

Eric Holder's Legacy

Will Swett
Staff Writer

Republicans' big midterm wins throw a potential curveball at President Obama as he tries to replace his disgraced Attorney General, Eric Holder. On November 8, the White House reported that the president nominated Loretta Lynch, the U.S. attorney in Brooklyn, N.Y., to replace Holder as Attorney General. Press Secretary Josh Earnest cited Ms. Lynch's qualification for the position as a "strong independent prosecutor who has twice led one of the most important U.S. Attorney's offices in the country." For Secretary Earnest and anyone else who did not identify the subtle innuendo of this characterization, I refer you to BuzzFeed's recent treatise, "Do You have an Inner Black Woman?" Putting aside the questionable racial undertones of the statement, Earnest continued, remarking that Holder's "tenure has been marked by historic gains in the areas of criminal justice reform and civil rights enforcements." The realities of Holder's tenure, however, tell a different story.

Holder became the first attorney general and sitting cabinet member in United States history to be held in contempt of Congress, the result of his noncompliance during the congressional investigation into Operation Fast and Furious. The bungled gun-running operation directly led to the death of one American border agent and many Mexican citizens. Both Holder and President Obama denied any allegation that the risky operation received presidential approval,

promising in January 2012 that if "a serious mistake was made ... then we'll find out and we'll hold somebody responsible." Despite this promise and Holder's claim that he knew nothing about Operation Fast and Furious, the Attorney General refused congressional orders to turn over relevant information and documentation about the operation. As a result, President Obama's legal advisor and AG was found guilty of obstructing the work of the House of Representatives and held in contempt of Congress. Holder has remained undeterred by his transgressions against federal laws and continues to support Obama's agenda. Holder expressed his sentiments in recently released emails, saying that Justice Department prosecutors, who were critical of the handling of the fallout of the Fast and Furious scandal, could "kiss my ass."

The legacy of Holder's tenure appears even more infamous when evaluating his politicization and racialization of the Justice Department. Holder will resign his post after permanently damaging the integrity of the Department of Justice and the office of Attorney General. During his tenure, Holder politicized the department's prosecutorial decision-making. One current Justice Department employee charged that Holder had "racialized and radicalized the [Civil Rights] Division to the point of corruption," consciously embedding "politically leftist extremists in the career ranks who have an agenda that does not comport with equal protection or the rule of law; who believe that the ends justify the means; and

who behave unprofessionally and unethically." This accusation is evidenced by Holder's failure to conduct a legitimate investigation of the IRS targeting of conservative organizations. In his official nomination of Loretta Lynch, President Obama thanked Holder for making sure "our nation is safer and freer, and more Americans ... receive fair and equal treatment under the law." When looking at the questionable actions of the Attorney General, however, one finds that he represents more of a hindrance than an asset in achieving this goal.

Loretta Lynch may share some of the same troubling views as retiring AG Eric Holder, which could help Obama as he strategizes the final two years of his presidential term under a GOP Congress. Although Lynch does not share the same close personal relationship that Obama had with Holder, she does share his support for loose voter ID laws and opposition to the death penalty, both controversial topics at all levels of government. It is suspected the Republican Senators would oppose the nomination of Lynch for fear that she would continue Holder's legacy of impeding the enforcement of federal policies that the office is constitutionally mandated to enforce. This fear, however, is nothing more than mere speculation grounded in her past as a prosecutor, and Lynch may follow her duties as Attorney General more honestly than Holder. Nevertheless, President Obama is pushing for the Senate to nominate Ms. Lynch soon to avoid potential difficulties of nominating someone in January against a more hostile GOP majority in the Senate.

A Republican Victory in Central New York

Phil Parkes | *Staff Writer*

When U.S. Representative-elect John Katko took the podium and addressed Republican supporters after capturing nearly 60 percent of the 24th Congressional District vote on election night, politics were surprisingly absent. He did not mention the steady stream of negative advertisements directed at him by incumbent Dan Maffei. He did not dwell on the magnitude of his victory. Rather, he reflected on those same principles

that will make him a force to be reckoned with in Congress.

Katko spoke about how grateful he was to have his family behind him, and addressed Maffei as a caring father and husband. Maffei, on the other hand, learned about his opponent's family the hard way. He attacked Katko's approach to women voters and criticized steps Katko took to defend his family against personal attacks. Katko's strong connections to the local community and to his family will keep him grounded in proper values as he heads to Washington

Katko has shown a consistent desire to remain true to himself. According to a recent story by the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, Katko often resisted advice from the National Republican Congressional Committee, which pressured him late in his campaign to smear Maffei. In the end, he compromised without sacrificing principle, etching out an honest but more critical picture of Maffei for a series of televised advertisements. Part of this is explained by his ties to local voters. Seventy percent of Katko's campaign funding came from within the 24th district, a figure that compares favorably to Maffei, who raised 83% of his funds from outside the district. Part of it can be also explained by a career as a federal prosecutor that demanded individual courage and leadership. From insider trading and political corruption to cartel crime and gang violence, Katko has suppressed special interests of all kinds to critical acclaim. From the beginning, Katko carved out his remarkable career by going against the grain.

Some dismiss Katko's shining career as nothing more than excellent campaign material. Critics say it won't translate into his plan to revitalize the Central New York economy and reform costly legislation. This goes too far. Indeed, Katko's career is no guarantee of his independence once in office. But after mediocre results from Maffei, who all but conceded during a debate that his job consisted solely of helping other members of Congress pass legislation, one cannot imagine that

Katko's grasp of local needs and leadership experience will fail to bring improvement to the area.

While Maffei's subprime performance in Congress certainly helped Katko win the election, Katko is far more than the lesser of two evils. He represents what could be a major step in the right direction for national politics. He provides hope for those who envision a Congress filled with representatives who disagree about how the government should operate, but agree that it should, at the very least, operate. Gridlocked government may bring a certain satisfaction to conservatives who appreciate checks on an ever-expanding state. But this should not prevent them from appreciating those who can work efficiently toward common goals.

When Katko takes office, the newly empowered Republican Party will appreciate his dedication to conservative fiscal policy and, increasingly, his ability to sidestep his noted religious beliefs to accept endorsements from pro-gay marriage organizations. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether or not Katko will vote with the party line beyond reforming Obamacare to help local businesses. He is uniquely situated to resist the pressures of party, outside interests, and his own beliefs where they do not help his constituents. If he can apply the skills and experience he has gained serving Central New York to his work in Washington, Katko will energize the representatives around him and improve the 24th district.

A Longer School Year

Taylor Elicegui | *Staff Writer*

Summer holds a special place in our hearts. It conjures up images of children playing outdoors, going on camping trips, travelling, and learning outside of the classroom. We refuse to let go of our Tom Sawyer notion of children fishing and adventuring. But a months-long summer vacation is the root of many problems in the United States education system. It keeps American children behind their international peers and keeps economically-advantaged children ahead of their less well-off counterparts. To lessen the blow of economic factors on educational success while improving international competitiveness, the United States should lengthen the school year.

The tradition of summer vacation stems from a variety of factors. An article by Connor Clarke in *The Atlantic* lists three. First, the agricultural demands of the 20th century required that children help with the harvest during summer months. Schools compensated by not holding class. Second, a lack of air conditioning in the 20th century made school in the summer uncomfortable. In hot climates, particularly in the South, children struggle to learn and teachers

struggle to teach. Third, before modern medicine, summer often brought an increased risk of disease transmission. Even though none of these factors are relevant today, the educational system still bears their mark.

Many blame summer vacation for the United States' overall lackluster education system. The United States ranks 22nd in standardized test scores, behind China, Japan, Vietnam, Finland, and Latvia. Studies show a correlation between test scores and the length of the academic year. Japanese students have the longest school year, with a total of 243 days, and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranks Japanese students as the second best in the world. Israel, England, Ireland, Scotland, and New Zealand all send their students to school for longer than American students and see better PISA scores.

Summer vacation also disproportionately affects lower income students. The difference arises from how children spend their summer. Children of affluent parents often spend their summers engaged in learning activities, either through summer camps or parent-directed learning. The children of less affluent parents, though, often cannot afford summer camps. Karl Alexander, a sociologist at Johns

Hopkins University, tracked 650 students in Baltimore. He found that while less affluent students "out-learn" their peers during the regular school year, wealthier students learn more and lose less information over the summer.

Many have advocated for a longer school year for decades. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan's National Committee on Excellence in Education pushed for increasing the school year to between 200 and 220 days. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan echoed Reagan in 2009, stating "Our year is way too short." With so much to gain by increasing the school year, it's time for America to face the realities of 21st century education.

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