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House of Representatives

Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey... Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Chairman GOODLATTE for his extraordinary work on this legislation, Mr. CONYERS, and, of course, PETER KING who has been absolutely tenacious picking up the good work that Dan Lungren, a former member of Congress and Attorney General of California, had done on this legislation previously.

This is a bipartisan piece of legislation, and it has to be signed by the President. I certainly hope—echoing comments of the previous speaker—that the President will, indeed, sign it into law.

This bill holds the promise of some measure of justice for the victims of al Qaeda's horrific terrorist attack on the United States 15 years ago this Sunday.

Time has not diminished the suffering of those who have lost loved ones on that day, nor has it brought accountability and, certainly, has not brought closure.

This bill aims to change that to some degree by overturning the legal challenges that have stood between the victims and the justice they rightly seek from foreign governments and individuals suspected of financing the 9/11 attacks. I have worked extensively with the 9/11 survivors and the family members.

I have worked with the Jersey Girls, as they became known, who pushed so hard for the 9/11 Commission that was chaired by my former Governor Tom Kean, who did yeoman's work to get to the bottom of what happened and what we might do to mitigate such a crisis going forward. Unfortunately, there still are gaps, and this is one of those gaping holes that need to be closed.

Here today are some of those family members, many of them widows: Kathy Wisniewski, who works on my staff who lost her husband, Alan; Mindy Kleinberg; Lorie Van Auken; Monica Gabrielle; and Carol Ashley are here in the Chamber and have pushed so hard for this legislation.

Not here but here in spirit: Kristen Breitweiser, Patty Casazza, and Sheila Martello.

Mary and Frank Fetchet also are with us. They lost their son Brad.

These are people who have said “never again” needs to mean never again so no other Americans would suffer what they have endured at the loss of their loved ones. This is why this legislation is another major step forward.

Look at the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act and the impediments that it has placed. As some of my colleagues have said earlier, we just

want in court to be able to get at the truth: who was part of the facilitating and the financing of the 9/11 murderers—the terrorists—that killed some 3,000 people, 50 of whom—more than 50 who lived in my own congressional district.

This bill also would amend the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987. The bill will open foreign officials to accountability to so-called secondary liability, such as aiding and abetting or conspiring with terrorist perpetrators. These are very commonsense and modest changes to the law that will hopefully get us closer to justice for those who have suffered so much. It is a great bill.

Again, I thank Chairman GOODLATTE. PETE KING has been absolutely tenacious, and our leadership has heeded those calls and is supportive. I want to thank them for ensuring it came up today prior to the 15th anniversary of that infamous event.