

Good morning. Chairman Lewis, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here to testify before you. My name Brandon Wolf, and I am from Orlando, Florida. I was at Pulse nightclub when a man killed 49 people and injured 53 more.

The night of June 11, 2016 was ordinary. Just like I always did after a long week, I went for a drink with my best friends Drew and Juan. In truth, the decision to go to Pulse Nightclub was little more than the flip of a coin. We got a later start than usual, piled into our rideshare, and simply chose the bar that was closest. To be honest, there are many moments from that night and the early hours of June 12 that are lost behind a traumatic fog. But there are others that are crystal clear. I remember dancing. I remember Juan's silly laugh. Drew's long arm around my shoulder as he told me we should say "I love you" more often. I remember we accidentally wore matching outfits. Before I knew it, it was 2am. I remember cold water from the faucet. A plastic cup teetering on the edge of the sink. I remember gunshots. Confusion. The rancid smell of blood and smoke that still burns my nose. I remember the hair standing up on the back of my neck. My heart pounding as I crouched on the bathroom floor. The faces of terror on those trapped there with me. The panicked sprint for an exit. And I swear I can still hear every one of the 110 rounds that man fired into the crowd.

I must have called Drew a hundred times over the next few hours, every dial more desperate than the last. I begged everyone for news of my friends, roamed the sidewalks until the sun came up, only to go home and stare at the television waiting for their names on a list. I will never forget calling Juan's family to tell them their son had been shot. His mother's heartbroken screams in the background. And I can never unsee their lifeless bodies in cold, hard caskets – a painful reminder that this was a nightmare none of us would wake up from.

The sad reality is that my story isn't unique. Hatred and the violence it begets are on the rise – and they have infected every corner of this country. In America, it seems we have made a decision. Rather than use every tool at our disposal to combat hatred, we have chosen to subsidize it, embolden it, and hand it an assault weapon. Instead of uniting us and calling upon our better angels, we have a President in Donald Trump who traffics in the darkest elements of racism, misogyny, and hate to score cheap political points. Inaction in the face of hatred has consequences, and it's high time that this Congress do something to protect those of us in the line of fire.

I'm not the first person who lost loved ones in a shooting fueled by hate -- there are people like me in Charleston, Pittsburgh, San Diego, and El Paso, just to name a few. The small consolation is that there are actions that Congress can take right now to make it harder for hate-filled people to kill: (1) Pass universal background checks to make sure that people who shouldn't have guns can't get them, (2) Enact extreme risk protection orders so that family members and law enforcement can petition courts to separate dangerous people from their guns, and (3) Close loopholes that let people convicted of misdemeanor hate crimes access guns.

I've seen the power of hatred. It ripped my world apart, stole my sense of joy, and haunts me in my nightmares. That's why I can say with confidence that if you are not using everything at

your disposal to snuff hate out, then you're simply not doing enough. The time is now for us to fight harder, lead more courageously, and use everything we have to put an end to this cancer that is ravaging our communities. My best friends are not just a statistic. They're empty seats at dinner tables. Missing faces at birthday parties. They had futures that were stolen by hatred and our obsession with easy access to guns. When this conversation gets bogged down in taxes and numbers, I ask that you remember their faces. Remember their names. Their stories. And honor their memories not with empty words and hollow sympathies, but with action.