

Ron DeSantis signs legislation to combat hate crimes while on trip to Israel




Kobi Wolf



Gabe Gutierrez

Thu, April 27, 2023 at 2:17 PM CDT · 4 min read

In this article:

-  **Ron DeSantis**
46th Governor of Fl...
-  **Benjamin Netanyahu**
Prime Minister of Isr...
-  **Yehudah Glick**
Israeli political activist

JERUSALEM — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed legislation cracking down on hate crimes Thursday morning after a high-profile speech in Israel.

Known as the “Public Nuisances” bill, the legislation — passed Wednesday by the state Legislature — makes it a felony for hate groups to harass people for their religion or ethnicity. Florida had the [fourth-highest number](#) of antisemitic incidents in 2022, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

DeSantis is in Israel as part of his overseas trade mission with stops in Japan and South Korea. He also met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Thursday before wrapping up the global trip in the United Kingdom.

“He’s a friend of Israel,” Netanyahu said in an interview with NBC News shortly after the meeting. “We talked about Iran. We talked about Israel-U.S. relations.”

- ADVERTISEMENT -

DeSantis’ travels come as he prepares to join the 2024 presidential contest [as soon as mid-May](#).

DeSantis also [signed a measure](#) to combat antisemitism while in Israel on a 2019 trip. That legislation was aimed at preventing discrimination on the basis of religion in Florida public schools.

DeSantis addressed a packed auditorium in Jerusalem Thursday morning at the Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem. The “Celebrate the Faces of Israel” conference comes the same week as the 75th anniversary of Israel’s independence. The governor, flanked by his wife Casey, arrived to cheers in the standing-room only auditorium.

“We must support Israel’s right to defend itself,” he said to the friendly crowd.

DeSantis shared his often-told story about using water from the Sea of Galilee to baptize his children — and how people in Israel sent him some replacement holy water when staff at the governor’s mansion in Florida mistakenly threw out a half-empty bottle.

He also stressed national security issues.

“Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons creates a risk like you’ve not seen in this region,” DeSantis said. “It’s an existential threat to the state of Israel and to the United States of America.”

DeSantis’ supposedly pro-business trade mission risks being overshadowed by a growing controversy back home: the dramatic escalation of his feud with Disney, with the entertainment giant accusing the governor of being anti-business and orchestrating a “targeted campaign of government retaliation” in a new lawsuit.

DeSantis [dismissed the lawsuit as “political”](#) at his press conference following his speech Thursday, in response to a question from NBC News.

Aside from the official state purposes of the trip to Israel, it also is a way to bolster his the governor’s foreign policy credentials after he faced backlash for calling the war in Ukraine a [“territorial dispute.”](#) He later clarified his comments, calling Russian President Vladimir Putin a [“war criminal.”](#)

Netanyahu is seen as a staunch ally of former President Donald Trump, who is running for a second term in 2024 and has been relentlessly attacking DeSantis over the past few months.

“We didn’t talk about American politics,” Netanyahu told NBC News in the Thursday interview. “I have enough politics here.”

Netanyahu has been wary of being seen as interfering in U.S. elections before. In 2012, he denied doing so after a clip of him was [featured in an ad](#) for Republican nominee Mitt Romney. Analysts don’t expect Israelis to signal a clear preference for either Trump or DeSantis — at least not yet.

“I imagine that every Israeli politician will try to stay out of it and try to say that both of them are friends of Israel,” said Prof. Jonathan Rynhold, the head of the department of political studies at Bar-Ilan University. “Whether former President Trump lets Israeli politicians do that or not is another question because he tends to see things in very personal terms.”

In 2017, DeSantis and other U.S. lawmakers traveled to Israel to tour possible sites for moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. In his speech Thursday, he said he tried to “cajole” the previous administration to move the embassy. At the time, he met with Yehudah Glick, a Brooklyn-born rabbi and former Knesset member who Palestinians see as a far-right lightning rod. He survived an assassination attempt in 2015, and later unsuccessfully ran for president.

In an interview with NBC News ahead of DeSantis’ visit, Glick praised DeSantis’ family values and his support of moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. Former President Trump ended up announcing the move later in 2017, though Glick stressed he has no inside knowledge of whether DeSantis’ public advocacy played any role in that.

“Ron DeSantis was extremely active in trying to locate the exact place to put the embassy,” Glick said. “I was very impressed by how much he was devoted to it.”

This article was originally published on [NBCNews.com](https://www.nbcnews.com)