March 2, 2021 | Faculty News

Economist Catherine Wolfram joins US treasury to focus on energy & climate policy

Featured Researcher
Catherine Wolfram
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & Chair of the Faculty, Economic Analysis and Policy

By
Laura Counts

Berkeley Haas Professor and Associate Dean Catherine Wolfram has been named to President Biden's treasury department as deputy assistant secretary for climate and energy economics—a position that reflects the administration's increased focus on fighting climate change.

She joins Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, a professor emerita, and Assoc. Prof. Adair Morse, appointed deputy assistant secretary of capital access last month, as the third Berkeley Haas woman in the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

"It's fantastic that the Biden Administration is paying so much attention to climate change, and I'm excited to be part of the efforts," said Wolfram, a world-renowned expert who has published extensively on climate and energy economics and led randomized controlled trials to evaluate energy programs in the U.S., Ghana, and Kenya. "It's one thing to sit in your office and write about what policy makers should and shouldn't do, but I'm really curious to see how these decisions get made in practice."

Wolfram started her role in the treasury's Office of Economic Policy this week. She is on leave from UC Berkeley, where she was serving as associate dean for academic affairs and chair of the Berkeley Haas faculty, and as a member of the school's Economic Analysis & Policy Group as the

Cora Jane Flood Professor of Business Administration. She was also on the faculty of the Energy Institute at Haas, where she was a regular contributor to the popular blog. In addition, she was an affiliated faculty member in UC Berkeley's Agriculture and Resource Economics Department and the Energy and Resources Group.

Prof. Catherine Wolfram (Photo: Jim Block for Berkeley Haas)

Outside of Berkeley, she served for five years as program director of the National Bureau of Economic Research's Environment and Energy Economics Program.

"Catherine has played a pivotal leadership role at Haas over the past several years, overseeing our stepped-up faculty recruiting, helping to create a new entrepreneurship and innovation group and a new certificate program in sustainability, and of course, supporting the faculty through the challenging transition to online instruction during the pandemic," said Dean Ann Harrison. "Her leadership experience combined with her passion for climate policies grounded in rigorous research will make her a great asset to the treasury department."

Wolfram has analyzed energy efficiency programs and the effects of environmental regulation on energy markets, and has developed statistical measures for improving business and policy decisions. In the developing world, she has analyzed rural electrification programs—finding they are not a silver bullet for eradicating poverty.

"Catherine brings a rare combination of expertise on energy and climate issues in developed and emerging markets," said Prof. Severin Borenstein, faculty director of the Energy Institute at Haas. "With experience in both areas, she sees the connections between making progress on carbon emissions domestically and helping grow developing economies on a sustainable pathway."

Wolfram earned a PhD in economics from MIT in 1996 and a bachelor's in economics from Harvard University in 1989. Before joining the Haas faculty in 2000, she was an assistant professor of economics at Harvard.

Wolfram and Morse are carrying on a strong tradition of Berkeley Haas women economists in public service. Yellen, the first woman to lead the Federal Reserve, is now the first woman to serve as treasury secretary. She's also the first person to have served in the nation's three top economic roles, since she also chaired the President's Council of Economic Advisers during the Clinton administration. Another Haas economist, Professor Laura D'Andrea Tyson, was the first woman to chair the Council of Economic Advisors.

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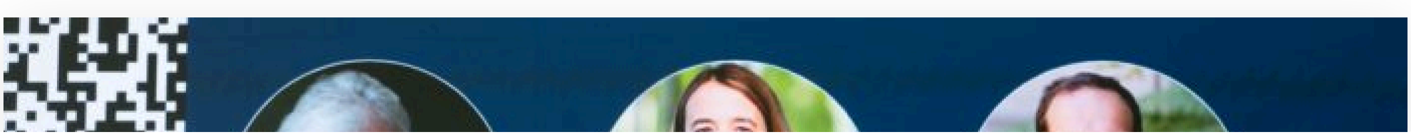

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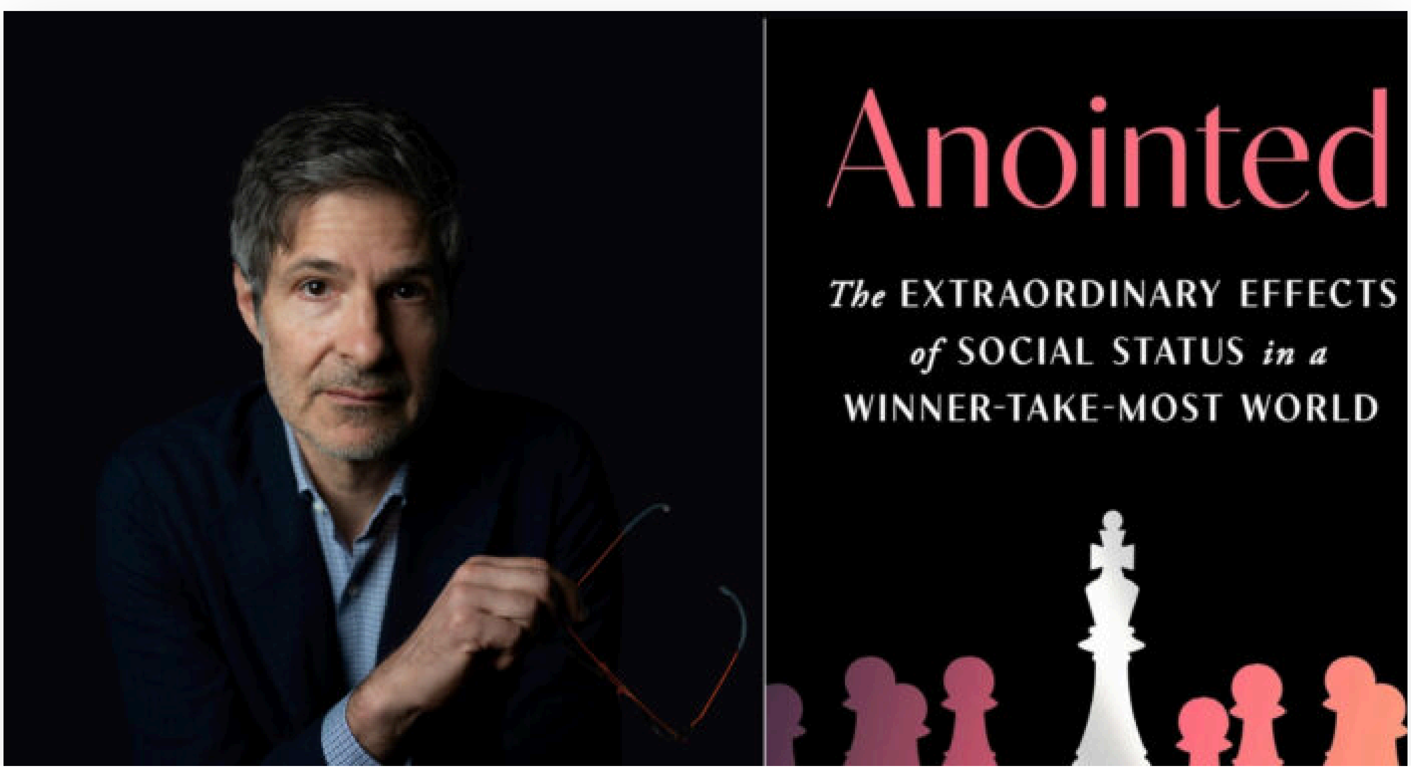

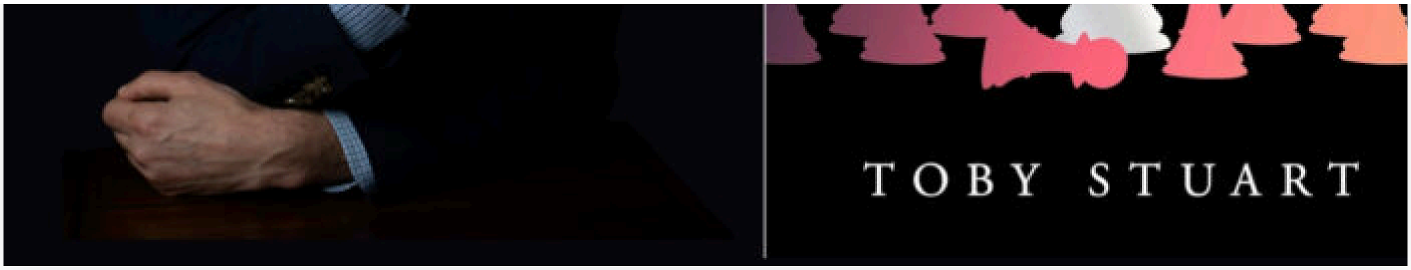

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