



Former Deputy Attorney Eric Holder, left, talks with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.

## Obama taps Holder as next attorney general

**Special to Sentinel-Voice**  
WASHINGTON — Washington attorney Eric Holder is President-elect Barack Obama's top choice to be the next attorney general and aides have gone so far as to ask senators whether he would be confirmed, an Obama official and people close to the matter said Tuesday.

Holder, a former U.S. attorney who served as the No. 2 official in the Justice Department under President Bill Clinton, would be the nation's first Black attorney general.

An Obama official and two Democrats in touch with the transition team confirmed that Holder is Obama's top choice, but the Obama official said the decision has not been finalized.

Holder did not return messages seeking comment Tuesday. Asked Monday by The Associated Press whether he expected to be nominated, he responded in an e-mail: "Who knows?"

In the past week, Obama aides have asked Senate Republicans whether they would support Holder. In particular, the aides questioned whether Holder's confirmation would be delayed because of his involvement in the 2001 pardon of fugitive Marc Rich by Clinton at the end of his presidency.

One person involved in the talks said the Obama team has received some assurances that, while the Rich pardon would certainly come up during hearings, the nomi-

nation likely wouldn't be held up.

All spoke on condition of anonymity to describe private conversations.

Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the pardon "would be a factor to consider. I wouldn't want to articulate it among the top items but it's worthwhile to look at," he told reporters.

Asked if Holder would be a good choice for attorney general, Specter said it was too soon to say.

"I know something of Holder's work in the Clinton administration and that's about it," he said.

"I'd have to take a much closer look at his record and talk to him and think about it."

A spokeswoman for Senate Judiciary Chairman Patrick Leahy said the Vermont Democrat has not been informed that Holder is Obama's pick to lead the Justice Department.

On the last day of Clinton's term, Holder was asked whether the president should pardon Rich, a wealthy commodities dealer who had spent years running from tax charges. Holder said he was "neutral, leaning toward favorable" on the pardon. Clinton later cited that as among the factors that persuaded him to issue the pardon.

Holder has publicly apologized for what he said was a snap decision that he should have paid more atten-

tion to. Had he taken more time to review the case, he would have advised against a pardon, he said.

Holder, 57, also a former judge and U.S. attorney in Washington, is widely respected in legal circles and among Justice Department career lawyers.

He has been on Obama's short list to be attorney general since before the election, and already has had private conversations about how he would run the department.

One of his top priorities, according to a person familiar with his thinking, is to rebuild the department's reputation after its fiercely independent image was tarnished by charges of political meddling by the White House during the Bush administration.

For that reason, Holder has been reluctant to lobby for the attorney general's post for fear the Rich pardon would invite a bloody nomination process and further strain the department's credibility, this person said.

Holder has been one of Obama's most trusted advisers. He was a member of the team that helped select Sen. Joe Biden as Obama's running mate. The two have known each other only briefly, however, after meeting at a dinner party four years ago.

Holder has other deep ties to Obama's team. Holder's wife, an obstetrician, delivered incoming White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel's daughter.

## Blood pressure gap leads to deaths of 8,000 Blacks

ATLANTA (AP) — The lives of nearly 8,000 Black Americans could be saved each year if doctors could figure out a way to bring their average blood pressure down to the average level of Whites, a surprising new study found. The gap between the races in controlling blood pressure is well-known, but the resulting number of lives lost startled some scientists.

"We expected it to be big, but it was even larger than we anticipated," said the lead author, Dr. Kevin Fiscella of the University of Rochester School of Medicine & Dentistry.

The study, released Monday in the *Annals of Family Medicine*, is being called the first to calculate the lives lost due to racial disparities in blood pressure control.

Fiscella said he believes steps can be taken to erase that gap. But a second article in the same journal found that racial differences in blood pressure treatment persisted in England despite a national health system that provides equal access to care.

Doctors may not be providing proper care, but some Black patients may not be taking prescribed medicines or following medical advice, said Christopher Millett of the Imperial College of London.

However, another researcher said it is unfair to blame the patient.

"Compliance," to me, is a hateful word. It says, "I, the great doctor, and we, the great healthcare service, inform you what needs to be done and you don't do it because you're stupid, you're incompetent"... I don't accept that at all," said Dr. Jeremiah Stamler, professor emeritus of preventive medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

High blood pressure — often called the "silent killer" because it has no symptoms — increases a person's chances for heart disease, stroke and other serious problems. But it's easy to check for and usually can be controlled through exercise, diet and medicine.

For decades, doctors have noted that a higher percentage of Black Americans have high blood pressure than Whites. The reasons for that include poverty and cultural habits. Both can prevent people from

exercising, eating healthy foods and getting in to see a good doctor.

The study suggesting 8,000 Black lives are lost due to uncontrolled blood pressure is based on earlier research that finds that about 40 percent of Black adults have high blood pressure, compared with about 30 percent of Whites.

Fiscella and his colleague, Kathleen Holt, made a series of calculations. They took estimates of how each point of increased blood pressure affects the likelihood of death, and put it in a formula that included the difference in Black and White blood pressure readings.

Those differences caused about 5,500 extra deaths from heart disease and about 2,200 deaths from stroke each year.

The second study, done in England, looked at the electronic medical records of about 8,900 patients in southwest London, who are covered by that country's national health insurance system. Researchers found Black patients with high blood pressure had significantly higher readings than White or Asian patients, even though Blacks were prescribed more medications.

The researchers also looked at patients who were sick with one or more conditions, such as heart disease, kidney disease and diabetes. They found that blood pressure control was much worse in Blacks than Whites.

Patients' failure to regularly take their medicine may be one factor. Another may be that certain medications work better for Blacks, but some doctors may be overlooking that difference, said Millett, a consultant in public health for Imperial College.

Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher said changes need to be made to make sure minority patients can get good medical care when they need it. But there also needs to be more done to make sure patients understand medical directions and feel comfortable asking questions when they don't.

"It's very clear we need to target our efforts to differences in how well patients follow medical advice," said Satcher, who is now an administrator at Atlanta's Morehouse School of Medicine.

## Arkansas

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went for McCain.

Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana are the only states where President-elect Obama fared worse among White voters than Kerry did in his 2004 loss.

"It says to me that race is still a predominant issue in those states and that it was race that was the explanation" for Obama's loss in those states, said David Bosisis, senior political analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington.

One reason no Blacks have been elected to Congress in Arkansas is demographics: Unlike many

Southern states, it has no predominantly Black congressional districts. In a state of less than 3 million people, about 16 percent of them Black, it would be difficult to draw up such a district.

For statewide offices, meanwhile, it took until 2002 for Democrats to even nominate a Black candidate. Ron Sheffield, a lawyer in his first political run, lost in the lieutenant governor's race that year to billionaire GOP incumbent Win Rockefeller.

Sheffield said he wanted to show other minority candidates what was possible.

"Why run for a legislative seat that is in a district that is 80 percent minority? OK,

you know a minority is going to be elected in a district that's predominantly minority, but should a political candidate only run in districts that are safe districts where they know they're going to probably get elected?" Sheffield said.

In 2004 and 2006, Appeals Court Judge Wendell Griffen lost statewide bids in nonpartisan state Supreme Court races while simultaneously fighting a disciplinary panel over the rights of judges to speak out on political issues.

Black leaders say both parties need to do a better job of recruiting Black candidates who can win.