

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Senate Floor Speech on the *COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act*

April 22, 2021

CANTWELL: Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about the rise of hate crimes in the Pacific Northwest and to thank my colleague, the Senator from Hawaii, for her tremendous leadership in guiding us through this process to get this legislation passed in the United States Senate. I want to thank her for her incredible work as a member of the Judiciary Committee and for getting this out and moved to the floor and to thank Senator Schumer and Senator McConnell for both helping us get to this point today and for our colleagues for passing this incredible legislation. But again thanks to Senator Hirono for knowing, knowing and understanding and being a great member of the Judiciary Committee that we needed to get this legislation done now.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have a long history in our country and their contributions have been significant both in cultural vibrancy, to our economy, and to our way of life. But, unfortunately, that has also been marked by periods of history of hate and damaging stereotypes and xenophobia and we saw this again with COVID-19. That is why we needed to act today to pass hate crimes legislation to protect Asian Americans in the United States of America and to make sure that they have tools to protect them. Our AAPI Communities are facing the same challenges we face in the pandemic and, trust me, we lost some incredible Asian Americans who ran markets, who ran restaurants, who were small business leaders and continued to work during this crisis and ultimately paid the price with their life. But they've also, in addition to facing the pandemic, have had to face a rage of hate and racism against them during this time period. According to stop AAPI Hate, nearly 3,800 incidents against AAPI individuals were recorded nationwide over a year since the pandemic. And sadly, women made up over half of this, nearly 68% of the reported incidents of violence against Asian Americans were against Asian American women. This must stop.

It's very important that we think about how the fraction of these statistics that are the reported information, how many more are out there that go unreported. My state, the state of Washington, has the seventh largest Asian American population and the third-largest Pacific Islander population in the nation. Like the rest of the United States, we have seen an increase in these incidents. In fact, in 2020, the state had the third-highest rate of hate crimes targeted against AAPI community members. That's why I am for getting a full slate of people over at the Department of Justice, including Kristen Clarke, to deal with hate crimes. Why? Because my state is plagued by these issues and we're not going to tolerate it. We are going to fight back and make sure that we have the infrastructure in place to recognize these things.

Just this past February, a teacher driving in the Seattle International District was assaulted with a sock containing a rock. The attacker was charged with felony assault but not a hate crime. We've been told there are widespread reports of AAPI elders and women throughout Western

Washington who have been verbally harassed and randomly physically assaulted. In King County Coalition Against Hate and Bias is collected information about these attacks. But we know that there have been many, throughout many communities in our state. Just a few months ago a woman in King County and her two children were accosted by a man yelling and screaming at them just to get out. "Get out, get out, get out." And a man was captured on video in downtown attacking and an Asian couple, spitting on them, slapping the mans' face, and yelling at them, "It's your fault." So we know these incidents are happening.

In fact, just a week or so ago I participated in a roundtable with Asian American Pacific Islander community members from my state to talk about the need for this national legislation and why it's so important we have community-based solutions, which include more cultural education to teach our children the history of the Asian American community in the United States, mental health support in multiple languages, and investing in community groups. The legislation that was passed today, that will give us better tools to prosecute those individuals who participate in hate crimes.

This bill would design a point person within the U.S. Department of Justice to expedite the review of hate crimes and continue to work with all of us. It requires the Attorney General to issue guidance to states, locals, and Tribal law enforcement to establish an online hate crime reporting and data collection system.

These are all important tools, and so I again want to thank our colleagues and I want to also thank Senator Blumenthal. His bipartisan amendment would authorize the Attorney General to provide grants to states and localities, to better train law enforcement on identifying, investigating, and reporting hate crimes to operate state-run hate crime reporting hotlines.

So this legislation will help us in shining a very bright light on an alarming rise in violence against the Asian American Pacific Islander community, and help us with new tools to combat that crime. I again thank my colleagues and we all must work together to stop this kind of violence. I thank the President, and I yield the floor.