

Good morning - my name is Matthew Haynes, and I am the founding owner of Club Q in Colorado Springs. I would like to first acknowledge and thank our local LGBTQ organizations, One Colorado, Inside Out Youth Services, the City of Colorado Springs and the national team at GLAAD for the efforts and support they have all provided to our community during this time.

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney, and to this House Oversight Committee for creating a space to meet with us today, for our voices, our stories and our experiences to be shared, heard and felt, here: at the highest levels of leadership. Although, I must say, we, should *not* be here. We should not be meeting under these pretenses. I know that we as a community are in the thoughts and prayers of so many people, including many of you, unfortunately these thoughts and prayers alone are not saving lives, they are not changing the rhetoric of hate.

Six years ago, we stood in the parking lot of Club Q for a candlelight Vigil for the victims of Pulse, my daughter, 11 years old sought out TV cameras to proclaim "Why can't we all just love each other." We raised money for the victims of Pulse in Orlando. But all of our lives continued never imagining that our little bar in Colorado Springs would be the next target of a hate crime like this.

Last week 305 charges were filed against the Club Q shooter included 48 hate crime charges. The number 305 alone graphically illustrates just how heinous this act was and how many in our community were impacted — it also powerfully illustrates how much damage can be done when hate, coupled with access to military style assault weapons, in the hands of one single person can do. We were lucky that night that the casualties were not much higher.

When I opened Club Q 20 years ago — Colorado Springs was a very different place — there were picketers greeting our opening — I'm proud to have remained in Colorado Springs over the years, even when we did not feel welcome. Club Q has been a home for the community for 20 years. We are proud to say it will once again become the home for our community. One man full of hate will not destroy us. Club Q is for everyone regardless of who they love and how they present regardless if this is different than how you or I may love. LGBTQ venues and small businesses across our nation are extensions of family for us all. And for many, they are the only places we can find acceptance. Club Q will need all the resources available to help us rebuild what was stolen from us.

Now is a critical time for national, state, local elected officials community and religious leaders to drop the politics and work with LGBTQ leaders and small business owners like me to support and affirm LGBTQ events, venues, communities

and must importantly people. We need safe spaces like Club Q more than ever. And we need you, as our leaders, to support and protect us.

Most Americans have not been the target of hate, have not had the validity of their marriages threatened or their simple right to exist threatened.

We have received hundreds of hate mail and emails. In the interest of time, I am not reading them all to you. But here are a few examples:

“I woke up to the wonderful news that 5 mentally unstable faggots and lesbians and 18 injured. The only thing that I’m mad about is that the faggots had courage to subdue the wonderful killer. I hope more shootings happen again. Have a blessed day.”

“The shooter was doing God’s work, 5 less fags not enough. Those that stopped him are the devil.”

“All Gays should die”

I could go on, but you get the point.

I spoke Sunday with our Hero Army Veteran Rich Fierro and his wife Jessica, they told me they and their daughter have been receiving hate messages on their phones, email and at their business. Most with the same basic theme. Condemning them to hell for stopping the shooter.

Finally — I had the honor to attend the White House ceremony for the signing of the Respect for Marriage Act yesterday with my husband. It was honestly the first joy and pride I have felt since the horrific shooting at Club Q.

And while protections for marriages like my own were signed into federal law, I could not but reflect those 169 members of Congress voted against that bill. 169 of your colleagues, hiding behind excuses and semantics sent a message to me and the entire community that you do not Respect my marriage, through the inaction of your vote you as leaders send the clear message it is ok not to respect the basic human rights of loving who you love, and it is ok to disrespect our marriages and who we love.

To the members of this committee I humbly ask, are LGBTQ people not part of your constituency? Do you not represent us? While we wait for you to answer, we are being slaughtered and dehumanized across this country, in communities you took oaths to protect. LGBTQ issues are not political issues. LGBTQ issues are not lifestyles. LGBTQ issues are not beliefs.

We are people — We are your neighbors, teachers, first responders, family and so much more — We are among you, yet do not feel welcome in the same spaces as you.

And so, I ask you today, not simply — what are you doing to safeguard LGBTQ Americans but rather — what are you or your colleagues doing, to make America unsafe for LGBTQ people?

Club Q is Grieving, Rebuilding and Fighting. Let's stop this from happening again.

Thank you.