

Attack on Holder is attack on civil rights

Written by Ben Jealous | Opinion | The Hill
Thursday, 20 June 2013 20:14



The continued political attacks aimed at U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder represent the most insidious kind of political gamesmanship.

Holder is among the finest attorneys general to ever serve this nation. But over the past four-plus years, he has faced one baseless allegation after another. We cannot fully know what motivates his detractors, but many seem to be obsessed by a coarse desire to politically damage the pro-civil-rights priorities set by his Department of Justice and the Obama administration. Efforts to assassinate his character and drive him from office represent more than a cynical campaign against a dedicated public servant; they are also an indirect attack on the civil and human rights of all Americans.

Holder has an exemplary record of defending our nation's laws and enforcing civil rights. Under his leadership, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has steadfastly protected the right to vote, investigated abusive police practices, and worked to save our children from the school-to-prison pipeline.

Over the past two years, the DOJ has steadfastly protected the fundamental right to vote while states attempt to encode voter suppression efforts into law. In 2012, under the attorney general's leadership, the department secured victories in four separate cases under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, including a decision to protect the rights of minority voters in South Carolina. In that state, where more than one-third of registered voters of color do not have a driver's license, South Carolina's onerous Voter ID law served as a modern-day poll tax that would have disproportionately burdened the voting rights of African-American voters and other racial and ethnic minorities.

Holder has also stood up to the racial profiling and police misconduct that continues to proliferate in our communities. Every year, hundreds of thousands of innocent bystanders are targeted for physical searches and public humiliation simply because of the color of their skin. Under Holder's leadership, the DOJ has initiated a record number of inquiries into the conduct and practice of police departments throughout the country to ensure compliance with our nation's Constitution.

Finally, at a time when America leads the world in incarceration while falling behind in education, the attorney general is working comprehensively to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. School discipline is the most glaring manifestation of the education gap between white

Attack on Holder is attack on civil rights

Written by Ben Jealous | Opinion | The Hill
Thursday, 20 June 2013 20:14

and black students in this country. Holder has partnered with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to develop the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, which will mitigate school policies that force students out of school and into the justice system. Moreover, the department intervened in Meridian, Miss., following an investigation into complaints that the school district unfairly and disproportionately subjected African-American students to suspension, expulsion and school-based arrest.

Holder has demonstrated an appreciation — in both substance and symbol — of the meaning and enormity of his responsibilities as attorney general. Just this month, he delivered remarks at the Medgar Evers Memorial Commemoration at Arlington National Cemetery. The attorney general's very presence was a reaffirmation of the legacy of the civil rights hero. Just as Evers's actions laid the foundation for so much of the civil rights progress in our nation, Holder is carrying the mantle of civil rights protection forward. The NAACP is most proud to have his back.

Jealous is the current president and chief executive officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).