

The First African American Attorney General For The United States To Visit Houston

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This historic visit was held at the Historic Phyllis Wheatley High School

Attorney General Eric Holder visited Houston students and community leaders on Feb. 13. as a guest of Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. During his visit, the Attorney General met with local Pastors, Law Enforcement officials, Wheatley students and alumni and students from Barbara Jordan High School to address local crime issues, voter ID laws, human trafficking, and to honor Barbara Jordan.

Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee felt that there was no better place than Wheatley High School to bring such a unique person as Attorney General Holder to a historic place. Congresswoman Jackson Lee thought that this was the time to showcase a unique High School. She wanted to expose the students to people who are in positions to expose them to life experiences and you never know – you could have the next Member of Congress, Mayor or Attorney General in the audience. Wheatley High School represents everything that is great about Houston and what Barbara Jordan had envisioned – a diverse school educating the children of Houston.

The Attorney General discussed the issue of human trafficking with Sheriff Adrian Garcia, and representatives from the Center to End Trafficking and Exploitation of Children (CETEC), YMCA International Services, Dominican Sisters of Houston, Catholic Charities, Houston Rescue & Restore, and Victims of Human Trafficking. The Attorney General was very receptive to the group and was adamant that enforcing the prevention of human trafficking is a high priority for him.

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Holder met with the Houston's Ministers Against Crime (HMAC) who asked the Attorney General to review the impact of the treatment of the minority community regarding criminal justice issues and he also discussed Voter ID issues. They requested that Holder seek Department of Justice intervention funding for the aforementioned issues. HMAC also urged the Attorney General to support Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee's bill, H.R.83, the "Bullying Prevention and Intervention Act of 2011."

Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee presented the Attorney General with a letter requesting that the Department of Justice review the current Texas Voter ID law; the Congresswoman believes that that the law violates the Voting Rights Act. Congresswoman Jackson Lee officially advocated that the Justice Department election officials oversee the 2012 elections in Texas and find the Texas Voter ID law in violation of the Voter Rights Amendment.

Attorney General Holder commemorated Black History Month by touting the accomplishments and legacy of former U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan at her alma mater, Phyllis Wheatley High School. Holder said, "In an era when racial discrimination was institutionalized and segregation was the law of the land, this courageous young woman found hope in the promise that inspired our nation's beginning." He credited Jordan, the first black woman elected to the Texas Senate, for championing the Voting Rights Act. "Barbara Jordan was a firm believer in the need for civic engagement, and in the ability of Americans to bridge long-standing divisions, to overcome a history of injustice and inequality, and to build a future that reflects this nation's founding ideals." The Attorney General referred to the current congressional redistricting dispute in Texas; he urged students to learn about and become involved in keeping voting rights fair and safe. "Protecting this right, ensuring meaningful access, and combating discrimination in our election systems must not be viewed as issues to be settled by lawyers and politicians,"

Congresswoman Jackson Lee worked with Attorney General Holder during the Clinton Administration and now as a Senior Member of the House Judiciary Committee in the Obama Administration. They have worked together on several issues; they have advocated for sentencing parity, juvenile justice, civil rights, and voting rights for all. Holder was appointed to the office of Attorney General by President Bill Clinton in 1997, and he was reappointed by President Barack Obama in 2008: he is the first African-American to serve in this office.

"Many community leaders and alumni who attended the ceremony were sons and daughters of pioneers or pioneers themselves. We are all glad to continue the legacy of Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland," commented Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee.{jcomments on}