

HOLYOKE

Formerly homeless, HCC alum advising Biden's Census Bureau

UMass, Georgetown law degrees helped land White House position



MEGHAN MAURY

BY LAURIE LOISEL

Special to The Republican

Hours after President Joe Biden's inauguration, he told nearly 1,000 new White House staff and political appointees, "We work for the people." This was a pandemic-era ceremony in which faces appeared in small boxes on several large screens in the State Dining Room.

Meghan Maury, a 2004 Holyoke Community College graduate, was among those whose faces graced the screens that day, taking an oath as senior adviser

to the director of the U.S. Census Bureau. "It was very cool," Maury said.

For many assuming coveted posts with the new administration, the day may have been a dream come true. For Maury, it represented something else entirely.

"It was pretty shocking to me. As a person who is formerly homeless, who was a heroin addict, you just don't expect to be recruited to work for the White House," said Maury, who uses they/them pronouns. "It was surreal."

The last few weeks have been a busy time for Maury as the Census Bureau was preparing the first batch of new data from the 2020 Census. The first set, released Monday, provided state population totals

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that will be used to reapportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

“I’m excited as a nerd, but I’m also excited as a big fan of democracy,” Maury said during a recent interview.

For now, with the pandemic requiring remote work, Maury has remained in Brooklyn, New York, with fiancée Rebecca Fox. But soon the couple expects to move to the D.C. area so Maury can report to the office at the U.S. Census Bureau in Suitland, Maryland.

Seventeen years ago, Maury, now 42, graduated from Holyoke Community College with an associate degree in accounting. After that, Maury continued studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst for a bachelor’s degree in accounting, then the Isenberg School of Management for a master’s degree in accounting, eventually earning a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center in 2013.

There was a time when Maury believed pretty much any level of higher education was simply out of reach. “I thought I’d blown it right after high school,” said Maury, who is originally from Connecticut but later lived in Springfield.

“I was a rough kid” — and just 14 when their mother died: “I didn’t know how to deal with it.”

That trauma led to substance use, then a heroin addiction and a life of severe instability, living in shelters, in a car, on the streets. When Maury was 18, their partner overdosed and was revived by police who arrested them both.

For Maury, that arrest resulted in a term of probation and a requirement to submit to drug screens. Maury admits to not liking the urine tests but acknowledges that those screens may have helped usher in their sobriety.

Eventually, that sobriety led to enough stability to consider college. By then, Maury was living in Holyoke and had met other HCC students and graduates: “I realized maybe I could do it. It was affordable and right down the street — I had a criminal record, and they didn’t care.”

Inspired by an aunt who was an accountant, Maury pursued a major in accounting. “That looks like a stable job,” Maury reasoned. But it



Meghan Maury, a 2004 Holyoke Community College graduate, is now senior adviser to the U.S. Census Bureau.

was coursework unrelated to accounting that changed the direction of Maury’s life.

Through an HCC Learning Community course that combined English and history — taught by professors Diane Beers and Deborah Fairman — Maury studied the history of the LGBTQ movement, social justice, advocacy and how social change movements work. “I had always thought I was terrible at history,” Maury said.

Turns out that wasn’t true, and the experience proved to be an awakening. “It just changed how I looked at the world,” said Maury. “It’s what made me pursue social justice activism.”

In the class, Maury learned about icons of the LBGQTQ movement, such as Urvasi Vaid, an activist and former executive director of the National LGBTQ Task Force,

founded in 1973 and said to be the oldest LGBTQ rights organization in the U.S.

In another class, English professor Kim Hicks introduced “The Craft of Research,” a standard college text on creating well-reasoned and researched papers that Maury still keeps handy. “It’s a tool I use all the time,” Maury said.

Beers, Fairman and Hicks became role models, inspirations and mentors. “All three invested in me as a person and as a student and it helped me feel like I had something to offer,” Maury said. “It just gave me a feeling that not only was I a person who had things to say, but a person who I looked up to wanted to invest in me.”

Hicks, now dean of arts and humanities, recalls that Maury seemed to seek out ways to put academic pursuit into action — “to make it mean

something.” She still remembers Maury’s research paper, “Radical Action: A Necessary Reaction,” which examined the historical moments that produced the Black Panther Party, ACT-UP and the Environmental Liberation Front, asserting that radical action is a viable form of dissent in response to what groups perceive as a mortal threat.

“The proposal for that paper seemed to be a blueprint for a life,” said Hicks. “That Meghan is now in a place of being able to influence policy and create policy on a national stage is just amazing and so inspiring to me.”

After law school, Maury landed a job as policy director for the National LGBTQ Task Force, where they met people they’d studied about at HCC, including Vaid.

“One of the first meetings I went to she was running,” Maury said, chuckling at the memory. “Now I think of her as a friend and colleague.”

During their time at the task force, Maury led a campaign to “queer the census,” initiated because the lack of data about the LGBTQ community was a serious problem. In trying to create policy that aimed at helping LGBTQ teens living

experience homelessness, it changed the tenor of the conversation.”

Work like that captured the attention of the Biden transition team, which earned Maury a seat at the table as the administration consulted with advocates for various constituencies.

And then Maury was invited to apply for a position. At the very first interview, Maury disclosed their criminal record as a teenager, wanting to avoid wasting anyone’s time if that proved a deal-breaker. The response was a huge relief: “The folks doing the interview said that is not a barrier.”

As senior adviser to the Census Bureau, Maury is a liaison to nonprofits, members of Congress and other stakeholders, providing education about the work of the bureau to make what is complex and technical accessible to people who are not necessarily data experts.

In August, September and beyond, more Census data will offer information about race, ethnicity and other demographics. Maury will pore over that data, analyzing it to see what it says about the population of the United States in an effort to improve

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Meghan Maury, HCC graduate, senior advisor, U.S. Census Bureau

on the streets, for example, policy makers would question the extent of the problem. When Maury offered personal experience as a concrete example, the response often was that they were an unusual case.

“It ends up being really tough to do policy work without data,” Maury said. “When we had data showing that 40% of LGBTQ youth

the lives of people who are LGBTQ, BIPOC (Black, indigenous, people of color), low income, those with disabilities and those who belong to other marginalized groups.

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4/28/21	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30
3	WFSB News	CBS News	Inside Ed.	People (N)	Price Is Right		Presidential Address to-Congress			News	Late-Colbert	
4	WBZ News	CBS News	Patriots	Jeopardy!	Price Is Right		Presidential Address to-Congress			News	Late-Colbert	
5	WCVB News	World News	News	Chronicle	Goldbergs	Home Econ.	Presidential Address to Congress and the Nation		News	J. Kimmel		
7	WHDH News	News	Inside Ed.	Extra (N)	Family Feud	Family Feud	7 News at 9PM (N) Ⓢ	7 News at 10PM (N) Ⓢ	News	Inside Ed.		
8	WTNH News	World News	Jeopardy!	Wheel	Goldbergs	Home Econ.	Presidential Address to Congress and the Nation			News	J. Kimmel	
20	WCCT Goldbergs	Goldbergs	Mod Fam	Mod Fam	Kung Fu “Hand” (N) Ⓢ	Nancy Drew (N) Ⓢ	Friends Ⓢ	Friends Ⓢ	Seinfeld ’	Seinfeld ’		
22	WWLP 22 News at 6PM (N)	NBC Nightly News - Holt	Wheel of Fortune (N)	Jeopardy! (N) Ⓢ	Chicago Med Choi hires an old Navy colleague.’		Presidential Address to Congress President Joe Biden addresses Congress. (N) Ⓢ (Live) Ⓢ			22 News at 11PM (N)	Tonight Show	
24	WEDH World News	BBC News	PBS NewsHour (N) Ⓢ	Greta Thunberg-Year			President Biden’s Address to Congress (N) Ⓢ			Antiques Roadshow Ⓢ		
30	WVIT News	NBC News	Hollywood	All Access	Chicago Med Ⓢ (DVS)		Presidential Address to Congress (N) Ⓢ (Live) Ⓢ			News	J. Fallon	
34	WTXX Hechos	Mi parej	(:01) Mi pareja puede	Al extremo: Edición			Al extremo		(:01) Difícil de creer	Hechos	Mentes	
38	WSBK Two Men	Two Men	Big Bang	Big Bang	Dateline “Poison” Ⓢ		Dateline Ⓢ		WBZ News 10p (N) Ⓢ	Seinfeld ’	Big Bang	
40	WGGB ABC40 at 6pm	ABC World News	Family Feud (N) Ⓢ	Family Feud (N) Ⓢ	The Goldbergs Home Economics (N)		Presidential Address to Congress and the Nation and the Republican Response (N) Ⓢ (Live) Ⓢ			ABC40 at 11pm	Jimmy Kimmel Live!	
43	WHTX Noticiero	Noticiero	La Rosa de Guadalupe	Diseñando tu amor (N)			Te acuerdas de mí (N)		La hija del embajador (N)	Noticiero	Noticiero	
51	WDMR Noticiero	Noticias	Exatón Estados Unidos (N) Ⓢ	(SS)			La suerte de Loli (N) (SS)		Buscando a Frida (N) Ⓢ	Noticiero	Noticias	
57	WGBY BBC News	PBS NewsHour (N) Ⓢ	Rick Steves’ Europe Ⓢ	Greta Thunberg: A Year to Change the World Ⓢ			President Biden’s Address to Congress President Joe Biden’s address. (N) Ⓢ (Live) Ⓢ			Amanpour and Company (N) Ⓢ		