Future Ancestors Weekend Celebrates Black Creativity and History at Huston-Tillotson University

By: Melissa Fontenette-Mitchell | Special to the Villager



Ms. Earnestine Strickland



Panel Ryan Fontenette-Mitchell, Miriam Conner and Harrison Eppright Moderated Rudi Dizer



Ryan Fontenette-Mitchell and Ms. Strickland

All photos courtesy Melissa Fontenette-Mitchell

(AUSTIN, TX) — Huston-Tillotson University hosted Future Ancestors: Black Creators on Bluebonnet Hill, a three-day celebration held October 30–November 1, 2026. Presented by Reggie Rap's Room in association with NEO GRIOT, with the Austin Film Festival as a programming partner, the event featured film screenings, music, performances, panels, and oral histories celebrating Black creativity and cultural heritage.

Friday's opening program, "Open the Archive," featured an "Earnestine Strickland Fireside Chat," connecting the university's history with contemporary Black creative voices. Moderated by Ryan Fontenette-Mitchell, the conversation highlighted Ms. Strickland's remarkable legacy as Huston-Tillotson University's longtime registrar. Having served the university for more than 50 years, she has personally helped more than 5,100 graduates earn their degrees. Strickland shared how her own journey at HTU led to a lifelong career of service. Her message to students was clear: complete your education, discover your purpose, and give back to your community.

Sunday's "Mapping Black Austin" panel featured three Austin natives: Ryan Fontenette-Mitchell, Miriam Conner, and Harrison Eppright. The discussion explored who tells Austin's African American stories, the importance of preserving historic buildings, and the need to educate future generations about Freedmen's communities and the city's rich Black history.

Future Ancestors was more than a celebration of Black creativity; it was a powerful reminder that preserving history requires participation, intentional storytelling, and a commitment to passing knowledge forward. Throughout the weekend, speakers and participants emphasized the importance of elevating community voices and ensuring future generations understand the stories and contributions of those who came before them.

As the next generation of creators, historians, and community leaders' step forward, the message is clear: We must preserve our history, tell our stories, honor those who came before us, and create opportunities for future generations to carry our legacy forward.

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TEXAS WOKE UP DIFFERENT

By Austin Justice Coalition

Ishia Lynette (Executive Director) & Chas Moore (Organizing Director)

Hi ,

And we think it's important that we take a moment to recognize what it took to get here. This didn't happen overnight, and it certainly didn't happen because the political climate suddenly became more favorable. It happened because everyday people, organizers, advocates, and communities continued to believe that Texas could be different, even when the odds suggested otherwise. We've spent years doing this work, and one thing we know for certain is that progress is never accidental. It is built through relationships, persistence, sacrifice, and people who refuse to accept that things have to stay the way they are.

After years of being told this state would never change, after years of organizers being dismissed, communities being ignored, voters being suppressed, and people being told to accept politics as usual, Texans showed up and changed the political landscape of this state. And yes, we should celebrate. We should celebrate the organizers who kept organizing when nobody was paying attention, the people who knocked doors, registered voters, made calls, showed up at the Capitol, testified late into the night, marched, protested, educated their neighbors, and refused to give up on Texas.

But let us be crystal clear: we did not fight this hard just to change the names on the doors. A blue Texas does not automatically mean a just Texas. Our communities still need affordable housing, fully funded schools, healthcare, living wages, dignity for immigrant families, protection of our democracy, and real public safety that does not rely on over-policing Black and Brown communities. The people we elected now have a responsibility to turn campaign promises into policy.

That means our work is not finished because Election Day is over. Accountability cannot disappear when preferred candidates win. If we demanded transparency, justice, courage, and action from the people who held power before, we have to demand the same thing now. Movement work cannot become team sports. Austin Justice Coalition has never existed to protect politicians. We exist to protect people.

We are excited to return to the Texas Legislature with a political landscape many people told us we would never see. But we are not going back as spectators. We are going back as organizers, advocates, and community members who understand that politicians do not give people power. Organized people create power.

So celebrate this moment. We earned some joy. But do not confuse celebration with completion. We still need you making calls, reading bills, contacting lawmakers, showing up at town halls, testifying, and organizing your neighbors. And when elected officials forget the promises they made to our communities, we need to be loud enough to remind them.

Texas changed at the ballot box. Now it is our responsibility to make sure that change reaches our schools, neighborhoods, budgets, laws, families, and the people who have been pushed to the margins for far too long.

As we move into this next chapter, remember that our responsibility is bigger than any election cycle. At Austin Justice Coalition, our commitment has always been to the communities we serve. That commitment doesn't shift based on who wins, who holds office, or which political party has the majority. Our communities deserve more than access to decision-makers. They deserve policies, resources, and systems that actually improve their lives.

We have an opportunity in front of us, but opportunity requires participation. It requires us to stay engaged, stay critical, and continue organizing even when the political conditions feel more favorable. Let's carry the energy of this moment into the work ahead, because the people who made this possible deserve to experience the change they've spent years fighting for.

The work continues. And we'll be right there doing it with you.

See y'all at the Capitol!

STATEMENT: Congressional Progressive Caucus PAC on the Midterms

Congressional Progressive Caucus PAC Co-chairs Greg Casar, Pramila Jayapal and Maxwell Frost released the following statement on Tuesday night's midterm results.

"[Tuesday night], voters delivered a mandate for bold change to bring down costs, root out corruption and end foreign wars. A record-breaking number of CPC PAC's candidates won in swing districts, including Randy Villegas, Will Lawrence, Bob Brooks, Sam Forstag, and Katy Padilla Stout. And all across the country, new members of Congress campaigned on progressive ideas like taking on the billionaire class and ending corporate price gouging. We are grateful to Democratic leadership, voters, and volunteers for believing in our candidates and making these historic wins possible.

"But we can't take a good midterm as a sign that all our problems are solved. Democrats now have to show people we will fight to deliver on our campaign promises. We should pass bold pro-worker policies and dare the President to veto them. Let Trump show the country how out of touch he is and let us show Americans that we are fighting for them."

Congressional Progressive Caucus Fueled Democrats' Historic Night

On Wednesday, Congressional Progressive Caucus PAC (CPC PAC) leadership and newly elected members hosted a press call to discuss Democrats' historic midterm elections, in which voters delivered a mandate for bold change to bring down costs, root out corruption and end foreign wars. CPC Chair Rep. Greg Casar and CPC PAC Co-Chairs Rep. Pramila Jayapal and Rep. Maxwell Frost were joined on the call by several of the CPC's Red to Blue winners, Reps.-elect Randy Villegas (CA-22), Katy Padilla Stout (TX-23), Will Lawrence (MI-07) and Sam Forstag (MT-1).

On election night, progressives flipped five Red-to-Blue districts.All three Frontline incumbents backed by the CPC PAC are also projected to win. CPC PAC-endorsed candidates won multiple districts that President Trump carried by over 10 points in 2024. Initial results show CPC Red-to-Blue and Frontline candidates averaging a 17 point swing to the left over Trump's district performance in 2024—not including Randy Villegas' 33 point lead in a district Democrats have historically struggled to win, with one third of the vote still left to count. The CPC will welcome over 25 new members to the caucus in the next Congress.

"This election cycle, the Progressive Caucus made a big new bet. By endorsing populist candidates in seats that Trump won, we can show that our message can win anywhere. And because of the hard work of our excellent candidates, that bet paid off," said CPC Chair Rep. Greg Casar."This is a message that people in this country are mad as hell and are giving Democrats a shot to show them we can do something about it, and so it's our turn to take them up on that opportunity."

Specifically among the Red-to-Blue candidates, Padilla Stout won a 23 point swing over Trump's district performance in 2024, Forstag a 17 point swing, and Brooks a 15 point swing. Frontline incumbents Rep. Nellie Pou (NJ-09) won a 36 point swing, Rep. Steven Horsford (NV-04) won a 22 point swing, and Rep. Darren Soto (FL-09) won an 18 point swing. Randy Villegas' current lead in CA-22 represents more than a 30 point swing as votes continue to be counted.

"The issues that were most important to voters across the country, affordability, corruption, immigration, these issues were issues that the Congressional Progressive Caucus was front and center on in Congress over the last two years," said CPC PAC Co-Chair Rep. Pramila Jayapal."On all of these issues, we really were first out to say, 'Let's fight, not fold.'"

"We have won immense amounts of political power, and now it's the most important time, which is to deliver so we can keep that political power," said CPC PAC Co-Chair Rep. Maxwell Frost."And the way that we're gonna keep Democrats in office, keep this House majority, and keep a lasting majority in the House and Senate, and eventually take the White House, is by passing bold pieces of legislation that show people that when you vote a Democrat in office, your life becomes better."