

# Holyoke Mayor Joshua Garcia, other elected officials take oath of office

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Holyoke City Clerk Brenna Murphy McGee administers the oath of office to Mayor Joshua A. Garcia.

**By Dennis Hohenberger | Special to The Republican**

HOLYOKE — A new political era dawned Monday as Mayor Joshua A. Garcia and elected officials took their oaths of office at City Hall.

Garcia's swearing-in marked the official start of his four-year term, the second such ceremony since he raised his right hand Nov. 15 to complete former Mayor Alex. B. Morse's final weeks in office.

Jordan Hart, Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce's executive director, presided over the ceremony. Holyoke District Court Judge William P. Hadley administered the oath to City Clerk Brenna Murphy McGee, who began her third term.

In his speech, Garcia said words could not describe the unprecedented times Holyoke and the nation faces in the COVID-19 era.

"And where my thoughts have returned to, time and again, is the palpable sense of resiliency that can be found in our community. It's something that can be found in the past: where generations of immigrants left their world behind and came to Holyoke in search of a better life," Garcia said.

As the city's first Latino mayor, Garcia said the "harsh truth" is that someone who looks like him was not set to succeed or become mayor of one's hometown.

"I have to believe that this feeling weighs heavily on the hearts and minds of many here today. I know it does because, if it didn't, we would not have the diverse representation we see on this stage," Garcia said.

He added, "The result of our most recent election reflects the citywide desires of Holyokers — from West Holyoke to South Holyoke, residents of this city turned to a new chapter that changed this narrative for one that embraces equity, inclusion and representation."

The pandemic laid bare the inequities many Americans face in everyday life, affecting citizens' social fabric and health, the mayor said.

"I was born into this city and grew up in it. I'm one of the few lucky ones out of many," Garcia said. "My experiences and what I have witnessed has channeled my focus to how we can better work together as neighbors to eliminate structural barriers so we can improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods and make peoples' lives a little better, no matter where in our city you live and what economic background you have."

Garcia called for a "stronger foundation" in city government, beginning with a balanced budget that focuses on the needs of city departments, avoids "irresponsible cuts" and desperate transfers.

"It's only logical that a healthy and responsible budget goes hand-in-hand with prioritizing the needs of city departments in a way that has not existed for a long time," he said. "We are a critical inflection point in this regard because I know we have the people who are equipped with the skills to solve many of the problems we face in our community."

Garcia wants to adopt a cooperative relationship with the City Council. Regaining local control of the Holyoke Public Schools would be a top priority for the administration.

"I honestly believe that there is indeed light at the end of the tunnel," Garcia said. "I am confident in our ability to regain local control and know we have the right people on our school board leading the charge to achieve it. So now we need to look to our roots and embody the resilient spirit we carry in our core to will our way there. Because when there is a will, there is a way."

The City Council and School Committee welcomed new members, joined by Murphy McGee and new City Treasurer Katherine Jackowski, who ran unopposed on the Nov. 2 municipal ballot.

The City Council underwent a transformation with a slate of new members, including Ward 1 Councilor Jenny Rivera, Ward 2 Councilor Will Puello, Ward 4 Councilor Kocayne Givner, At-large Councilors Tessa Murphy-Romboletti, Israel Rivera, Jose Luis Maldonado and Kevin Jourdain.

Returning councilors include McGee, At-large Councilors Joseph M. McGiverin, Peter Tallman, Ward 3 Councilor David Bartley, Ward 5 Councilor Linda Vacon and Ward 6 Councilor Juan Anderson-Burgos.

The School Committee seated the newest members Gustavo Romero (Ward 1) and Eleanor M. Wilson (Ward 7). Returning: Ward 2 Member Rosalee Tensely Williams, Ward 3 Member Rebecca Birks, Ward 4 Member Irene Feliciano-Sims, Ward 5 Member John G. Whelihan, Ward 6 Member William "Ron" Collamore, and At-Large Members Mildred Lefebvre and Erin Brunelle.

The School Committee slated a reorganization meeting for Tuesday night to elect a new vice-chair.

Aleyana Noemi Ramos-Batille sang the national anthem, joined by Garcia's children, Ethan and Allison. The Caledonian Pipe Band and Holyoke Police Department Honor Guard led the delegation into the auditorium.

Last week, Garcia announced the postponement of the Inaugural Ball from Jan. 8 to Feb. 26 at the Log Cabin, citing the current COVID surge.