

MICHAEL ANDERSON

To the distinguished members of the House Oversight Committee, thank you for inviting us here today.

Growing up in rural Florida, I was taught in my private religious school and by many conservative voices to hate who I was, that being born gay was something to reject. A young person should never feel that way. So I waited, silent and suffering, until I was 16 and came out.

It was places like gay bars and clubs that helped me embrace who I was, and formed me into the man I am today. Club Q was and will once again be a safe place for not just the LGBTQ community, but everyone else too. If you are fortunate enough to intimately know LGBTQ people you will find some of the kindest, funniest, accepting and welcoming people. Those are the people that found a safe place in Club Q, and deserve to once again have that safe space.

On November 19th, 2022, a deranged shooter entered Club Q armed with an assault rifle, a pistol, an incredibly disturbing amount of ammunition and an even more disturbing amount of hatred in their heart, all while cowardly hiding behind a bulletproof vest. This shooter entered our safe space and our home with the intention of killing as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. They used a military style weapon that exists solely for the intention of killing other human beings, and began to hunt us down as if we were disposable, as if our lives meant nothing.

I was bartending that evening, when the attack began. I felt more terrified than I ever have before. I ran for my life that night and hid, praying and hoping the violence would end. When I stared down the barrel of that gun, I realized I stood no chance against a weapon of that power, magazine capacity, and seemingly automatic firing rate. While I prepared for my life to end in that moment, I prayed. I panicked. And I prayed some more. God must have heard my prayers because two brave men stopped the shooter moments before he would have inevitably found me. I saw my friend lying on the floor, bleeding out, knowing there was little to no chance of surviving the bullet wound. I had to tell him goodbye while I continued to fear for my life, not knowing if the attack was truly over.

I can still hear the rapid firing of bullets, it's a sound I may never forget. It's a sound I hope no one here or anywhere else in this country has to hear. I say all of this, not because it is easy to do so, but because it is important to do so. I plead you all to appeal to your heart, your morality, your humanity to do something about this issue. I thank President Biden for fighting to reinstate the assault weapons ban, and I sincerely hope you all will support reform so that we may try to prevent more people from needlessly dying.

Not only am I embarrassed for our country's international reputation of inaction on gun reform, but I am frankly disgusted. Between 1994-2004, America's mass shooting incidents dropped dramatically. Following the expiration of the assault weapons ban, we now have an epidemic of

domestic terrorism and violence. The time to do something is now, what needs to be done is placing the lives of children and adults above our unhealthy obsession with assault rifles, and you are the ones who can make a difference. Many in our government say nothing can be done... this epidemic of violence is just a price we pay for the rights of being free. That is a lie. The facts speak for themselves. The denial of this gun violence reality is not a policy proposal. I encourage you all to work together to save our children and adults, and in turn, save ourselves and the soul of our nation.

To the politicians and activists who accuse LGBTQ people of grooming children and being abusers, shame on you. As leaders of our country, it is your obligation to represent all of us, not just the ones you happen to agree with.

Hate speech turns into hate action, and actions based on hate almost took my life from me, at 25 years old. I beg you all to consider your words before you speak them, for someone may use those words to justify action - action that may take someone's life.

To my fellow LGBTQ community, events like this are designed to discourage us from speaking and living our truth. They are designed to scare us from living openly, courageously, and proudly. We must not succumb to fear, we must live prouder and louder than ever before. We must continue to be who we are, for who we are is exactly who we are meant to be. And to the children watching this, feeling you may not be like the other kids. I understand you and I see you. You deserve to be exactly who you are, no matter what anyone has to say. In the words of my personal gay icon Christina Aguilera, you are beautiful no matter what they say. Words can't bring you down, so don't let them bring you down today.

To Chairwoman Maloney, I thank you for making this a priority. To the House Oversight Committee, thank you for hearing us today. I hope my truth can help usher America into its next and greatest chapter yet.

My name is Michael Anderson, I am 25 years old, I am a proud gay man, and now, I am a survivor of a mass shooting. I hope we can work together to end this carnage in our country. Thank you.