

Sylvia Mary Mathews Burwell

An American government and non-profit executive, who is the 15th president of American University since June 1, 2017. She is the first woman to serve as the university's president. She earlier served as the 22nd United States Secretary of Health and Human Services. President Barack Obama nominated Burwell on April 11, 2014. Burwell's nomination was confirmed by the Senate on June 5, 2014, by a vote of 78–17. She served as Secretary until the end of the Obama administration. Previously, she had been the Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget from 2013 to 2014.

A Hinton, WV native, born June 23, 1965, to parents Cleo (née Maroudas) Mathews, a teacher and Hinton mayor from 2001 to 2009, and Dr. William Peter Mathews, an optometrist.

She showed an interest in politics while still in grade school, getting involved her best friend's father's campaign for county commissioner and Jay Rockefeller's first campaign for governor. Mathews served as student body president and played on the basketball team. She graduated as valedictorian of her high school class. In 1982 she was a Youth For Understanding exchange student in Japan. While still in college, she served as an intern for West Virginia Congressman Nick Rahall, as a governor's aide to Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, and as a researcher on the Dukakis/Bentsen campaign. Mathews earned a bachelor's degree in Government and graduated cum laude, from Harvard University in 1987. She then enrolled at the University of Oxford where she became a Rhodes Scholar at Worcester College, and, in her spare time, a rower. She graduated from Oxford with a second bachelor's degree in Politics, Economics, and Philosophy. She has since been appointed as an honorary fellow of Worcester College.

Burwell first worked for the United States government in Washington, D.C., during the presidency of Bill Clinton. She helped form the National Economic Council in 1993. She later served as Chief of Staff to Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin, Deputy White House Chief of Staff to Erskine Bowles, and finally Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Previous positions included serving as president of the Walmart Foundation beginning in January 2012. Before that, she was the president of the Global Development Program of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, where her program focused on combating world poverty through agricultural development, financial services for the poor, and global libraries. She was Chief Operating Officer and Executive Director of the Foundation before its reorganization in 2006. She had joined the Foundation in 2001, after the end of the Clinton Presidency.

Even after leaving Hinton to pursue her education and career, Burwell has maintained strong ties with her hometown.

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