I believe this bill will finally address the massive human suffering that has occurred as a result of the trade of conflict diamonds in Africa. This tragedy, which has driven over 6 million people from their homes and resulted in over 2 million deaths, has gone unaddressed for too long. I encourage all my colleagues to support H.R. 2722, so the association between diamonds and Americans can once again be love, not violence.

HATE CRIMES PREVENTION ACT

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 28, 2001

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, since the April 3, 2001 introduction of H.R. 1343, the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, 199 members from both sides of the aisle have added their voices to the call for comprehensive legislation that will provide assistance to state and local law enforcement and amend federal law to streamline the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes.

The events of September 11th have demonstrated the destructive power of hate to rend the fabric of a community and a nation. Domestically, hate crimes statistics are a disturbing barometer of the state of the nation. In spite of national success in lowering overall crime rates, hate crimes have proven resistant to that trend. Data collected for 2000, pursuant to the 1990 Hate Crimes Statistics Act, documented 8,152 hate crimes, an increase of 3.5 percent from 1999 figures.

Overall, racial bias accounted for 54.3 percent of incidents, with religious bias accounting for 16.5 percent, sexual orientation 16 percent and ethnicity 12.4 percent of incidents. Notably, anti-black bias accounted for 35.6 percent of all racial bias and anti-Semitism accounted for 75.5 percent of all religious bias incidents.

In the wake of terrorist attacks, the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee has investigated, documented and referred to federal authorities over 450 incidents. These incidents include the murders of a Muslim Pakistani store owner in Dallas, TX, and an Indian-American gas station owner in Mesa, AZ, where a suspect was arrested shouting, ''I stand for America all the way.''

The Department of Justice, however, has initiated only approximately 40 investigations of hate crimes directed against institutions or people of Arab or Middle-Eastern decent. As the James Byrd and Matthew Shepard tragedies suggest, the investigation and prosecution of this flood of hate crimes will strain the resources of state and local law enforcement agencies.

Current law limits federal jurisdiction to federally protected activities, such as voting for even covered classes of persons, so all these incidents will not be subject to federal jurisdiction. Moreover, current law does not permit federal involvement in a range of cases involving crimes motivated by bias against the victim's sexual orientation, gender or disability. This loophole is particularly significant given the fact that ten states have no hate crime laws on the books, and another 21 states have extremely weak hate crimes laws.

Our bill will remove these hurdles, so the federal government will no longer be handicapped in its efforts to assist in the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. Through an Intergovernmental Assistance Program, federal authorities will be able to provide technical, forensic or prosecutorial assistance to state and local law enforcement officials. In addition, the legislation authorizes the Attorney General to make grants to state and local law enforcement agencies that have incurred extraordinary expenses associated with the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2001 is a constructive and measured response to a problem that continues to plague our nation—violence motivated by prejudice. It is vital that both government and individuals distinguish the beliefs of the Arab-American and Muslim communities from the perpetrators of September 11th's violence, and recognize that these Americans share our values and contribute significantly to our communities.

All Americans should stand to condemn any acts of bigotry, violence or discrimination against Arab-Americans, South Asians and American Muslims and call upon Americans of every faith and heritage to stand together in this time of national crisis. Our sense of community with fellow Americans of Arab and South Asian decent and those of the Islamic faith should not be counted as another casualty of September 11th's senseless violence.

MEDICARE PATIENT ACCESS TO PHYSICAL THERAPISTS ACT OF 2001

HON. EARL POMEROY

OF NORTH DAKOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 28, 2001

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with my friend and colleague from Illinois to introduce a bill that will provide Medicare beneficiaries with direct access to qualified physical therapists. I join Mr. CRANE today in introducing the ''Medicare Patient Access to Physical Therapists Act of 2001,'' a bill that is patient-focused, patient-friendly, and puts the patient first. This legislation will enhance access to quality health care services for Medicare beneficiaries under Part B and expand choices for Medicare beneficiaries.

The time is right for this legislation, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-four states currently allow direct access to physical therapists without a referral requirement. The citizens of my own State of North Dakota have been able to directly access their physical therapists since 1989 without limitation. Under this provision of State law, my constitutes have enjoyed nearly unfettered access to the expertise of licensed physical therapists without the delay or added cost of a physician referral. This is especially important to rural areas of this country where we are frequently underserved by health care professionals. Physical therapists in North Dakota are able to treat many impairments, functional limitations, disabilities, and changes in health status for our residents, and as such, they contribute to making our population more productive and healthy.

Access to physical therapist services without a referral requirement already has been successful around the country. Studies conducted by Johns Hopkins and Georgetown University researchers demonstrate that utilization of services was actually lower in episodes of care initiated without referral than episodes initiated with a physician referral. My constituents—who incidentally make up the largest population of seniors per capita—are entitled to the same access under Medicare as the rest of the citizens in North Dakota and across the country. North Dakotans and all Medicare beneficiaries should have better access to qualified health care providers, and physical therapists can be instrumental in this role.

Finally, I think it is important to recognize that this bill will raise the standard, domestically and internationally in effect, for qualified physical therapists. The new standard endorsed by the American Physical Therapy Association requires a master's or doctoral degree, which I believe will serve to improve patient care across the country.

Through better access to highly qualified health care professionals, we ensure enhanced care and services for all Americans. Mr. Speaker, I ask for my colleagues' consideration and support for this important legislation to provide direct access to physical therapists under Medicare.

TRIBUTE TO THE CHILDREN OF GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN SCHOOL

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 28, 2001

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the children of Good Shepherd Lutheran school in my home town of Collinsville, IL, and their heartwarming actions in the wake of the September tragedy.

Roughly 2 months ago I received a package of letters from the students at Good Shepherd. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the children were scared and confused; but the teachers calmed them, and asked those who wished, to put their thoughts on paper. The result was truly inspiring—over seventy cards, hand drawn by the children with pictures of crosses and flags and hearts. Inside them were notes of support and caring, as the children put their faith in God, America, and Congress to make things right in the world. As one young girl wrote, ''We will pray to Jesus that Congress makes the right decisions. God bless America.''

Mr. Speaker, some of these cards I shared with the Members from New York; the others I placed on the wall in my office. There they serve as a powerful reminder to me, not only of the faith that some people place in us as Representatives, but also of exactly for whom we are fighting this war. It is my sincere hope that when these children grow up and look back on this time, they will feel their faith in us was justified. It is my hope that we will have left them a better world.

Mr. Speaker, the students and the faculty of Good Shepherd School deserve our thanks—not only for their cards, which have touched my heart and the hearts of other Congressmen and women, but also for their great spirit as Americans. Their faith in God and Country is admirable; their faith in us as a legislative body is humbling. May God bless them, and may God bless our country.