto theft in America. Among other things, that law set up two national registers of information—one dealing with stolen parts, and another dealing with car titles.

The stolen parts register was assigned to the Department of Justice, and the national titling register to the Department of Transportation. This bill deals with the national titling register.

The national titling register will be an important tool to stop a practice known as "washing" the titles of stolen cars. Right now, car thieves can steal a car in one State, then take it to another State and by using criminal paper-shuffling, get a new washed title for the stolen car.

As surprising as it may seem, there is presently no central place against which a State can check the bona fides of a title from another State before it issues a new one. Most checking of titles now is done after the fact, by mail, using paper records, and is not very effective.

The central title register is therefore a crucial step toward stopping interstate movement of stolen cars.

Unfortunately, experience has shown since 1992 that the Department of Transportation is not the best place for establishing such a register.

The register is primarily a law enforcement tool, better suited to the De-

partment of Justice, in addition, the Department of Justice already has access to data systems that can be adapted to include titling information.

Recognizing that reality, all parties concerned have agreed that responsibility for this national title register should be shifted from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Justice.

This bill does that. I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio [Mr. OXLEY].

Mr. OXLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me.

I rise today in support of H.R. 2803, the Anti-Car Theft Improvements Act of 1996. When the Congress enacted the Anti-Car Theft Act of 1992, the Commerce Committee and Judiciary Committee worked as partners to craft legislation which addressed the continuing problem of car theft from a number of angles. One provision set up an information system to track information about vehicle titles and stolen parts. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, implementation of this information system has been delayed thus far.

H.R. 2803 addresses a number of issues which have been identified as possible bottlenecks in implementing this information system. A lack of resources at the Department of Transportation, combined with some ambiguities in the original act, led to a situation where a tool which had obvious value to law enforcement officials in the States and Federal Government could not be set up.

H.R. 2803 paves the way for full implementation of the information system. The Department of Transportation has already begun a pilot program, which will serve as the model for nationwide implementation. It provides a specific authorization for appropriations, and transfers authority for overseeing the project from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Justice. With these changes, I believe that we can finally realize the potential provided by this kind of information system.

As I mentioned earlier, the Commerce Committee and Judiciary Committee have a long record of working together on these issues, stretching back to the early 1980's and before. Because the Judiciary Committee addressed a number of our substantive concerns in the legislation before us, the Commerce Committee has waived its right to a sequential referral of H.R. 2803 in order to expedite its consideration.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to especially thank the chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. MCCOLLUM], for his leadership on this legislation in providing the kind of help for our committee as well as the full House in enacting this legislation.

I would like to confirm with the gentleman from Florida that he would support the Committee on Commerce's request for an appropriate number of conferees should this bill become the subject of a House-Senate conference.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. OXLEY. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, as the gentleman knows, that decision would be primarily between our two chairmen, the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. BLILEY] and the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE]. But certainly I have no objection to that.

Mr. OXLEY. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. Reclaiming my time, I want to thank the gentleman from Florida for his commitment and hard work on this legislation. The Committee on Commerce has no objection to the legislation. As a matter of fact, we support it strongly. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support it.

Mr. WATT of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WELLER). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida [Mr. MCCOLLUM] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2803, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CHURCH ARSON PREVENTION ACT OF 1996

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3525) to amend title 18, United States Code, to clarify the Federal jurisdiction over offenses relating to damage to religious property, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3525

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996".

SEC. 2. DAMAGE TO RELIGIOUS PROPERTY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 247 of title 18, United States Code, is amended—

(1) so that subsection (b) reads as follows:

"(b) The circumstances referred to in subsection (a) are that the offense is in or affects interstate or foreign commerce.";

(2) in subsection (a), by striking "subsection (c)" and inserting "subsection (d)";

(3) in subsection (c), by inserting "or (c)" after "subsection (a)";

(4) by redesignating subsections (c), (d), and (e), as subsections (d), (e), and (f), respectively;

(5) by inserting after subsection (b) the following:

"(c) Whoever intentionally defaces, damages, or destroys any religious real property because of the race, color, or ethnic characteristics of any individual associated with that religious property, or attempts to do so, shall be punished as provided in subsection (d)."; and

(6) in subsection (f) as so redesignated by this section, by inserting "real" before "property" each place it appears.

(b) COMPENSATION OF VICTIMS.—

(1) REQUIREMENT OF INCLUSION IN LIST OF CRIMES ELIGIBLE FOR COMPENSATION.—Section 1403(d)(3) of the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (42 U.S.C. 10602(d)(3)) is amended by inserting "crimes, whose victims suffer death or personal injury, that are described in section 247 of title 18, United States Code," after "includes".

(2) PRIORITY IN CRIME VICTIM ASSISTANCE.—Section 1404(a)(2)(A) of the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (42 U.S.C. 10603(a)(2)(A)) is amended by inserting "victims who suffer death or personal injury resulting from crimes described in section 247 of title 18, United States Code, and" before "victims of".

THE SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. NETHERCUTT). Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE] and the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. CONYERS] each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE].

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks on the bill under consideration.

THE SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

(Mr. HYDE asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Today we consider the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996, H.R. 3525, legislation reflecting a bipartisan congressional response to the rash of church burnings that have occurred in recent months.

On May 21, the House Judiciary Committee conducted a hearing focusing on this problem. The committee, at that time, heard first hand from Federal and State law enforcement officials regarding the status of their various investigations. In addition, we heard some very compelling and emotional testimony from two black ministers representing affected African-American congregations.

During that hearing, the Department of Justice indicated that the principal statute used to prosecute church arson contains some significant defects that need to be remedied. Specifically, section 247 of title 18, damage to religious property, imposes an interstate commerce requirement that goes well beyond constitutional requirements. The current law says that the defendant must either travel in interstate commerce, or use a facility or instrumentality of interstate commerce and that the defendant must do so "in interstate commerce." Thus, for example, it's not

enough to use a telephone to help commit the crime—the call must go out of State. Another example would be a circumstance where the defendant uses public transportation to facilitate the crime—it would not be enough if that bus or train traveled interstate, the defendant must have used it in interstate commerce.

This highly restrictive and duplicative language has greatly limited the effectiveness of this law. The Justice Department has indicated that in the majority of these cases, the Government is unable to establish the commerce clause predicates required. Consequently, this statute is simply not punishing or deterring the very kind of misconduct it was originally intended to address.

Just 2 days after our hearing I introduced H.R. 3525, and was pleased to be joined in this effort by the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, JOHN CONYERS. There are now 94 cosponsors of our bill. Today, under suspension of the rules, we will consider a manager's amendment to the bill as reported by the Judiciary Committee. That amendment contains additional provisions intended to assist in compensating the victims of these abhorrent acts.

Specifically, this legislation would broaden the jurisdictional authority of the Federal Government to seek criminal penalties in cases of damage to religious real property based upon whether or not the offense is in or affects interstate or foreign commerce.

This formulation replaces the interstate commerce requirement of current law, thereby simplifying and enhancing the ability of the Attorney General to successfully prosecute cases under Federal law.

The interstate commerce requirement is intended to avoid the problem identified in *United States v. Lopez*, 115 S. Ct. 1624 (1995), in which the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional legislation which would have regulated the possession of firearms in a school zone. In that case, the Court found that the conduct to be regulated did not have a substantial effect on interstate commerce, and was therefore not within the Federal Government's reach under the interstate commerce clause of the Constitution. H.R. 3525, by contrast, specifically limits its reach to conduct which can be shown to be in or to affect interstate commerce. Thus, if in prosecuting a particular case, the Government is unable to establish this interstate commerce connection to the act, section 247 will not apply to the offense.

The formulation of the interstate commerce nexus in H.R. 3525 is virtually identical to that found in section 844(i) of title 18, the Federal arson statute, which is limited to cover buildings "used in interstate commerce or in any activity affecting interstate commerce." That statute, which was enacted in 1970, has been used to prosecute church arsons, thereby confirm-

ing our view that church arsons could be found to be in interstate commerce. See, e.g., *United States v. Norton*, 700 F.2d 1072 (6th Cir.), cert. denied, 461 U.S. 910 (1983); *United States v. Swapp*, 719 F. Supp. 1015 (D. Utah 1989), aff'd 934 F.2d 326 (10th Cir. 1991). In fact, the Supreme Court, in reviewing the legislative history associated with section 844(i), cited an amendment to the provision which was intended to expand coverage from just business property to "a private dwelling, or a church or other property not used in business." *Russell v. United States*, 471 U.S. 858, 860-862 n.7 (1985). We are making the interstate commerce requirement of section 247 consistent with that of section 844(i) so as to ensure that the Federal Government has equal authority to prosecute damage to religious real property caused by something other than arson. Further, section 247 will permit prosecution of those who would intentionally obstruct any person in the enjoyment of his or her free exercise of religious beliefs.

Second, the manager's amendment eliminates the requirement of current law that the damage involved must be of a value of more than \$10,000. When introduced, our bill would have reduced that amount to \$5,000. In Committee, substitute language was adopted that eliminated the dollar threshold in its entirety. I offered this amendment because I have become convinced that a minimum dollar amount is not necessary to justify Federal involvement in these types of cases. That is, they are clearly hate crimes and implicitly interfere with the first amendment rights or civil rights of the victims. Spray painted swastikas on synagogues or gunshots fired through church windows may not reflect large dollar losses, but they are nevertheless assaults on religious freedom.

The manager's amendment also amends section 247 by creating a new subsection (c) which makes it unlawful to damage religious real property because of the racial or ethnic character of persons associated with that property. Current law requires that the damage be caused only because of the religious character of the property. Section 247, as amended by H.R. 3525, will firmly reach any attack of a church that is tied to the racial or ethnic characteristics of the members of the church or house of worship.

Because power to enact this subsection is found in the 13th amendment to the Constitution rather than the commerce clause, a showing that the offense is in or affects interstate commerce is not an element of a subsection (c) crime. Section 1 of the 13th amendment prohibits slavery or involuntary servitude. Section 2 of the amendment states, "Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." It is pursuant to this authority to enforce the 13th amendment, that Congress may make it a crime for persons to deface, damage, or destroy houses of worship because of the race,

color or ethnic origin of persons using the house of worship.

The leading Supreme Court case on Congress's authority to reach private conduct under the 13th amendment is *Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co.*, 392 U.S. 409 (1968). In *Jones*, Congress reviewed 42 U.S.C. 1982, which provides that, "All citizens of the United States shall have the same right, in every State and Territory, as in enjoyed by white citizens thereof to inherit, purchase, lease, sell, hold, and convey real and personal property."

The Court in *Jones* held that 42 U.S.C. 1982 barred private discrimination in the sale or rental of private property, and that Congress had authority under section 2 of the 13th amendment to reach private acts of racial discrimination. "[T]he fact that section 1982 operates upon the unofficial acts of private individuals, whether or not sanctioned by state law, presents no constitutional problem." 392 U.S. at 438. The Court stated that section 2 of the 13th amendment gave Congress "power to pass all laws necessary and proper for abolishing all badges and incidents of slavery in the United States." *Id.* at 439. The Court concluded in *Jones* that "badges and incidents of slavery" included racial restraints upon the holding of property, and therefore legislation that prohibited discrimination in the right to hold and use property clearly was encompassed within Congress's power to enforce the 13th amendment. *Id.* at 441. Subsequently, the Supreme court stated, "[S]urely there has never been any doubt of the power of Congress to impose liability on private persons under Section 2 of [the Thirteenth] Amendment." *Griffin v. Breckenridge*, 403 U.S. 88, 105 (1971).

While 42 U.S.C. 1983 was enacted in 1866, Congress has used its authority to enforce the 13th amendment more recently. The 13th amendment was one authorization on which Congress relied when it enacted the fair housing provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-284, approved April 11, 1968). See discussion in *United States v. Hunter*, 459 F.2d 205, 214 (4th Cir.), cert. denied, 409 U.S. 934 (1972); *Williams v. Matthews Co.*, 499 F.2d 819 (8th Cir.), cert. denied, 419 U.S. 1021 (1974). Like 42 U.S.C. 1982, some provisions of the Fair Housing Act prohibit discriminatory private conduct, and Congress in fact enacted both civil and criminal provisions addressing private discrimination. See 42 U.S.C. 3631 making it a crime for anyone, "whether or not acting under color of law," to injure, interfere with, or intimidate anyone because of race, color, national origin, or religion in seeking to secure, or helping others to secure housing.

Accordingly, based on *Jones* versus *Mayer*, Congress may make it a violation of Federal criminal law to destroy or attempt to destroy a church because it is owned or used by African-Americans. Racially motivated destruction of a church would be no less a badge or in-

cident of slavery than denial of housing based on race. Many of the victims of church arsons have been quoted recently as stating that the fires appeared to them to resurrect the days in which racial discrimination and intimidation was rampant. This legislation easily falls within the kind of private action Congress may reach pursuant to its authority to enforce the 13th amendment to prohibit private conduct that discriminates on the basis of race.

While this legislation might be targeted primarily at the recent increase in fires at churches owned by African-Americans, its reach is broad enough to include arsons or acts of violence motivated by bias directed at any racial or ethnic minority group, and at synagogue desecrations as well. In *Saint Francis College v. Al-Khazraji*, 481 U.S. 604 (1987), the Supreme Court stated that an individual of Arab descent could file a claim under 42 U.S.C. 1981, in which Congress guaranteed to all persons the same right to enter contracts "as is enjoyed by white citizens." Section 1981, like 42 U.S.C. 1982, was enacted pursuant to Congress's authority to implement the 13th amendment. The court in *Saint Francis College* held that, when sections 1981 and 1982 were enacted in the mid-1800's, the persons who did not qualify as white citizens under the Congress's understanding of that term at the time included ethnic minorities. In *Shaare Tefila Congregation v. Cobb*, 481 U.S. 615 (1987), decided with *Saint Francis College* versus *Al-Khazraji*, the Supreme Court held, under the same analysis, that Jews were encompassed within the protections of 42 U.S.C. 1982.

These two cases establish that, in passing legislation to protect churches and houses of worship under its 13th amendment authority, Congress may reach attacks not only on churches owned by African-Americans, but churches owned or used by other minority groups, and synagogues as well. Congress's exercise of its authority to eliminate the badges and incidents of slavery easily supports legislation to make it a crime to deface, damage or destroy a house of worship because of the race, color, or ethnic origin of the person or persons who own or use the building.

Finally, the manager's amendment extends eligibility under the Victims of Crime Act to persons who have been killed or suffered personal injury as a result of a crime described in new section 247.

The arson of a place of worship is repulsive to us as a society. When a fire is motivated by racial hatred it is even more reprehensible. In my view there is no crime that should be more vigilantly investigated and the perpetrators more vigorously prosecuted than crimes of this type. We are dealing with depraved actions resulting from twisted and bigoted minds. It is important that this Congress move forward on this legislation to ensure that Federal law enforcement has the necessary

tools to punish and deter these shameful, vile acts.

□ 1545

Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from Virginia [Mr. DAVIS].

(Mr. DAVIS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DAVIS. Mr. Speaker, as an American citizen, a Virginian, and a Member of Congress, I want to condemn in the strongest possible terms the epidemic of arson against churches that has taken hold across the southern States and elsewhere in our land. I am absolutely appalled that, after all this land has done to heal old wounds and guarantee fairness and justice to all Americans, there are some who still succumb to hate.

The deliberate burning of churches in our land for that has been occurring over the past 18 months is an outrage. It must stop. Those who perpetrate those acts of violence must be brought to justice.

This is one of those rare occasions when nothing short of the full resources of the Federal Government must be brought to bear. No single State government is strong enough to deal with crimes and possibly criminals that do not respect State borders. Penalties should be stiff and uniform. As I read reports of the latest of these incidents, I had the feeling that we have been down this terrible road before. Memory carried me back to headlines I remember reading in the decades in which I was growing up.

In 1958, a synagogue was bombed in Atlanta. President Eisenhower took to the airwaves and expressed his horror at the atrocity and contempt for those who committed it. The Nation recommitted itself to respect for all Americans and for freedom of religion. In 1962, a church was bombed in Birmingham. Four young girls were killed. The conscience of the Nation was aroused in anger and disgust.

President Kennedy spoke for us all when he said, "If these cruel and tragic events can only awaken that city and State—if they can only awaken this entire Nation—to a realization of the folly of racial injustice and hatred and violence then it is not too late for all concerned to unite in steps toward peaceful progress." The Nation responded to his call. Action was taken then. Action must be taken now. This form of terrorism—like all the other forms that have become all too commonplace—must stop.

I commend President Clinton for his show of solidarity with those who have lost and are rebuilding their churches. I salute Representative HENRY HYDE for assembling a bipartisan coalition in Congress behind legislation that would make the willful and destruction of American houses of worship a Federal crime. I am proud to cosponsor his bill and support the managers amendment.

Efforts like these are bringing out the best of America. And it will be the

best of America that will bring these vicious cowards to justice. I said as I began, that I had the feeling that we had been down this road before. And we have. But this time there is a major difference.

This time, not just a handful of concerned local citizens, but entire communities have condemned these vicious acts and are working to bring their perpetrators to justice. This time, elected State and local officials are actively lending their support to those who have to suffer the effects of this violence. This time, they are working to solve crimes and bring about justice. This time, people of all faiths in every part of this Nation have offered their assistance to those who endured these tragedies and are working to achieve reconciliation among Americans of all faiths, races, and creeds.

I especially want to single out the Christian Coalition for its offer of a \$25,000 reward for information leading to arrests and the neighborhood watches it has organized, the National Council of Churches for launching an appeal for funds for rebuilding, and the Southern Baptist Convention for its offers of assistance. Other organizations and denominations have also been stepping forward in great numbers. This time, the people of America stand as united as never before in their resolve to rid this kind of hatred in our land. They are bound and determined to succeed. And they will.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. CONYERS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, we come here today because the Nation is in crisis, and the symptoms of that crisis have been reflected in these church burnings in mostly African American churches. It is to the credit of the Federal Government that we have reacted in a serious and, I think, swift manner, and I want to say that this legislation is the work product of all of us on the committee and that we have held hearings in the Committee on the Judiciary on May 21 in which we had a wide range of witnesses, both in the church and out of the church, in government and out of government, plus the law enforcement agency heads who were dealing with this matter.

Mr. Speaker, what we found out, that is to me one of the most single important matters to come out of this tragedy, is the fact that these burnings are not condoned by anyone, no one in the Congress, no one in the Senate. Our law enforcement agencies, both Federal and State, are united in trying to put an end to this scourge.

Mr. Speaker, I have been in the South on two occasions in which I saw this at the grassroots level, in which law enforcement officers were working very effectively.

In addition, I think we should lift up the name of the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Deval Patrick

for the excellent leadership that he has given and is giving as we move through this nightmare in American history.

Yesterday three more African-American churches were torched. It is pathological. It is the consequence of a lot of things we might have done otherwise. But on this one point we are all united.

The Assistant Secretary for Enforcement in the Treasury, Jim Johnson, has been before the committee and has told us what they are doing. John McGaw, the Director of the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms unit, has given us his report of what is going on. The Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Louis Freeh, through his representatives, have worked completely. We have more than 200 investigators on the ground working full-time on this matter as we speak.

It is a difficult crime for all the obvious reasons, but we are united. We are working closely with State and local law enforcement officers as well. And so we are here today as a combined unit in agreement that the church arson law on the Federal books has to be made effective to be operable.

Our chairman, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE], has explained in perfect detail precisely what we have done to facilitate the implementation of this Federal statute which has lain fallow, actually, up until now. So I am very pleased about what is going on and the resources that are being committed to continue the law enforcement side of this.

I must say that at that hearing on May 21 the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr. Joseph Lowery, urged us to do what we have done, move swifter, move faster, move more effectively. I think that he will agree that we have listened to his comments and are following them with as much speed as the bureaucracy can work.

Then I want to lift up the name of Rev. Jesse Lewis Jackson who has done a marvelous job of trying—well, he has done two things. The first thing he has done is to speak sensibly and in a teacher way about the problem, and the second thing he has done is try to do this healing that has been referred to by the President.

Now, how do we heal a nation that is coming out of a history of racism? It is not just done by words or sermons or speeches from on high. But, as my colleagues know, I believe that we have struck a nerve in the American body politic that has led us all to say enough of this kind of foolishness.

The conservative Members of the Congress came to the members of the Congressional Black Caucus to join together even before we had the hearings to urge, and they met with the law enforcement officials of the Federal Government and urged with us that they move as swiftly as they can, no holds barred, get whoever is at the bottom of this, if it is individuals, whatever, let us deal with it in a way that reflects the understanding and common sense

and leadership that should be expected of the Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say as one Member of this body that this Government has made me proud. This membership in Congress has made me proud because this is the most sensitive thing in the American body politic right now. When in God's name are these few people out there going to turn away from this kind of pathological conduct?

But we are doing all we can on this side. Oh, yes, there is more to be done. These kinds of problems are not healed by a bill, but it is my privilege, as the ranking member of this committee, to commend to all of the Members and the staffs, Alan Coffey and the other members, Julian Epstein, Melanie Sloan, and Diana Schacht and all of those that have been working with us for a job well done.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1600

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. HEINEMAN].

(Mr. HEINEMAN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HEINEMAN. Mr. Speaker, today, Congress has its opportunity to speak out against the ignorant and cowardly actions of the antireligious bigots who participated in burning the churches of both black and white Americans. Unfortunately, as a former law enforcement officer, I have witnessed firsthand the horror of both the burning and desecration of sacred houses of worship. Nothing can be more devastating to people than to see the very foundation of their existence go up in flames. Black Americans have always centered their hope and aspirations around God and their respective churches. I have seen this myself. The destruction of these institutions tears the very fabric of our society and dashes hope for the future. Likewise, the desecration of synagogues is a grim reminder of the Holocaust and is a painful reminder of the tragedies of the past.

We, as a nation and as a Congress, must now allow this to continue. This bill is a proper response to these cowardly acts. This bipartisan legislation will truly make a difference. It will enable the Federal Government to more easily prosecute those who commit these heinous crimes and impose stiff and appropriate criminal sanctions.

Americans have always stood for God and country. Americans have always supported each other in times of need. Today is one of those times. Let us all stand together in this matter and put an end to this madness. If we fail to adequately deal with these tragedies, then we, as representatives of all the people, are not doing our sworn duty. I thank the chairman of the committee, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE], and my colleague, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. CONYERS],

for sponsoring this legislation, and I urge my colleagues to give their full support to this bill.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. WATT] in whose State there have been church arsons.

Mr. WATT of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the chairman of the committee, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE], and the ranking member, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. CONYERS], for proposing this legislation, and encourage my colleagues to vote unanimously in support of it.

There are two important reasons for this legislation, the first of which is a practical reason. When I appeared on the scene at Matthews Merkleland, and the investigation was proceeding of that church burning in Charlotte, NC, we had representatives of the Federal Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms division, we had representatives of the State Bureau of Investigation, we had representatives of the local law enforcement officials, and representatives of the local fire department.

But for the fact that that church had been completely destroyed, there is some question about whether the Federal authorities could have been there at all. If the amount of damages had been minimal, there would have been some question about whether they could have even gone to investigate the fire, despite the terrible nature of it and everybody's suspicion that it could have been racially motivated. So this legislation, on a practical level, will get us beyond that. It was a wonderful sight to see all of the law enforcement authorities there in a spirit of cooperation, trying to bring their resources to bear on this tragedy, and in that particular situation it led to a very quick arrest.

The second important reason is a symbolic reason. That is that we need to make a statement of our outrage about these church burnings. This legislation will enable us to make that statement to the American people that this kind of conduct is totally outside the bounds, is unacceptable in a democratic society. I encourage my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from Illinois [Mr. FLANAGAN].

Mr. FLANAGAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act. In a country that was founded on the principle of religious freedom, crimes against religious property are particularly repugnant. The recent wave of church burnings that has occurred, predominantly against black churches in the South, is reprehensible.

This legislation greatly enhances the ability of Federal law enforcement authorities to prosecute crimes against religious property. Presently, there must be at least 10,000 dollars' worth of property damage before a crime

against religious property can be federally prosecuted. This bill eliminates that minimum requirement. Even a penny's worth of damage would now be enough for Federal prosecution. This is as it should be.

Also, victims of church burnings or other types of religious property destruction will now be able to receive compensation from the violent crimes trust fund that was established by the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. Surely, you are a crime victim when your sacred place of worship is burned to ashes. Compensation is but one small thing we can do to help alleviate the pain for those who have seen their houses of veneration destroyed.

This legislation takes many other actions that will make it easier for Federal investigators to track down those who are maliciously destroying our houses of worship. We must ensure that those who have committed these heinous crimes do not escape punishment. This legislation will help bring those responsible to justice. I urge my colleagues to give the Church Arson Prevention Act their full support.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE), a sterling member of the Committee on the Judiciary, in whose State there have been church burnings.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the ranking member for his kindness in yielding to me, and particularly for his leadership and, as well, the chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE], for the expeditious manner in which we move toward hearings and then now have come to the House floor to speak on behalf of the American people.

There is nothing more tragic than burning houses of worship, no matter what color, what religion. I am grateful that this Congress will say to America, enough is enough, for since 1995 we have had now more than 40 of these burnings, most recently those in my home State of Greenville, TX.

Let me also applaud the NAACP and the group of ministers with which I had the opportunity to join just yesterday in Houston, who likewise met with FBI agents and other Federal officials to assess and be able to indicate their consternation with these tragedies that are occurring.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this legislation is right-headed and right-footed, for it says to the perpetrators, we are going to get you. There is nothing wrong with that, when those who violate the law come to justice, and that we untangle the hands of prosecutors so they can do their job and ensure that those who would worship under the first amendment in the Constitution would not be blighted.

But let me say something for all of us to hear. It is important to recognize

that with this legislation we cannot rebuild churches and men's hearts. We must recognize that we must take away from the anger of this Congress on affirmative action and resegregating us with respect to busing questions; and realize, America, that we must bring this country together. We must stop the ugly talk and recognize that we are all of one human family.

I enjoy America when we stand together. I would hope that all of the church families that I have already heard from will likewise understand that this is not just another whining on behalf of African-Americans in this Nation, but this is in fact an opportunity that we understand, that we stand under one flag, and yes, one belief; that is, in a higher authority that believes in love and sharing and the respect of human dignity.

It is time for all denominations to rise up with us to stand against these atrocities, and yes, this Congress cannot stop with this legislation, we must ensure that we heal this Nation with the kind of legislation that says that we stand against church burnings but we stand for America as one family, supported, for all.

So I thank those who have proposed this legislation, and Mr. Speaker, I would hope that my colleagues will support wholeheartedly H.R. 3525.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of one of the most important pieces of legislation before this House in recent memory. There are few issues that we can debate that are more significant than issues of racial equality and freedom of religion. This bill will aid prosecutors in bringing an end to the many church burnings that have occurred across the country in the past year and a half. We simply cannot return to the reign of terror that existed in the 1960's. We simply cannot risk innocent citizens being harmed like the horrible incident at a Birmingham church in 1963.

Since 1995 alone, there have been more than 40 incidents of the burning and desecration of African-American churches including two in my home State of Texas. In fact, two churches were burned in Mississippi last night. As evidenced by these numbers, there is no doubt that many of these fires have been and continue to be racially motivated. Before loss of life occurs we must end this siege on the Constitution.

The legislation before us today aids law enforcement officials by making it easier to prosecute those who would commit such heinous acts. It amends existing law by providing that anyone using weapons, explosives, or fire damaging property on the basis of its racial or ethnic consideration regardless of the dollar amount of the loss will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law—10 years in prison.

As this plague continues to rapidly grow, it is time for this House to act and help our Nation's enforcement personnel end this reign of terror against our citizens based on race and religion. I urge my colleagues to strongly support this bill and send it to the Senate so that the President can sign this bill as soon as possible. Our swift movement on this bill may help save more communities from suffering these devastating losses.

Finally, I would like to thank Howard Jefferson of the NAACP, President J.J. Roberson of

the Baptist Ministers Alliance, Minister Robert Mohammed of the Nation of Islam, Bishop Guillary of the Houston/Galveston Catholic Diocese, and Rev. Ed Young of Second Baptist Church, local and Federal law enforcement authorities, and many other clergy and community leaders for their leadership on this issue in our great city of Houston, TX. Their message was that we will not tolerate these hateful acts. I was proud to stand with them in their effort of unity.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Florida [Mr. CANADY], the distinguished chairman of the Subcommittee on the Constitution of the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mr. CANADY of Florida. I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Church Arson Prevention Act. Recently Americans have watched in horror as houses of worship have gone into flames, igniting new fears and suspicions and fomenting fires of hatred in our Nation. This tragedy, which has hit primarily African-American churches, calls for immediate action. The Church Arson Prevention Act will help by enabling Federal prosecutors to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

I want to commend the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE] for his swift action on this issue, as well as the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. CONYERS] for his work on this important issue. I urge my colleagues to vote yes on this important bill.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. THOMAS FOGLIETTA, one of the distinguished Members who have worked on civil rights matters across the years.

Mr. FOGLIETTA. Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues to express my horror at the recent string of church fires across the South. More importantly, we join together to do something about it. There have been more than 37 suspicious fires in black and multiracial churches in small towns across America in the last 18 months, 7 in the last 2 weeks, including 2 in the last 2 days in Mississippi.

For the past year we have debated about the role of government. Government is brave men and women putting out fires in communities, it is police officers and the Justice Department fighting to stop crime. The effort we announce today is a good example of how government, the private sector, and people can join together to accomplish a common goal. Government works. Government works when people like President Clinton step up to the bully pulpit and turn this issue into a national challenge, and teaches us that we have to return to the value that made our country so strong, that we have to fight the fire of hate that drove people to commit these outrages.

Government works when my colleagues and I come together to create the energy of firefighters to help people prevent church arsons. As one min-

ister put it, someone who is trying to do us harm in one sense really has done us a lot of good. These fires have drawn people together, both black and white. These acts of hatred have been transformed into gestures of love.

I ask my colleagues to support the proposed amendment by the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE] and the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. CONYERS], H.R. 3525, so together we can find these criminals and put an end to this madness. Together we can and must write an end to this horrible chapter in our Nation's history.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Georgia [Mr. BARR].

Mr. BARR of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary, on which I am proud to serve, for yielding time on this important piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary for looking at this matter in the light it ought to be, to take a very learned, very dispassionate, but passionate look at whether our Federal laws are indeed sufficient to address the problem presented to the American people by the rash of church burnings, white and black alike, across our country, particularly in my part of the country, the southern United States.

Rather than seek out photo ops, rather than talk about this in partisan terms, rather than try and score headline victories over other folks, the gentleman from Illinois, Chairman HYDE, has done it the old-fashioned way, professionally and according to the laws of our land.

I would like, though, also, Mr. Speaker, to caution all of us as we look at this piece of legislation, or really perhaps as we look at other pieces of legislation, because none of us, including myself, dispute the need for this legislation, but to keep in mind that the commerce clause of our Constitution is not infinitely elastic, and we need to look at these pieces of legislation to ensure that there is a proper and firm foundation in the appropriate provisions of our Constitution for the laws that we seek to enact.

While the commerce clause is very broad indeed, it is not, as I have said, infinitely elastic, and we have to be careful, because when it breaks, it will snap fairly hard. We do need to keep that in mind, because we do not want to pass important legislation such as that before us today and find a problem later on, which I do not believe we have with this piece of legislation. Mr. Speaker; but again, I would caution all of us here to be very mindful of the limitations of the various clauses of our Constitution, including particularly in this case, since we are amending the applicability and the reach of this legislation by way of the commerce clause, to be very mindful of those principles of Federalism which

all of us certainly on the Committee on the Judiciary, on our side of the aisle, adhere to and support very strongly.

Again, in closing, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today and commend the chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary, and I urge support for this important piece of legislation.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Texas, Mr. KEN BENTSEN.

(Mr. BENTSEN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in very strong support of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996, in hope that it will end these acts of cowardice against churches in my home State of Texas and across the South. It is unfortunate that in the late 20th century hate crimes still exist in our society.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3525 sends a strong message that these actions will not be tolerated by the Nation, and that our will is stronger than the hatred from which they are born. This legislation brings to bear the full authority and resources of the Federal Government in stopping the arson and bringing the perpetrators to justice. The Federal Government will be a full partner with State and local authorities in this effort. These criminals must be brought to justice and their message must be exposed for what it is: ignorance and hatred—the most un-American of values. One of the founding principles of our Nation is the freedom to worship as we choose, and any attempt to deny someone that right must be stopped.

If anything positive can be gained from these acts, it is that people of good conscience, of all races and creeds, have come together to help the affected congregations and to prevent the further spread of these acts. It's unfortunate that it took something of this magnitude for us to come together, but I want to applaud these efforts. Organizations like the National Trust for Historic Preservations and the Anti-Defamation League have come forward and offered their assistance, along with many others.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. CONYERS] and the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE] for their leadership on this issue. Today we send a strong message that while we in Congress can disagree on many things, we stand united against hatred and ignorance.

□ 1615

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from New York [Mr. WALSH], the chairman of the District of Columbia Appropriation Subcommittee.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished gentlemen from Illinois and from Michigan for bringing this important piece of legislation to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this bill. I rise today to condemn the

arson fires in African-American churches. The good people of central New York whom I represent know that when you see a wrong committed, you must speak out. On their behalf, I want to protest the violence, express our disgust with the hatred, and offer our hand in peace.

As we publicly stand with black Americans we hope to show people of violence one thing—that it is they who are in the minority. It is they who will be overcome. It is we, the majority, the peacemakers, black and white, who will inherit the Earth.

Hatred that spawns violence is not natural or normal. It is foreign to us at birth. We see that the children do not hate. They do not segregate themselves. They do not act violently toward others of a different skin color—unless they are taught. We can learn from the children. In fact, we must if we are to survive as a great civilization.

Today, as the fire investigation continues, I want to say to my friends in this Chamber who are African-American, and to my friends back home, please continue to have faith that most Americans do not hate.

With you, we are the majority in the greatest country on Earth. No purveyors of hate or prejudice will take that from us.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Connecticut [Ms. DELAURO].

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Michigan and the gentleman from Illinois for bringing this legislation forward.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Church Arson Prevention Act and urge its immediate adoption. Just last night, two more southern churches were burned to the ground—these tragic losses add to the mounting list of over 30 suspicious fires at black and multiracial churches in communities across the South in the past 18 months.

Yesterday, I stood with religious and community leaders in New Haven, CT, to condemn these tragic fires that have destroyed sacred sites—built on faith, hope, and love—and to stand in solidarity with the victims of these heinous crimes.

This vital measure makes it a Federal crime to deface or destroy religious property and makes it easier to prosecute church arsons. Most importantly, the passage of this bill will give comfort to the victims of the fires—it will speed the healing process and assist with rebuilding of the churches and the communities that have been scarred by these violent and hateful acts.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Indiana [Mr. MCINTOSH].

Mr. MCINTOSH. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3525, and I want to commend Chairman HYDE and his committee for their good work on this bill. It in some measure allows us to renew that great dream of Martin Luther

King's that blacks and whites can once again walk together in this country blessed by God in a land of freedom.

In the court case *United States versus Lopez*, Justices Kennedy and O'Connor opined that the political branches of government must fulfill grave constitutional obligation to delineate the democratic liberty and federalism and distinguish where the power to enact laws comes from.

In light of that admonition, I must express my sincere doubt regarding the claimed commerce clause justification for this act. I do not believe that a mere change of wording will allow us to preserve the act from constitutional challenge. However, I will vote today to support this bill because it is a very good bill and a necessary bill and because I believe it is one of the rare instances when it is within our express authority under section 5 of the 14th amendment to enact such legislation. It is very clear that this arson which is addressed by this bill dramatically interferes with the religious liberties protected by the first amendment that the States have failed to adequately protect for minorities.

With this nexus, I want to commend the committee for bringing this bill to floor today and urge all of my colleagues to vote for it so that we can send a message to all Americans that this Congress will not stand for these heinous acts of church burnings throughout the South or in any other part of our land.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from Maryland [Mr. CUMMINGS].

(Mr. CUMMINGS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Michigan and Mr. HYDE for their leadership in bringing this important piece of legislation to the floor in such a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, the burning and defacement of places of worship across the South have shaken and angered me to the core. These are atrocities that will not go unpunished. This legislation gives prosecutors the tools to punish the cowardly perpetrators of these heinous crimes.

The church for African-Americans is more than a place of worship. It is a symbol of hope and the bedrock of our community. Like the generations of family and friends before us, we find comfort, hope, and faith in our churches.

Mr. Speaker, it is 1996 and still racism exists. But the Members in this Chambers have chosen to fight these injustices. These gutless acts will not have their intended effect. They will not dissuade us from fighting bigotry and intolerance.

I am pleased to support this legislation, which will facilitate Federal prosecution of arson cases and I urge its swift passage.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from Texas [Mr. STOCKMAN].

Mr. STOCKMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for bringing this bill forward.

I would like to take just one quick moment here to try and put a human face on this. I do not know if you can see this, Mr. Speaker, but in Saturday's paper it discusses how the pastor of a church in Galveston, TX, had his church burned down and to this day has not rebuilt his church and to this day they have not found the perpetrators. This was in our district which, quite frankly, has been a very peaceful, harmonious district, and I would like to point out for the record and like to submit this for the RECORD that this is something that we need to put a human face on. These are people who have lost their church and we do not know why or what is going on in this Nation that has turned its people against churches but, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for offering this bill and I stand fully behind it.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the chairman for bringing this bill forward and I rise in strong support of H.R. 3525—the Church Arson Prevention Act.

It is time we put a human face on the epidemic of church burning. I do not know if you can see this, Mr. Speaker, but last Saturday, the Galveston Daily News ran a story about the destruction of the Island Baptist Church. This little church burned down nearly 2 years ago. The perpetrators of this horrible act have not been found and the church pastor, James Booth, has not yet been able to rebuild his church. I want to submit the story of Pastor Booth, as it appears in the Galveston Daily News, for the RECORD.

Again, it is time we put a human face on the epidemic of church burning. Pastor James Booth is a real person, and members of his congregation are real people. The burning must stop. He and other religious leaders have suffered enough. This bill is necessary to make easier the Federal prosecution of church burners. It is extremely important that the Justice Department pursue church burners diligently.

The destruction of churches isn't a black catastrophe, it isn't a white catastrophe, it's a religious catastrophe. These are crimes against people of faith and those who worship. We must do what we can to stop these heinous crimes.

I implore my colleagues to support this bill. The citizens of Galveston and Pastor Booth are entitled to justice. All victims of church burners are entitled to justice. This bill should be passed by Congress and signed into law immediately. I want to thank the gentleman for offering this bill and I stand fully behind it.

BURNED CHURCH WINS CONGRESSMAN'S SUPPORT

(By Chad Eric Watt and Wes Swift)

GALVESTON.—U.S. Rep. Steve Stockman has asked his colleagues to remember a Galveston church torched by arsonists in 1994.

The Island Baptist Church, which was at 9 Mile and Ostermayer roads, burned Dec. 22, 1994.

The predominantly white Southern Baptist congregation is rebuilding at 8 Mile and Stewart roads.

"Pastor (James) Booth has not yet been able to rebuild his little church on Galveston Island," Stockman said Thursday night on the floor of the House of Representatives.

"He did not receive much attention from the media because when his church burned down, it was not then fashionable to talk about burning churches."

Stockman and other members of Congress expressed concern in a March 1 letter to the U.S. Attorney General.

"We brought this to Janet Reno several months ago," said Cory Birenbaum, a spokesman for Stockman.

In the letter, the congressmen asked Reno to direct the Justice Department to help local authorities catch those setting the fires.

"The burning of churches has become a fashionable crime, with news reports possibly contributing to imitative acts of violence," the letter states.

Governors of Southern states have been invited to the White House next week to discuss strategy for coping with a rash of suspicious fires at predominantly black churches.

By early next week, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms hopes to have details of fires at 33 black churches and 23 non-black churches since Jan. 1.

Civil rights groups tracking church burnings in the South said they have found few examples of white churches being attacked.

"If white church fires were on the increase, with racism as a reason, we'd be on it in a heartbeat," said Angie Lowry of the Montgomery, Ala.-based Southern Poverty Law Center, which studies racial issues.

"I'm not seeing it here in Alabama, and we're not seeing it anywhere else."

Booth said the church burnings reflect a sickness that crosses ethnic boundaries.

"My feeling is not that these burnings are racially motivated—as it was by anger in general," he said. "It's not a race issue. It's the attitude of people in general. It's a very poor condition."

Booth's wife, Ruth Ann, said she was alerted to the mention of their church by a stranger in Modesto, Calif., who saw Stockman make his statements on cable television.

"We had had troubles with vandalism there," Mrs. Booth said.

No one has been arrested in connection with the fire.

Ruth Ann Booth said fire investigators traced the source of the fire to a closet near the church's front entrance. Empty beer cans were found near the entrance.

James Booth said he understands the pain other congregations are going through.

"It's a lot of emotional stress," he said. "To see something that means so much to you like a church go up in flames . . . it's very painful."

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from North Carolina [Mrs. CLAYTON], who has worked on this matter with a great deal of commitment.

(Mrs. CLAYTON asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996.

This bill would amend title 18, the criminal title of the U.S. Code by facilitating prosecution and increasing penalties against those who would do violence to houses of worship.

We have all been concerned over the disturbing trend of African-American church burnings, two a month over the past 18 months, and three more this past weekend.

This bill will address that alarming trend.

But, there have also been other acts of violence directed at houses of worship, such as vandalism, desecrations, and even drive-by-shootings.

This bill will address that alarming trend as well.

The bill makes clear that it is a Federal crime to deface or destroy religious property for racial, ethnic, or religious reasons.

More importantly, the bill removes the current requirement that the offense cause at least \$10,000 in damage—a threshold that has made it very difficult to prosecute such cases in the past.

And, the bill makes victims of religious property defacing or destruction eligible for compensation under the Victims of Crime Act.

This provision is important as many churches seek to rebuild following the rash of destruction, particularly the church burnings.

I am exploring other ways in which the Federal Government can make communities whole when faced with these crimes, especially ways we can help in the rebuilding of churches.

Two more suspicious church fires occurred over the weekend, including another fire in my State of North Carolina.

While I am proud of bipartisan efforts that have been undertaken by the House, we must continue those efforts.

Congress must be eternally vigilant in speaking out now against these intolerable acts.

Those who perpetrate these misdeeds must know that our will to stop them is stronger than their will to continue.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the distinguished gentlewoman from the District of Columbia [Ms. NORTON].

Ms. NORTON. I thank the gentleman for yielding time, and I thank the chairman and the ranking member for their alacrity in moving this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, as a student member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the South during the civil rights movement I remember no time when there was a rash of church burnings. We have enough polarization in this society. We do not need the ultimate polarization, the burning of places of worship. You have restored confidence in the rule of law for many Americans. You have said through this bill that we are still committed to eliminating racism, and I thank you.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE].

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I went to the Second Baptist Church in Long Branch, my hometown, last Sunday to talk to a very concerned crowd about why this legislation is so important.

It is time to relentlessly investigate and swiftly prosecute perpetrators of these crimes. We must have a public outcry condemning these mindless

church burnings, and it must be bipartisan and multiracial. Those people who gain politically and financially from fueling hatred in our society today should recognize the effects of their words.

I say to those who perpetrate these heinous crimes that the days of the night riders are over. The days when African-Americans had to take cover by nightfall in hopes of seeing another day are over. This country will not go back to a time when hatred and intimidation through terrorism was the law of the land.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from South Carolina [Mr. INGLIS].

Mr. INGLIS of South Carolina. I thank the chairman for yielding time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this bill and congratulate the chairman and the ranking member for moving this bill to the floor so quickly.

I think it is important to note two things. First, is the importance of this bill, that it will give us the opportunity as a Federal matter to get at these people who would desecrate houses of worship and really seek to destroy a great deal of the social fabric of our communities. So I think it is important to get this bill accomplished and get it passed so that we can get at a successful prosecution of these folks.

The second thing I think is important to point out is that there is a message of reconciliation and hope in this. It is a message that Terrence Mackey, the pastor of the Greelyville church that President Clinton visited last week, is so good at putting forth, and that is that in the face of this hateful act, people like Pastor Mackey are presenting a message of forgiveness and hope.

That, I think, will get at the deeper problem, because we know that this legislation will be a significant help to Federal prosecutors but we know that underneath this, there is a deeper problem and it is a problem in the heart of humankind. That problem, I think, can only be overcome by people like Pastor Mackey preaching that message of forgiveness and hope. That is the hope of reconciliation. I hope his voice is one that is heard loudest as we go through this process of dealing with the rebuilding and hopefully of the successful prosecution, as well, because of this bill, of the people who would perpetrate these hateful acts.

□ 1630

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. FIELDS] in whose State there have been arsons.

Mr. FIELDS of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Michigan for yielding me the time, and I want to thank the gentlemen for his leadership. I also want to thank the gentleman from Illinois on the other side of the aisle [Mr. HYDE] for this very important matter and also for bringing to it the floor.

Mr. Speaker, the burning of churches in this country is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in any shape, form or fashion. This legislation will give Federal prosecutors the tools they need to prosecute those perpetrators of the crime to the fullest extent of the law.

Mr. Speaker, I come from a State that has witnessed over five burnings in the past 4 months, four in one night alone. I want to thank the gentleman from Michigan and thank the gentleman from Illinois for bringing this very important piece of legislation to the floor and would like to say in no uncertain terms that this Congress will not tolerate individuals burning churches.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. CONYERS], and I ask unanimous consent that he be permitted to control that time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE] for his generosity, and I yield 30 seconds to the gentleman from California [Mr. MILLER].

Mr. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time.

I thank the chairman of the committee, Mr. HYDE, for yielding and both of my colleagues for bringing this matter to the floor and rise in strong support of this legislation. I join those of our colleagues and so many across the Nation who have voiced their strong, strong objection to those who would take actions of violence against our houses of worship in this country and hope that this legislation will be some small beginning in mending these horrible actions against the churches in the South and elsewhere.

I thank the gentleman for bringing this legislation to the floor.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to conclude the time that has been afforded us on this side by reminding all of our colleagues that the President of the United States has involved himself in this matter in a very important way.

First of all, he urged that there be some legislation that could deal with this subject matter. Then he used his weekly radio address to direct to the Nation the deepness of the injury that these kinds of attacks on churches commit. Then he went to the South himself, and tomorrow he will be meeting with Governors of the several States. I think the President of the United States has handled this at the Federal level remarkably well.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to the distinguished gentleman from Oklahoma [Mr. WATTS].

Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me the time.

Mr. Speaker, in the last week, churches have burned in North Carolina, Texas, Oklahoma, and Georgia. Fires are destroying our houses of worship like an unchecked scourge. With each fire, we have all felt the loss because any church that is burned in our church, for every house of worship is a symbol of our faith in God and our right to worship according to the dictates of our own conscience.

As evil as these church burnings are, we must avoid becoming consumed by our anger. For as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., taught us, darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.

To begin to heal, to drive away the darkness, we must bring back the light, the light of love, the light of hope. First we must apprehend those who are responsible for the fires and prosecute them to the full extent of the law. This bill will help to do that.

Second and more importantly, we must come together to rebuild our churches and communities. Our actions must show the world that we will not sit idly by when the unity and religious freedom of our nation are attacked.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the gentleman from Illinois, Chairman HYDE, and the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. CONYERS, for producing H.R. 3525. I call on the House to pass this bill unanimously to send the strongest possible message that this Congress will do all within its power to stop the fires and help the healing again.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the remainder of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that we have had an interesting and good and full debate on this important issue. Burning a church is about as rotten, reprehensible an act as anybody can do, and I hope this law helps in the identification and severe punishment of the perpetrators.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BEVILL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my deep concern about the alarming rash of fires that have destroyed or badly damaged at least 34 black churches across the South. There is a lot of speculation about who may be behind these arson attacks and whether racism is involved. I am confident that the perpetrators of these crimes will be caught and brought to justice. Their punishment should be severe.

Strong legislation is moving through Congress to give U.S. attorneys clear jurisdiction to prosecute church arson suspects. I will support this bill when it comes to the House floor. There should be no misunderstanding that these attacks are of national concern.

These crimes show a blatant disrespect not only for the people who worship at these churches, but also for their faith itself. Churches are sanctuaries of faith. They are houses of God and they should be respected. How would you feel if someone burned down your church? I know how I would feel. I would be hurt and outraged. I would want something done about it.

It is a sad commentary on our society when any place of worship is vandalized or de-

stroyed. This goes for the burning of churches as well as the spraying of Nazi graffiti on synagogues.

The very principles upon which our Nation was founded are at stake here. The Pilgrims who braved rough seas and harsh winters to find a new life in America came here to find a place to worship freely. They came to escape religious persecution.

That's why our U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion in the first amendment. Most of us would interpret that right to mean that we can worship without fear.

When crimes are committed against places of worship—even in the dead of night—it creates an atmosphere of distrust and fear. God-loving, law-abiding citizens don't wish that on anyone, regardless of their religion or their race.

I am glad to see the Congress and the administration stepping forward to address this issue. And, I want to commend NationsBank Corp. for pledging to pay \$500,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible. This sends a strong message that the corporate community in the South is equally concerned about these crimes.

I am also glad to see that the National Trust for Historic Preservation has added southern black churches to its list of "most endangered" historic places. The support offered by the trust will go a long way toward helping affected communities to heal.

I pray that this rash of attacks on Southern churches will end now and that a sense of safety and sanctity will be restored to these places of worship.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act. I want to commend Mr. HYDE and Mr. CONYERS for proposing this bill which was introduced in response to the tragic church fires which have destroyed over 30 black churches throughout the South over the last 18 months. Enough is enough. The time has come to step up our efforts, and we must take more action to assist Federal, State, and local authorities in preventing and investigating these fires.

I want to add my voice in expressing strong displeasure with those who seek to evoke fear and promote hatred by engaging in these acts of cowardice. This type of behavior tears at the very fabric which holds this Nation together. It is important that we do what is necessary to put an end to these unacceptable actions. As a Nation which prides itself in furthering liberty, equality, and justice for all, conduct of this nature cannot and will not be tolerated.

There is no institution more sacred than a house of worship. I am appalled and outraged that any person would desecrate an institution which fosters religious freedom, a right guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States. The church serves as the foundation of good, hope, and prosperity in many communities. It also serves as a place of solace for those seeking refuge from the cruelties and harshness of the world. Moreover, it is a place where people can put aside their differences and come together. I will never understand how one can seek to destroy the positive spirit which the church symbolizes.

I am deeply saddened by the events which have taken place over the last year and a half.

They are an ugly reminder of our not so distant past and send the wrong message to impressionable minds. Over the past 30 years, we have worked hard to build many bridges across the racial divide. To a large degree, we have been quite successful. However, we still have a long way to go in our pursuit to understand one another and ensure equality for every American. As the most civilized nation in the world, it is incumbent on us to continue to move forward. We cannot let the uncivilized actions of a few keep us from achieving the worthwhile goal of racial and ethnic harmony.

The legislation before us today, in coordination with the efforts of Federal law enforcement agencies, can assist in bringing to justice those individuals responsible for the fires. Through their efforts, some progress has already been made. One of the principle Federal agencies working on these incidents has been the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. BATF has responded to these incidences by using additional resources and manpower. Their efforts have resulted in the resolution of some of these arson cases, some by arrest and others by designation as accidental. There still are a number of ongoing investigations and the fires continue to occur. Therefore, we must provide additional tools to BATF and other Federal law enforcement agencies so that they can more readily investigate and prosecute these heinous crimes.

I urge my colleagues to stand with Congressman HYDE and CONYERS in supporting this legislation. Passage of this legislation today will allow Congress to join in the healing process which has begun for those churches which are now rebuilding. It will also send a message from Congress that we do not condone or tolerate this type of activity in our Nation.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the bipartisan legislation introduced by our colleagues, Judiciary Chairman HENRY HYDE and ranking member JOHN CONYERS, and to encourage the House to pass it unanimously. There is no more cowardly and offensive act than burning a community's place of worship. It is all the more unconscionable when it is done out of bigotry and hatred. This legislation will help the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms ensure that justice will be swift and complete. Congress must make a strong proactive move to stop these burnings, bring the arsonists to justice, and help these communities rebuild.

I extend my utmost sympathy to the ministers and their congregations all over the country who have lost their places of worship. I also call upon the victims of these terrible crimes to be strong and to direct your anger not toward revenge, but toward reconstruction and healing. As the only survivor of the Holocaust elected to Congress, I am all too familiar with the injustices of random, unprovoked acts of violence. We must use this opportunity to bare these extreme racists for who they are—unscrupulous criminals who deserve to be put in jail for a long time. It is imperative that we send a loud, clear, and firm message to the perpetrators of these sick crimes that Americans will not tolerate bigotry or hate crimes.

It will take a concerted effort of every American from every region of the country to send the message that we must not slip back into a dark past when minorities lived in fear of intolerant racists. Mr. Speaker, let us lend our resources and wholehearted commitment to

the Federal, State, and local authorities who are investigating this damaging epidemic. I urge my colleagues to unanimously support this legislation.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, this Member is pleased to be a cosponsor of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act, and would urge his colleagues to support this bill.

This measure is necessary because of the recent rash of church burnings which has occurred across the Nation. Over 30 black churches have been the victims of arson this year alone, and Federal help has been asked in catching those responsible. In fact, there have been over half a dozen church fires this week. This must stop. The Church Arson Prevention Act will give Federal prosecutors specific jurisdiction to prosecute those who damage religious property. It will also eliminate any monetary damage requirement for Federal prosecution. This legislation will give prosecutors a great opportunity to fight these terrible crimes, as the arson-investigating resources of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms can be called into play. The victims of these fires will be eligible under this bill to receive compensation from the crime victims trust fund.

Mr. Speaker, it is this Member's hope that this legislation will quickly become law in order to help combat this rash of hatred and to punish those responsible for these crimes.

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, considering that our country was founded on certain principles, among them the freedom of religious expression, it is utterly appalling that places of worship—homes to hundreds and hundreds of congregations—have apparently been targeted to bear the brunt of racial hatred and religious bigotry in this country.

While I am absolutely outraged at the series of church fires that have brought us to this point, I am pleased that the Congress has worked swiftly and in a bipartisan manner to ensure that the church arson law is improved and strengthened. This is an issue that knows no color, race, or religion. It affects each and every one of us Americans; as a country.

The passage of this bill will not heal the wounds created by the tragic burning of churches, nor help ease the pain felt by those who have seen their place of worship destroyed by the senseless and bigoted act of another. But this measure will help punish the instigators of these fires by making it easier to prosecute those responsible for these egregious acts. And in light of recent events, this could not be more timely nor more crucial.

Mr. FRANKS of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, as I had done on June 13, 1996, I rise once again to voice my support of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996 which has been offered by Congressman HYDE and Congressman CONYERS and of which I am a proud cosponsor.

Mr. Speaker, I and many of my colleagues have been alarmed by the rash of intentionally set church fires. Sadly, it has reached the point that it has become a daily occurrence. Seemingly, each day, we read in the papers or see on the morning news that our Nation will be supporting more burned-out churches upon its landscape—grotesque charred shells which remind us that there are those who would still practice racism and bigotry and prevent their fellow Americans from pursuing a terror-free life of happiness, freedom and religious liberty.

As I have stated before, H.R. 3525 will make important and necessary changes to our laws which are presently on the books so that we can investigate, arrest, and convict more of those who terrorize with fire or vandalism.

The bill would broaden the scope of present statute which makes it a crime to damage religious property or to obstruct a person in the free exercise of religious beliefs by applying criminal penalties if the offense is in, or affects interstate commerce. As I had mentioned before, both Congressman HYDE and Congressman CONYERS have written H.R. 3525 so it will provide the necessary amendment to our Federal statutes to grant Federal jurisdiction, and thus will augment the Attorney General's ability to prosecute arson cases of this nature.

I am happy to report that this bill will eliminate the current dollar value of destruction which may occur before these crimes of desecration may be prosecuted. At the present time, our laws state that the loss from the destruction of property must be more than \$10,000. Originally as written, H.R. 3525 would reduce that threshold to \$5,000, but Messrs. HYDE and CONYERS have properly seen fit to eliminate the threshold altogether. By eliminating the threshold, it will be easier for the Federal Government to prosecute more of these arson cases.

Mr. Speaker, I once again congratulate Messrs. HYDE and CONYERS on their work on this important bill. I also congratulate the other 91 sponsors of this measure. Now is time for this House to let the people of America know that it will not tolerate the actions of bigots and racists. We must pass H.R. 3525 to deliver that message.

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996.

On Monday night two churches were burned in Mississippi that bring sadness to me that this has happened in our State.

This bill will give law enforcement officers the tools to bring to justice those who are responsible for these burnings. Also the bill will bring better cooperation between local, State and Federal law enforcement agencies to solve these terrible crimes.

I am sure the people in Mississippi will pull together to rebuild these churches of God.

I support this legislation. I hope the Senate and the President will act quickly on this bill.

Mr. FAZIO of California. I rise today to offer my strong support for the bipartisan legislation before us. The Church Arson Prevention Act will make it easier to bring prosecutions and will stiffen penalties against those who target houses of worship.

Over the last 18 months, 33 predominantly black churches have been burned down throughout the South. This outbreak of violence and racism recalls a time in our Nation's history when such acts were used to intimidate civil rights activists. We must not tolerate a rekindling of these flames of bigotry and hatred in our country as we approach the new century.

These church fires, and the smoldering scourge of racism that we still confront in our society, have reminded us that there is much work to be done to achieve the goals of Dr. King and the millions of others who aspire to live in the colorblind society that he dreamed would become a reality.

This legislation is a step in that direction, but we must do much more. As a nation, we

must stand together in opposition to those who advocate violence and racism. With one voice, we must be firm and unequivocal in our denunciation of such acts.

As Abraham Lincoln said in 1858, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." These prophetic words remain true in our day.

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Church Arson Prevention Act (HR 3525). Sacred places of worship are under attack across America. Over the past 18 months, 35 black churches have been burned. This number rivals the number of churches that were the targets of vicious racial hatred four decades ago, in the years leading up to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Mr. Speaker, we must not permit the forces of evil to turn back the hands of time. Church burnings will never destroy the spirit of those who have faith. Those who perpetrate these morbid crimes telecast themselves as the enemies of all who quest social justice. As legislators committed to racial equality we must condemn the violence and resist efforts to promote the despicable concept of white supremacy.

The burning of black churches dramatizes the racist polarization which plagues our society. Congress must act with singular resolve to denounce these reprehensible acts of vandalism and the stupidity and hatred that spawn such unthinkable crimes. Government must employ all necessary resources to investigate these outrageous offenses and prosecute those responsible for such malicious acts of violence.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3525 which makes it a Federal crime to deface or destroy religious property. It will facilitate Federal authorities in prosecuting those guilty of the terrorist tactics involved in church burnings.

Ms. McCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I want to express my condolences to all of the families and congregations which have been victims of church burnings throughout our Nation, and urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act.

Many religious groups and individuals in my community have provided support for those who have been displaced by the church burnings. The Reverend Mac Charles Jones, pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church in Kansas City, is one who is advocating nationally for African American congregations coping with this extraordinary misfortune. In his role as associate general secretary for racial justice of the National Council of Churches, Rev. Jones met with President Clinton last week urging Federal support in investigating the church burnings. Rev. Jones and other area ministers are seeking donations locally to assist the investigators and the victims. I salute everyone for demonstrating compassion and generosity during this difficult time, and encourage the broadest participation possible in rebuilding these spiritual structures.

I am honored today to have the opportunity to do my part by supporting a bill to prevent these horrific acts of violence in the future. H.R. 3525 eliminates certain barriers to Federal prosecution of individuals suspected of church burning. For example, the current requirement that the offense cause at least \$10,000 in damages before Federal action can be taken will be eliminated. Those who would deface or destroy religious property in the name of hate will be subject to Federal criminal charges.

Healing the spiritual wounds caused by the destruction of one's place of worship will not come easily or quickly, but finding the individuals who are responsible and bringing them to justice is essential. I believe very strongly that local communities and the Federal Government must work together to see that these grave injustices are rectified. The Church Arson Prevention Act will aid communities and law enforcement in this effort, and will help deter future acts of terrorism on our churches and synagogues, which serve as the center of every community.

The Jewish Community Relations Bureau, one of the many organizations in my community which has come to the aid of the victims of church burnings, has a saying:

If injustice is occurring to one person, it's the same as if it's happening to me.

I urge my colleagues to act in the spirit of this sincere expression by voting for H.R. 3525.

Mr. POSHARD. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996, and thank chairman HYDE and Ranking Member CONYERS for their swift action in bringing this bill to the floor.

Like millions of other Americans, I grew up attending a little country church. It was there along the banks of the Little Wabash River in White County, IL, that I learned the scripture lessons and the basic values which have guided my life and which are still today the foundation for who I am. That is not an unusual experience whatsoever, for Americans are a religious people and we live in a religious nation. We are a nation of religious tolerance, respecting differing denominations and religions as we all seek the solace and comfort of our faith.

The church, as important as it was spiritually, was also important in a very physical, structural way, and it served as a gathering place in our little community.

The church arsons which have scarred our physical, spiritual, and emotional connections to those churches are repugnant to all of us. We want the people who have suffered from these reprehensible acts to know that our thoughts and prayers are with them. And we want those who are responsible for these actions to know they will be held responsible.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996.

I come to the House of Representatives having grown up as the child of an active Baptist minister in Alabama with fear that my family would be the target of church bombings that were all too common during the 1950's. The burning of a church is nothing less than a cowardly act of terrorism upon the community that hosts the church.

We are seeing church burnings in the African-American communities every day and we must put a stop to it. We do everything in our power to stop terrorism abroad, we must do nothing less to prevent this terror in these United States.

The cowards who set these fires must be caught, brought to justice and punished severely. I hope that we will work together to help all Americans build a better nation and a better world.

I urge each of my colleagues to vote in support of the Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996.

Mr. PAYNE of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus

and as a cosponsor of the Church Arson Prevention Act, I rise in strong support of this measure. It is imperative that we take immediate action to strengthen the ability of Federal law enforcement officials to respond to the alarming increase in church burnings in the South and other parts of the Nation. These incidents of hate call to mind ugly images of cross burnings and Klan rallies by false patriots determined to divide this Nation.

Communities are now living in fear that their sacred houses of worship will be reduced to ashes overnight in the wake of this destructive spree. We need to send a clear signal to the perpetrators of these hate crimes that every law enforcement resource available will be used to bring them to justice. Not only does this bill clarify that Federal officials can become involved in investigations of church fires affecting interstate commerce; it also removes the current requirement that \$10,000 in damage must occur before Federal intervention.

Mr. Speaker, we know that a church is more than just the brick and mortar which make up the building. It is a place of hope and spiritual renewal, a center where communities gather in celebration of one of our most precious freedoms, the freedom of religion. Many congregations also run important services out of their church buildings, such as food pantries to feed the needy, activities for young people, and programs for seniors. The loss of a church is devastating; it goes far beyond the material loss and inflicts enormous emotional pain.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill and stop the epidemic of hate and violence which has no place in this Nation.

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. Speaker, our Nation is witnessing a frightening and despicable increase in violent attacks on places of worship. Indeed, since 1991, more than 152 houses of worship have been destroyed by arson or vandalism. And within the last 18 months, nearly 50 African-American churches and 10 predominantly white churches have been desecrated. Just last night in Mississippi, two more churches were victims of arson.

These attacks simply must be stopped. While arson is undeniably one of the most egregious crimes against society, it is even more heinous when committed against a sacred place of worship. Every American and every community must act against these crimes. And congress can take the first step by passing H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act.

Religion has been a central part of our Nation's culture and society. The burning or desecration of a place of worship not only destroys a vital and important physical structure and moral symbol, but it sends a message of hate and division within the community where the attack occurs. Congress must ensure that those responsible for such hideous acts be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

This is not a partisan issue; it is an issue of justice. H.R. 3525 addresses this problem by enhancing the Federal Government's ability to prosecute convicted arsonists and by removing the minimal damage requirement.

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 3525. We must send a clear and strong message that this dangerous and immoral behavior will not be tolerated anywhere in America.

Mr. STOKES. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act. If this great Nation is to live up to

its pledge of liberty and justice for all, then we must come together to end the repugnant wave or racially motivated arsons perpetrated against African-American churches.

After hearing today of yet two more burnings of predominantly African-American churches, the latest of more than 34 since January 1995, I commend my colleagues Chairman HENRY HYDE and JOHN CONYERS for proposing this crucial legislation. H.R. 3525 is an unequivocal representation of the Congress' condemnation of these acts of violence. This bill also provides for reasonable steps to fight these kinds of crimes. This legislation sensibly amends the United States Code to facilitate the use of Federal law to prosecute persons who attack religious property based on the race, color, or ethnic characteristics of persons associated with that property. In addition, this bill allows victims to obtain financial assistance under the victims of crime fund for any injuries caused by an attack on religious property.

Mr. Speaker, I denounce the recent epidemic of arson against African-American churches across this Nation. In addition to supporting H.R. 3525, I am committed to insisting that law enforcement authorities do everything within their power to apprehend the persons responsible for such acts of unadulterated hatred. This bipartisan legislation being considered by the House of Representatives will certainly assist our efforts to prevent these immoral crimes.

It is my hope that from the ashes of African-American churches Americans will come together to put an end to racial intolerance. I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation.

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my outrage and that of good Americans across this great country at the wave of suspicious fires that have swept at least 30 churches in the South in recent months. Churches and synagogues are the cornerstones of our communities, providing the moral and spiritual cultivation that our society so desperately needs. I ask all my colleagues in the House to voice their condemnation of these deplorable acts. Vandalizing places of worship is not a partisan issue.

I also call on all the moral leaders of our Nation and those of every religious background to stand against these acts of terror. Every synagogue, mosque and church is vulnerable to the same acts of terrorism committed against our black churches and it is crucial that leaders of every religious denomination speak out against the vandalism of our nation's houses of worship.

It is a shame that the history of violence and intimidation towards black people in this country is repeating itself. Will we allow hate groups such as the Klu Klux Klan, the Aryan Nation, skinheads, and other white supremacist organizations to rise again? Will we allow the historic achievements of our courageous freedom fighters who sought to create a nation of fairness and racial harmony to be further defamed?

In our society, arson of a church attended predominately by African-Americans carries a unique and menacing threat to individuals in our Nation who remain physically vulnerable to acts of violence and intimidation because of their race. Such threats are intolerable and individuals responsible for such acts must be aggressively pursued and apprehended.

As churches burn from flames of hate and intolerance, there are those in our society who would dismantle civil rights legislation and affirmative action that have provided assistance to groups in our Nation who have been discriminated against due to their race, sex, or religious beliefs.

We as a nation must not allow the practice of scapegoating others because they are of a different race or nationality or poor to continue. Our Nation was built on diversity and we must refute any beliefs that condone or support an atmosphere of blame and intolerance against those in our society who are defenseless, particularly our sick, poor, and aged. Just as the churches, synagogues, and mosques shelter our weak and defenseless, we as Americans have an obligation to protect those houses of worship from vicious attacks.

I commend President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno on their quick responses to investigate these criminal acts of terrorism and I hope those who make such threats will be prosecuted and will serve sentences commensurate with the cowardly and despicable nature of their actions.

Mr. REED. Mr. Speaker, as a cosponsor of H.R. 3525, the Church Arson Prevention Act, I am pleased that the House is considering this important legislation.

The legislation before us is straightforward. It will help law enforcement officials capture those responsible for these heinous crimes.

Unfortunately, the motivation of those committing these acts is also straightforward—hate, ignorance and disrespect.

More than 30 fires have occurred at churches throughout the South, leaving in their wake a fear that the demons of the past have risen again. This time they are not content to spew their slogans of hatred. Instead, their hate is at such a fever pitch that these brutes attack one of the most powerful symbols of community and love—places of worship.

In the 1960's our Nation witnessed a dramatic struggle for racial equality. Efforts to give African-Americans equal opportunity were often met with violent protest, and America lost a number of brilliant young leaders to racial hatred and bigotry, including religious men like the Reverend Martin Luther King.

In the end, the American ideal of equality won, and hate lost.

Now, those who would tear our Nation apart have returned.

We must collectively respond to this hatred. We cannot tolerate these deplorable acts against African-Americans and our places of worship. Indeed, the combination of this racial and religious intolerance is immoral and must be countered at every turn.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the House will pass this legislation to fight these despicable acts, and the Senate should follow suit.

In addition, I would urge the President and Assistant Attorney General Patrick to continue their efforts to bring the perpetrators of these hateful acts to justice—America's citizens of all races and religions deserve no less.

Ms. PELOSI. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this important legislation. These hate crimes against places of worship are simply intolerable and we in Congress must take quick and decisive action against these horrible acts of terrorism.

While we are saddened by these tragedies we can take heart on the words of one of the ministers who said they have burned the building, but they haven't destroyed the church.

I commend the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Mr. HYDE, its ranking member, Mr. CONYERS, and all of my colleagues who are working together so effectively to see that this legislation is speedily passed in the hopes that the hatred that is rearing its ugly head will be stamped out.

Yesterday, two more churches burned to the ground. Institutions of worship represent America's faith. Congress must give the Department of Justice the tools necessary to investigate, apprehend and prosecute those who destroy or desecrate religious property. Our religious liberty is at stake and people's lives are in danger.

I join with my colleagues to act now to put out these fires of hatred and ignorance and to help with the healing of those in the communities affected.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. NETHERCUTT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3525, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 5, rule 1 and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

WILLIAM H. NATCHER BRIDGE

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3572) to designate the bridge on U.S. Route 231 which crosses the Ohio River between Maceo, KY, and Rockport, IN, as the "William H. Natcher Bridge."

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3572

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. DESIGNATION.

The bridge on United States Route 231 which crosses the Ohio River between Maceo, Kentucky, and Rockport, Indiana, shall be known and designated as the "William H. Natcher Bridge".

SEC. 2. REFERENCES.

Any reference in a law, map, regulation, document, paper, or other record of the United States to the bridge referred to in section 1 shall be deemed to be a reference to the "William H. Natcher Bridge".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Wisconsin [Mr. PETRI] and the gentleman from West Virginia [Mr. RAHALL] each will be recognized for 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin [Mr. PETRI].

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3572, which would name a bridge on U.S. 231 over the Ohio River near Owensboro, KY, in honor of our late and former colleague, William Natcher, is identical to legislation which was passed unanimously by this House on September 22, 1994. Unfortunately, the Senate never acted on this