

# Texas announces takeover of Houston schools, stirring anger



By JUAN A. LOZANO and PAUL J. WEBER | AP

FILE - People hold up signs at a news conference, Friday, March 3, 2023, in Houston. (AP Photo/Juan A. Lozano)

**HOUSTON (AP)** — Texas officials on Wednesday announced a state takeover of Houston's nearly 200,000-student public school district, the eighth-largest in the country, acting on years of threats and angering Democrats who assailed the move as political.

The announcement, made by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's education commissioner, Mike Morath, amounts to one of the largest school takeovers ever in the U.S. It also deepens a high-stakes rift between Texas' largest city, where Democrats wield control locally and state Republican leaders have sought increasing authority following election fumbles and COVID-19 restrictions.

In a letter to the Houston Independent School District, Morath said the Texas Education Agency will replace Superintendent Millard House II and the district's elected board of trustees with an appointed board of managers made of residents from within the district's boundaries.

Morath said the board has failed to improve student outcomes while conducting "chaotic board meetings marred by infighting" and violating open meetings act and procurement laws. He accused the district of failing to provide proper special education services and of violating state and federal laws with its approach to supporting students with disabilities.

He cited the seven-year record of poor academic performance at one of the district's roughly 50 high schools, Wheatley High, as well as the poor performance of several other campuses.

"The governing body of a school system bears ultimate responsibility for the outcomes of all students. While the current Board of Trustees has made progress, systemic problems in Houston ISD continue to impact district students," Morath wrote in his six-page letter.

Most of Houston's school board members have been replaced since the state began making moves toward a takeover in 2019, and House became superintendent in 2021. House and the current school board will remain until the new board of managers is chosen sometime after June 1.

House in a statement pointed to strides made across the district, saying the announcement "does not discount the gains we have made."

He said his focus now will be on ensuring "a smooth transition without disruption to our core mission of providing an exceptional educational experience for all students."

Other big cities including Philadelphia, New Orleans and Detroit in recent decades have gone through state takeovers, which are generally viewed as last resorts for underperforming schools and are often met with community backlash. Critics argue that state interventions generally have not led to

big improvements.

Texas started moving to take over the district following allegations of misconduct by school trustees, including inappropriate influencing of vendor contracts, and chronically low academic scores at Wheatley High.

The district sued to block a takeover, but new education laws subsequently passed by the GOP-controlled state Legislature and a January ruling from the Texas Supreme Court cleared the way for the state to seize control.

Schools in Houston are not under mayoral control, unlike in cities such as New York or Chicago, but as expectations of a takeover mounted, the city's Democratic leaders unified in opposition.

Race is also an issue because the overwhelming majority of students in Houston schools are Hispanic or Black. Domingo Morel, a professor of political science and public services at New York University, has studied school takeovers nationwide and said the political dynamics in Texas are similar to where states have intervened elsewhere.

The demographics in Houston, Morel said, are also similar.

"If we just focus on taking over school districts because they underperform, we would have a lot more takeovers," Morel said. "But that's not what happens."

## Michelle Obama dishes on 'exhausting' weight of responsibility during White House years

**(TheGrio Staff)** - There was undoubtedly a political shift when American voters elected Barack Obama as the country's first Black president in 2008, and the former first lady is revealing just how "exhausting" it was for her family to bear that burden for eight years.

While speaking during the second episode of Audible's "The Light Podcast," which featured a conversation with Tyler Perry, Obama shared that there wasn't much room for error as the first Black family in the White House, and her family didn't take it lightly, according to CNN.

"It was no accident that the administration was scandal-free," Obama said, CNN reported. "It was no accident that ... our children had to show up right in the world."

The former first lady noted that perceived scandals involving her daughters "wouldn't have been laughed off" or chalked up to their youth, but instead would have sparked a broader conversation

about "the soul of Black folks."

"So we didn't underestimate that," she maintained. "But that, that weight is exhausting when you're carrying that."

Obama referenced her husband's "tan suit scandal" and the rumors that circulated after the couple fist-bumped in the Oval Office, a move many people deemed "terroristic."

"One small misstep isn't just a misstep for you, but it's a misstep for your family," community, race and all of humanity, the former first lady previously told journalist Hoda Kotb during a stop on her book tour, noting that "we don't often get a second chance."

Obama's remarks not only highlight her experience as the first and lone Black woman to be the United States' first lady, but it appears to reaffirm a typical African American trope that Blacks must perform twice as well as their white peers to receive even half the credit.

"And when you're the first at stuff, especially the first in the biggest spotlight with the world watching you — you don't want to mess it up," she told Kotb, adding that you want to ensure you're "representing."

Audible's recently launched podcast coincides with Obama's third book, "The Light We Carry," which examines how she's juggled relationships, self-doubt and anxiety during uncertain times.

The award-winning author has also been giving listeners a more detailed recollection of the eight years she and her family spent in the White House.

Elsewhere in the podcast's second episode, Obama disclosed how being overcome with emotions led to her "uncontrollable sobbing" for 30 minutes following the inauguration of Donald Trump as president, tears she attributed to leaving the only home her children knew and resentment over Trump's forthcoming presidency.

## Austin Rep. Chip Roy preemptively endorses Ron DeSantis for president

BY COLIN MEYN | THE HILL

**(THE HILL)** - Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas) offered a preemptive endorsement of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, even though the potential presidential contender has not yet announced an official bid for the White House.

"The next President of the United States must be a vibrant and energetic leader with the faith, vision, and courage to chart a new course," Roy said in an email to supporters from his campaign account on Wednesday.

"America needs a leader who will truly defend her and empower the people against the destructive force of unrestrained government and corporate excess, profligate spending, and woke cultural indoctrination."

"That leader is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis," Roy said.

Roy appears to be DeSantis's first official congressional endorsement for president. Several other Republicans have endorsed Trump, while Rep. Ralph Norman (R-S.C.) endorsed former U.N. Ambassador

Nikki Haley, who officially launched her candidacy last month.

The endorsement from Roy, one of the most vocal hard-line Republicans in the House, is a notable rejection of former President Trump. Roy broke with Trump ahead of and on Jan. 6, 2021, criticizing his move to pressure Republicans to reject 2020 presidential election results.

Roy recently clapped back at a Trump-aligned Republican consultant who said "MAGA will never forget" Roy thanking former Vice President Mike Pence — for rejecting Trump's pressure to unilaterally reject the 2020 election results — during a Republican Study Committee meeting last year.

"America First," Roy said in a tweet.

The Texas congressman praised DeSantis's "faith in god" and his being a "dedicated husband and father."

His glowing endorsement also noted DeSantis's high-profile policy moves — many of them controversial — like rejecting mask mandates during COVID-19 and the governor's sending of migrants

to Martha's Vineyard, Mass., last year.

DeSantis's "non-politically correct" stances and rejection of "woke corporate America and higher education," Roy argued, are also reason to support him.

While Roy did not directly mention Trump, he nodded to 2022 midterm election losses that were widely attributed to Trump-endorsed candidates falling short.

"[DeSantis] has also proven his ability to win at the ballot box time and time again. When other Republicans were faltering in key races, Governor DeSantis provided a positive vision for the future with prudent, conservative action. The result was crystal clear: Republicans enjoyed sweeping, historic performances statewide," Roy said.

Roy pledged to support whoever becomes the 2024 Republican nominee, but called for a "new generation of leadership."

"It's time for America to be proven, leadership to offer America eight solid years of transformational change," Roy said. "It's time for Ron DeSantis to be President of the United States."