

## Coming Home

BY CHRISTOPHER SNOW HOPKINS

When she was 8, **Cleve Mesidor** and her siblings left Haiti in search of a better life. But this month, the former Obama administration official returns to the destitute island country to help it rebuild. “I think [the 2010 earthquake] was the beginning of a lot of Haitian-Americans feeling that they have to ... go back and help in some capacity,” she said.

On July 5, Mesidor resigned as director of public affairs at the Commerce Department’s Economic Development Administration. In Haiti, she will teach a marketing workshop at Université Quisqueya, in Port-au-Prince, and embark on a self-funded, six-month “exploration” of her home country.

“To say that I am taking a salary cut is an understatement,” she said. “I am essentially ‘boot-strapping it.’... Teaching will not pay much.”

Haiti, which is slightly smaller than Maryland, is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The former French colony is prone to military coups and is lashed by tropical storms every summer. Three years ago, it was devastated by a magnitude 7.0 earthquake, which killed 300,000 people, including two of Mesidor’s cousins.

Born in L’Asile, a city on Haiti’s southern peninsula, Mesidor saw her mother only once—and did not see her father at all—between ages 4 and 8. Her parents, educators in their home country, immigrated to New York City when Mesidor was still a toddler. “Having secured legal papers for the two of them



**Giving back:** Mesidor hopes to help rebuild her Haitian homeland.

to enter the United States, they moved to America and left their three children behind because they did not have legal documents for us,” Mesidor wrote in an op-ed piece for *TheGrio.com*, an affiliate of NBC News.

Asked why her parents moved, Mesidor responded, “There was a lot of political turmoil at the time. My father is definitely not an agitator, but he wanted to be outside of the political realm and have a safer environment for his family.”

Eventually, Mesidor and her siblings were reunited with their parents in Queens, N.Y., where they had found work in a plastics factory. “The good thing about New York City is that it does a really good job in terms of socializing people from other countries,” she said.

Nonetheless, Mesidor at times felt alienated and was taunted by her peers, some of whom

referred to her as “French Fry.” Once she was mocked for eating chicken wings “to the bone” in the school cafeteria. “One of the things you do in Haiti is eat all of your meat,” she said. “This kid made such fun of me that, to this day, I always leave some food on the bone.”

After graduating from the University at Albany-SUNY, Mesidor worked for four years in retail management before receiving a master’s degree in mass communications from Howard University. She then served as communications director for Reps. **Betty McCollum**, D-Minn., and **Barbara Lee**, D-Calif.

Before starting her job at the Commerce Department, Mesidor volunteered at the Haitian Embassy in Washington, where she handled press inquiries in the days following the 2010 earthquake. She had planned to be on vacation during that time.

Now a citizen of the U.S., the 40-year-old is temporarily giving up the peace and prosperity her parents sacrificed to provide for their children.

“I would say that most of my adult life, I have felt this duality: While Haiti birthed me, America raised me,” she said. “Oddly enough, for the first time, I’m feeling connected to my heritage to the point that I have an obligation to this country, to these people.” ■

### CORRECTION

A graphic in the July 17 issue of *National Journal Daily*, p. 10, provided inaccurate data for Duke Energy’s electricity profile in 2012. The breakdown by energy type was 44 percent coal; 21 percent natural gas; 34 percent nuclear; and 1 percent renewable.

## PEOPLE ROUNDUP

### Tryon Times

Veteran Capitol Hill staffer **Warren Tryon** has joined the Washington office of Roberts, Raheb & Gradler as a senior policy adviser on financial services and judiciary issues.

He most recently was deputy staff director for the House Financial Services Committee.

### Hopalong Kassiday

**Joel Kassiday** is a new vice president at the Washington government-affairs firm HillStaffer.

Kassiday was chief of staff to three former House members—Elton Gallegly, R-Calif., Rick Lazio, R-N.Y., and Hank Brown, R-Colo.—

and was press secretary to former Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, and former Rep. James Johnson, R-Colo.

He also was legislative director at Liz Robins Associates and congressional-affairs director at the Republican Jewish Coalition.

### Here Comes the Judge

**Robert Rogers**, a former administrative-law judge at the International Trade Commission, has joined Steptoe & Johnson as senior counsel in the firm’s Intellectual Property Department.

Rogers was a judge at the commission for five years, primarily working on cases involving patent rights. He previously was an administrative judge for several feder-

al agencies, including the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

He started his law career in both private practice and as a municipal attorney in California.

### Diamond Specialist

Most recently the special adviser at the State Department on “conflict diamonds,” **Brad Brooks-Rubin** has joined the export controls/trade sanctions group at Holland & Hart.

Brooks-Rubin was previously an attorney adviser in the Office of Chief Counsel at the Treasury Department, focused on foreign assets control.

*Mike Magner*