

Bipartisan leaders gather to discuss challenges to American leadership at 2026 McCain Institute Sedona Forum

By Lisa Robbins, ASU News
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As global instability intensifies and political divisions deepen at home, the 2026 Sedona Forum convened some of the world's most influential policymakers, military leaders, journalists and business voices to address a defining question: What will it take to sustain American leadership in a rapidly changing world?

Held May 1–2 in Sedona, Arizona, the [McCain Institute's](#) 13th annual Sedona Forum centered on the theme “The Challenges to American Dominance.” The gathering brought together leaders from across the political spectrum for candid conversations on national security, democracy, diplomacy and global competition.

Unlike traditional political conferences, the Sedona Forum has built its reputation on fostering direct, bipartisan dialogue. This year's event continued that mission with appearances from Democratic and Republican lawmakers, military officials, humanitarian leaders and media organizations spanning ideological divides.

Among the featured speakers were U.S. senators Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.), Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.), Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.); representatives Stephanie Bice (R-Okla.-05), Jason Crow (D-Colo.-06), Craig Goldman (R-TX-12) and Mike Lawler (R-N.Y.-16); U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Cmdr. Gen. Dagvin R.M. Anderson and World Food Programme Executive Director Cindy McCain.

One of the most notable moments came when Lt. Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, addressed an American audience virtually for the first time, providing updates on Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine and underscoring the broader geopolitical stakes facing Western democracies.

Arizona State University President Michael Crow provided [opening remarks](#) at the Sedona Forum Leadership Dinner.

"(ASU) is the home of the McCain Institute, working to make it a powerful institution for transformation in the United States and around the world," Crow said.

Conversations throughout the forum explored issues ranging from food diplomacy and U.S.-Iran relations to the global influence of sports and the future of democratic alliances. Media partners including The Washington Post, Punchbowl News, Defense News and NOTUS moderated panels alongside journalists from NBC News, PBS News, Financial Times and others.

For many attendees, the forum's value extended beyond policy debate. It offered a rare environment for constructive engagement at a moment when civil discourse often feels increasingly strained.

"Right now, the extension of civil discourse is really needed," said U.S. Army Capt. James McCain during the event. "The decision-makers are here, with no biases, all coming together for one thing: how to support the United States."

ASU Enterprise Chief Information Officer Lev Gonick spoke about the next wave of [strategic technology](#), preceding a conversation about the 21st century's technological revolution, asking, "How do we actually frame policies that are going to make the U.S. competitive, and actually win the race when it comes to AI, quantum and fusion?"

The McCain Institute recently released full panel recordings and event [photos](#).

Inspired by the legacy of Sen. John McCain, the Sedona Forum was created to bring leaders together for practical, solutions-oriented dialogue around democracy, human dignity and security. Over the years, it has become one of the premier bipartisan gatherings focused on international affairs and American leadership.

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

Main image



Cindy McCain (center), executive director of the World Food Programme, joined a panel about food security at the 2026 McCain Institute Sedona Forum. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



ASU President Michael Crow speaks to attendees of the 2026 McCain Institute Sedona Forum. Courtesy photo