

# Putting hope above hate at antisemitism conference

## ASU, Anti-Defamation League bring together community members to address rise in US antisemitism at Rising Above Together conference

By Scott Bordow, ASU News  
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Hatred and hope were the overarching themes of the “Rising Above Together” conference hosted April 11 by the Anti-Defamation League in partnership with Arizona State University.

**Hatred:** According to the ADL, more than 10,000 antisemitic incidents occurred in the United States from Oct. 7, 2023 — the day Hamas attacked Israel — to September of 2024. That represented a 200% increase compared with the same period a year earlier, and the number of incidents were the highest since the ADL began tracking such incidents in 1979.

“That is why today matters,” said Jolie Brislin, ADL’s regional director in Arizona and Nevada.

**Hope:** Several speakers at the conference said the rise in antisemitism has prompted a dialogue that is long overdue.

“Where I find hope in this moment is that I am seeing serious leaders begin to step forward talking about this in a real way,” said Eric Ward, a nationally recognized expert on the relationship between authoritarian movements and hate violence. “Not as a political football to score points against one side or the other, but folks who understand that tackling antisemitism strengthens our society.

“Twenty-five years ago, there were maybe a hundred of us talking about antisemitism in America. Most folks thought it was something that was long gone. Now, there are tens of thousands of people talking about antisemitism. And, in one way, that means we’re beginning to exercise our muscles.”

The conference, held before an audience of 450 at the Omni Hotel at ASU in Tempe, included video messages from ASU President Michael Crow and Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego; speeches by Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes, Tempe Mayor Corey Woods and U.S. Rep. Greg Stanton; and panel discussions that featured faith leaders, ADL representatives, ASU officials and

students.

In his video, Crow said ASU is “deeply committed to the notion of religious freedom and religious expression.”

“We understand very much what an American university needs to be,” Crow said. “One in which these rights and privileges are protected — the right of free speech and the privilege of attending the university. So, we do everything we can and are completely and totally committed to inclusion, respect and success for our students.”

Brislin noted that ASU received an “A” on ADL’s report card, which uses a grading system to evaluate colleges and universities on criteria including policies toward addressing antisemitism, the prevalence of antisemitic incidents on campus, and the climate of inclusion and support for Jewish students, faculty and staff.

“This conference would not be possible without the university’s deep commitment to inclusion and to creating spaces where honest and respectful dialogue can thrive,” Brislin said. “Campuses across the country are facing deep division, but we are not seeing that same level of hostility here at ASU. And I want to be clear that doesn’t just happen. It is a result of intentional leadership, thoughtful policy and a deep commitment to community.”

Added Stanton: “ASU is part of the solution to antisemitism on campus. It’s not perfect. No one is. But we’ve seen what’s happened on other universities compared to what’s happened here, and I’m really proud of this university.”

Mayes told the audience that antisemitism is “not just rising. It is evolving, becoming more visible, more violent and more deeply woven into the fabric of public life.”

And once spread, Mayes said, antisemitism leads to other forms of hate speech.

“While its impact is deeply personal and targeted, its consequences reach far beyond any one community,” she said. “Because when hatred is allowed to root, whether it is directed at Jews, Muslims, immigrants, LGBTQ individuals or people with disabilities, it creates a climate where no one is truly safe.

“Hatred never stays in one lane. It adapts and emboldens others. And that’s why our collective response must be rooted not just in condemnation, but in collective resolve in solidarity.”

In a conversation with Oren Segal, senior vice president for counter-extremism and intelligence for the ADL, Ward said antisemitism is not just a form of bigotry or personal bias. It’s also, he said, a political theory.

“It is how people understand the world,” he said. “And typically, that false prejudice and worldview conspiracy theory brings violence with it. Antisemitism at its core is the hatred of Jews and the scapegoating of Jews to avoid the complex conversations we need to be having in society. In truth, antisemitism is the laziest form of understanding the world.”

Ward said he believes the rise in antisemitism is a direct consequence of the political divisions seen today.

“What we need to understand about antisemitism in this moment is that it appears mostly when a society is under stress,” he said. “And I think we can all agree regardless of where we sit on the political spectrum, that this is a society that feels greatly under stress. And in that stress, antisemitism is beginning to evolve and grow in our society once again.”

That said, Segal noted that not every comment or criticism rises to the level of hate speech.

“I think vehement criticism of the state of Israel is not something that is automatically antisemitism. It’s just not,” he said. “I think you can care deeply about Palestinian rights and their right to self-determination without glorifying terrorism or supporting antisemitism. I, for one, am one of those people.”

Rabbi Peter Levi of the ADL said that antisemitism impacts people in every walk of life.

One example: Gallego, who is Jewish, said that when she announced in 2018 that she was running to be Phoenix’s mayor, she was the victim of antisemitic attacks.

“People saying they wouldn’t vote for a Jewish person, except they used a more offensive term than that,” Gallego said.

Loay Alshareef, a Muslim social influencer, followed the panel discussion by saying antisemitism should be a crime.

“Because it might start with speech, but it ends with vandalizing, intimidating and attacking not only Jews, but also those who support Jews or those who support coexisting with the Jewish people, like myself,” Alshareef said.

Joanne Vogel, ASU’s vice president of student services, said it was her greatest wish that the conference wouldn’t have been necessary, that people didn’t have to come together to talk about rising above hate and antisemitism.

But in the event’s closing panel, Mi-Ai Parrish, who leads ASU’s Media Enterprise and is a professor of practice at the Cronkite School, expressed the sentiment of everyone in the room.

“This,” Parrish said, “has been a very important and meaningful day for all of us who care about the First Amendment, religious freedom and, frankly, our democracy.”

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

**Main image**



Debbie Yunker Kail (second from left), executive director of the Hillel Jewish Student Center at ASU, speaks on a panel about "Rising Above Hate on Campus" with (from left) Joanne Vogel, ASU vice president of student services; third-year political science student Jacob Marson; third-year journalism and mass communication student Emily Fox-Million; and moderator Rabbi Peter Levi with the Anti-Defamation League during the "Rising Above Together: ADL Desert Region Conference on Antisemitism and Hate" event organized by the ADL Desert Region and ASU, on Friday, April 11. The conference, held at the Omni Tempe Hotel at ASU, attracting 450 attendees. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

## Gallery





U.S. Rep. Greg Stanton speaks at the “Rising Above Together: ADL Desert Region Conference on Antisemitism and Hate” event on April 11, held at the Omni Hotel at ASU in Tempe. About the university's efforts, he said: “ASU is part of the solution to antisemitism on campus. It’s not perfect. No one is. But we’ve seen what’s happened on other universities compared to what’s happened here, and I’m really proud of this university.”



Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes tells the audience that antisemitism leads to other forms of hate speech: "Hatred never stays in one lane. It adapts and emboldens others. And that's why our collective response must be rooted not just in condemnation, but in collective resolve in solidarity."





More than 400 people applaud Rabbi David Wolpe following his invocation at the “Rising Above Together” conference April 11 at the Omni Hotel at ASU in Tempe.



Loay Alshareef, social media influencer and peace activist from Abu Dhabi, speaks April 11 at the conference. Antisemitism, he said, “might start with speech, but it ends with vandalizing, intimidating and attacking not only Jews, but also those who support Jews or those who support coexisting with the Jewish people, like myself.”