

NY leaders blast 'hateful' slurs in texts

Young Republicans made racist comments in chat

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Ciro Riccardi

Spokesman for Rep. Mike Lawler

Chris McKenna
New York State Team
USA TODAY NETWORK

New York leaders from both parties have roundly condemned Young Republican leaders who traded racist and anti-gay slurs and Nazi jokes in a group chat exposed by the political news site Politico.

Some of the offensive language plucked from thousands of texts sent this year and leaked to Politico's reporters is attributed to Peter Giunta, who was chairman of the New York State Young Republicans and running at that time to lead the national organization for Republicans ages 18 to 40.

Giunta, reportedly shooting off messages in a Telegram group chat with other Young Republican leaders from New York and three other states, is quoted referring to Black people as monkeys and 'the watermelon people,' lobbing anti-gay slurs and joking he would send anyone opposing his national leadership run 'to the gas chamber.'

Told that Michigan's members would vote for 'the most right wing person,' Giunta reportedly responded: 'Great. I love Hitler.'

The texts set off a storm of criticism after the Politico article was posted on Oct. 14. Sen. Chuck Schumer, the Democratic minority leader, laced into the culprits at the end of a Senate floor speech he was giving, saying it was 'hard to believe' how they spoke to one another in private.

'You can't make this up,' Schumer said. 'And it's awful, it's revolting, it's disgusting, it's obnoxious. It's the kind of garbage that the worst kind of people say when they think no one is watching.'

Republican Reps. Elise Stefanik and Mike Lawler both denounced the texts in statements made by their spokespersons. Stefanik, an 11-year House member who is weighing a 2026 run for governor, had backed Giunta's campaign this year to lead the Young Republican National Federation, and she recently accepted a 'congresswoman of the year' award from her state's Young Republicans.

Alex deGrasse, Stefanik's senior advisor, told Politico Stefanik was appalled by the 'heinous, antisemitic, racist and unacceptable' comments in the text chain, and called for any New Yorkers responsible for them to step down.

Lawler's spokesman, **Ciro Riccardi**, put out a statement saying the Hudson Valley congressman was 'disgusted by the hateful antisemitism and racism revealed in these message.'

'Anyone involved in this disgraceful behavior should immediately resign from any leadership position and reflect on how far they've strayed from basic decency and respect,' Riccardi said.

A campaign spokeswoman for Gov. **Kathy Hochul** — a Democrat who's up for reelection next year and may face **Stefanik** in that race — took a shot at her potential opponent for having a staffer condemn the remarks instead of doing so herself.

'Elise Stefanik can't hide behind staff to denounce the antisemitic, racist, hateful individuals she endorsed, funded, and praised as the 'backbone' of the Republican Party,' campaign spokeswoman **Sarafina Chitika** said. 'These are her people who said 'I love Hitler' and named her their congresswoman of the year — an award she still hasn't returned.'

By the time the award was issued in August, **Giunta** had been replaced as chairman by **Bobby Walker**, who was also involved in the group chat. In remarks to Politico, Giunta apologized for 'insensitive and inexcusable' comments he and others had made. But he also blamed his rivals in the New York City Young Republican club for the leak and suggested the messages 'may have been deceptively doctored.'

Vice President **JD Vance** pushed back at outcries over the chat group. He pointed to text messages recently exposed from Virginia Democratic attorney general candidate **Jay Jones** in which Jones joked the Republican statehouse speaker should get 'two bullets to the head' and expressed hope his two children would die.

'This is far worse than anything said in a college group chat, and the guy who said it could become the AG of Virginia,' Vance said in a post on X. 'I refuse to join the pearl clutching when powerful people call for political violence.'

Shortly after Vance's statement, Stefanik echoed the same sentiment in a post on X. She accused 'Democrats hyperventilating about this latest Politico hit piece' of having a double standard when it comes to the rhetoric of Jones.

'Mind you, these were not even candidates for elected office,' Stefanik said, referring to the leaders of Young Republicans.

The Young Republican National Federation called for the immediate resignations of leaders in the organization exposed in the Politico story.

*Includes reporting by **Joey Garrison** of USA TODAY*