



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Hosts “Hate in the Age of Multiculturalism” Online Forum

PETE HARCKHAM May 27, 2021

| ISSUE: **CULTURAL DIVERSITY. EDUCATION, COMBATING HATE SPEECH, MULTICULTURALISM, STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES**



Albany, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham hosted a special online forum this week titled “Hate in the Age of Multiculturalism,” which featured comments and insights from six prominent activists / advocates residing in Westchester County. State Sen. Shelley B. Mayer also participated in the forum as well after initially registering to watch the event. More than 170 viewers watched the event.

This was the fourth roundtable discussion as such Harckham has hosted since taking office in 2019.

“Tragically, violence, hate and intolerance have not abated in our communities, not even during the worst months of the pandemic,” said Harckham in his welcoming remarks, who noted the forum was taking place on the one-year anniversary of George Floyd’s murder while being arrested in Minneapolis, Minnesota. “But hate crimes and violence are only the tip of the iceberg. There is a deeper, more subtle and troubling challenge of systemic racism.”

How racism persists in an era of rich cultural diversity remains a vexing issue, Harckham said, offering a number of troubling statistics: 6,000 hate incidents against Asian-Americans during the pandemic; a record number of LGBTQ people killed in hate crimes; and increases in hate crimes targeting the Latinx community, Jewish people and Jewish institutions and Muslims in the U.S.

Mayer added, “I signed up for this event because I wanted to listen. I can’t think of a more pressing moment in our country’s history than right now to talk about these issues and the challenges we are facing.”

The diverse group of forum panelists included:

- Rev. Kym McNair, associate minister and coordinator of social justice initiatives at Antioch Baptist Church in Bedford Hills, NY;
- Scott Richman, New York and New Jersey regional director of the Anti-Defamation League;
- Dr. Nadia Amin, a primary care physician and volunteer for the Hudson Valley Islamic Community Center and the Islamic Center of Peekskill;

- Robert Chao, co-vice president of the Westchester and Hudson Valley Chapter of OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates, a national civil rights organization;
- The Honorable Lissette G. Fernández, first Hispanic judge appointed to the bench in Peekskill and guest commentator on the Law & Crime Network;
- Marjorie Hsu, chair of the Asian American Federation and co-chair of the Westchester County Asian American Advisory Board.

The first question Harckham asked the panel was what was driving hate and intolerance toward their communities. McNair said that it has to do “with one culture losing something, and people who look like me stepping out of place—that we’re refusing to comply with the dominant culture.” Amin talked about economic fears, power struggles and ignorance, along with a systematic silencing of minority women; her work, she said, “was to give a voice to those who don’t have one.”

The role of education in fostering hate versus fostering tolerance and understanding was addressed next, and Mayer, who is chair of the Senate Committee on Education, said work is being done statewide to teach students about the diversity of the American experience. Fernández thought community leaders should be assisting the effort on social media, and McNair opined that education on diversity and cultural history begins in children’s homes.

In wondering whether incremental progress is being made in terms of fighting racism, Richman said that finding allies in the conflict was important because “polarization is the opposite of empathy.” He acknowledged that “no one is safe from hate,” and “none of us can live up to our full potential until all of us can.” Chao agreed; his generation is relatively quiet on the issue of hate, and he appreciates younger people are speaking up. “Now, we have to stand together,” he said.

“This forum exemplifies the idea of finding allies and a return to civility,” said Amin in summing up. “Let’s keep emphasizing that inclusion means a better future for our children.”