

2021 NAAG Presidential Summit

WRITTEN BY

Namrata Kang | Daniel Waltz

On September 30 and October 1, the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) held its *Presidential Summit*. Hosted by NAAG President and District of Columbia Attorney General Karl Racine, the summit occurred as part of his 2021 NAAG presidential initiative, “The People v. Hate: Standing Up for Humanity,” which focuses on raising awareness about bias and hate; preventing (and combatting) such incidents; and promoting social and racial justice. Consequently, the summit offered a forum for attorneys general from both sides of the aisle to come together and seek solutions for successfully combatting hate. One theme permeated all conversations: *Attorneys general must use their power to bring stakeholders to the table and engage communities to make progress together.*

The summit denotes Attorney General Racine’s most recent effort in his “inquiry into hate.” In April 2021, Attorney General Racine co-led a coalition with Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt to unite 35 Republican and Democratic attorneys general to call on Congress to pass the Jabara-Hayer NO HATE Act, which seeks to improve hate crime reporting. In May 2021, he co-hosted a national convention with Connecticut Attorney General William Tong on combatting anti-AAPI hate, and in July 2021, Attorney General Racine spoke on a panel at Troutman Pepper, where he discussed hate, racism, and extremism.

Learning from History of Hate

The two-day summit began with a presentation and panel discussion about the Tulsa Massacre. Moderated by Attorney General Racine, former Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Turpen and John W. Franklin (the grandson of renowned civil rights lawyer and witness to the Tulsa Race Massacre Buck Colbert (B.C.) Franklin) discussed the importance of understanding the nation’s past and its history of hate to be better equipped to fight against it.

Former U.S. Senator Doug Jones and former Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley also presented their successful prosecution of the Ku Klux Klan members responsible for the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing in Birmingham, AL. The presentation highlighted the challenges of holding accountable those who committed terrible acts of hate at a time in history when the prosecutions were not popular. Senator Doug Jones stressed that attorneys general are charged with the responsibility to confront hate and to put an end to it — even if it takes decades. Other meaningful sessions offered at the summit include the following:

Uniting with Community Partners on Effective Ways to Address Hate. Moderated by U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Denise George and featuring New Jersey Acting Attorney General Andrew Bruck, this session highlighted how attorneys general can collaborate with community partners in the fight against hate. Attorney General Bruck discussed the success of his alliance with the Anti-Defamation League to monitor hate and

extremism and prioritize hate crime and incident reporting, emphasizing the “need [for] community partners to get the job done.”

Law Enforcement Working Together on Solutions to Stop Hate. In this session, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost moderated a panel with law enforcement leaders, focusing on how attorneys general can better work with law enforcement officials. Attorney General Yost highlighted the unique positions attorneys general hold and the immense opportunity that comes with it to condemn hate within communities. Law enforcement leaders also emphasized the need for law enforcement officials, including attorneys general, to understand their communities’ histories, build relationships, and restore trust by bringing justice.

Takeaway

The summit concluded at the National Museum for African American History and Culture, where one of the survivors of the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing, Sara Collins-Rudolph, shared her firsthand experience. Attorneys general had the opportunity to explore the museum and learn more about African American history and culture.

The summit came at a critical time when there is an uptick in hate crimes and incidents. Throughout the two-day events, a recurring message occurred: *We must not accept hate*. A collective commitment to eliminate hate begins with confronting the history of hate and having difficult conversations, but it does not stop there. Attorneys general especially play a pivotal role in the fight and have a call to stand up against hate by uniting their communities and working alongside them.

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