Written by Adam Hicks
Thursday, 30 April 2009 09:48

Congresswoman Virginia Foxx has issued an apology after using the word “hoax” to describe the details surrounding Matthew Shepard’s death in 1998.

Several human rights organizations have expressed discontent with Foxx’ statements.

While on the House Floor on Wednesday, the Republican said, “The hate crime bill that is called the Matthew Shepard Bill is named after a very unfortunate incident that happened where a young man was killed, but we know that that young man was killed in the commitment of a robbery. It wasn’t because he was gay… The hate crimes bill was named for him but it’s really a hoax.”

Shepard was a 21-year-old college student who was tortured and murdered by two men near Laramie, Wyoming. He died from severe head injuries several days after the attack.

Witnesses said that Shepard was targeted because he was gay. The trial brought attention to the issue of hate crime legislation at the state and federal levels.

Thursday, Foxx issued the following statement:

“It has come to my attention that some people have been led to believe that I think the terrible crimes that led to Matthew Shepard's death in 1998 were a hoax. The term ‘hoax’ was a poor choice of words used in the discussion of the hate crimes bill. Mr. Shepard's death was nothing less than a tragedy and those responsible for his death certainly deserved the punishment they received. I am especially sorry if his grieving family was offended by my statement.

“The larger context of my remarks is important. I was referring to a 2004 ABCNews 20/20 report on Mr. Shepard's death. ABC's 20/20 report questioned the motivation of those responsible for Mr. Shepard's death. Referencing this media account may have been a mistake, but it was a mistake based on what I believed were reliable accounts.”

Foxx represents Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Davie, Stokes, Surry, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yadkin counties as well as parts of Forsyth, Iredell, and Rockingham counties in the U.S. House of Representatives.