

**STATEMENT OF SETH HARRIS  
NOMINEE FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY OF U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

**BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS**

**U.S. SENATE**

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Thank you, Madam Chair, Senator Enzi, and members of the Committee for inviting me to share my views about the Labor Department and the role of the Deputy Secretary of Labor.

Before we begin, I would like to pay special tribute to Chairman Kennedy. His presence is felt today even though he is not participating in this hearing. I look forward, if confirmed, to renewing a close working relationship with him and all of this Committee's members.

Madam Chair, I am humbled to be sitting before you today. My grandparents fled the Czar's tyranny and deadly anti-semitism to seek opportunity in this country — the opportunity to live the American Dream. Through hard work, the support of their communities, the power of their unions, and well-timed assistance from their government, my grandparents built a life in the New World that gave my parents a chance at a secure place in the American middle class. These working class Eastern European immigrants could not have imagined that their sacrifices and struggles would one day allow their grandson to stand at the threshold of high government office.

I am a grandchild of immigrants and a child of the middle class. My parents were public school teachers. My Dad taught and wrote about history. When he died, the headline of his obituary read, "Jonathan Harris, Fought Racism." I hope that, one day, my service can be summed up as simply and elegantly. My Mom was a school librarian. Today, at the age of 85

years, my Mom still works in a public library near her home on Long Island. She is still giving back to her community, and I am very proud of her.

Every American child should have the same chances my parents provided to my brother and me: a great education, a secure home, reliable health care, strong values, a welcoming community, and a family's loving support. And every American parent should be able to provide for their families and leave their children something more than they were given. My parents did that for me. My wife Karen and I are doing our best for our sons, Jonathan and Daniel.

But today, parents across America are wondering what they will be able to leave to their children. Their homes are being foreclosed. Their jobs are disappearing along with their health insurance. Decades of stagnant wages have left them with debts they can't pay. Retirement for themselves and college for their children have moved out of reach. For too many of these parents, for too many working Americans, the American Dream is slipping away.

If I am confirmed, Madam Chair, I will work hard every day for these families. My simple goal will be to help the President and the Secretary to serve those workers who are struggling to secure their place and their children's place in the middle class. I will dedicate myself to making that American Dream into a reality.

The President and Secretary Solis will define the Labor Department's agenda. If confirmed, my role will be to implement that agenda. I view the Deputy Secretary as the "Chief Operating Officer" of the Labor Department. If I am confirmed, my job will be to manage the department to meet the administration's goals consistent with the President's and the Secretary's

commitment to open government, responsible stewardship of the taxpayer's money, and broadly inclusive citizen engagement.

One important part of my job will be to assure a collegial and cooperative relationship between the department and the members of this Committee. If I am confirmed, I will do my best to lead by example.

I would like to briefly highlight five priorities that I would pursue as the Deputy Secretary.

First, if I am confirmed, I intend to continue the Labor Department's longstanding commitment to strategic planning. I began work in the Labor Department's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy not long after the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) was enacted in 1993. I also worked directly for Secretary Herman in 1997 when the department undertook an extensive strategic planning effort pursuant to GPRA. I look forward, if confirmed, to re-engaging in the Labor Department's GPRA strategic planning process, consulting with this Committee, other members of Congress, and stakeholders, and working under the Secretary's direction with the Secretary's management team on the department's mission, performance goals, and performance measures.

Second, if confirmed, I will bring a strong commitment to accountability to the Deputy Secretary's office. Employers, pension and welfare plans, and other entities regulated by the Labor Department must be held accountable when they fail to comply with the law. The department's grantees and contractors must meet their contractual and other obligations. The Labor Department's staff and agencies, including their highest ranking leaders, also must be held responsible for their performance. This commitment to accountability is inextricably bound up

with clear defining performance goals and measures in the strategic planning process and beyond. But I am convinced that another important tool for holding the department accountable is to expose our department's performance, as well as the behavior of the communities regulated by the department, to public examination. Open government is not just a slogan or a policy position. It is a powerful management tool. If I am confirmed, I look forward to making it a regular part of how the Labor Department does business.

Third, and building on the theme of open government, I believe the Labor Department must welcome working people into its decision making processes as well as its programs. Americans shouldn't need a lobbyist to have their voices heard in the Labor Department. And they should not have to be part of a traditional stakeholder group before their concerns are taken seriously. All of the department's stakeholders should be welcomed, but I believe the Labor Department must do more to reach out. Using new information technologies and an increasingly diverse workforce with connections to American workers of every type, the Labor Department should be the people's department.

Let me hasten to add that inclusive decision-making necessarily involves building constructive, problem-solving relationships with the unions that represent the Labor Department's employees. If I am confirmed, I expect to play an important role in that process. I do not mean that the answer to every union demand will be "yes." But answering "no" will not mean that collective bargaining has failed. Like any human relationship, collective bargaining can be difficult on occasion. Nonetheless, I consider collective bargaining to be a necessary part of American democracy and I agree with the President that unions are an essential bulwark of the

middle class. If I am confirmed to be the Labor Department's senior manager, I expect to live that value, even when it is difficult.

Fourth, if confirmed, I will work with the Secretary, the Office of Management and Budget, and the members of this committee and the appropriations committees to produce departmental budgets that serve the department's mission effectively and economically as possible. Budgeting involves hard choices. The Labor Department must creatively leverage its limited human and capital assets to achieve the best possible outcomes for America's workers. But the department's resources must match the department's mission. If we expect safer and healthier workplaces, we must invest in OSHA compliance officers and build OSHA's standards capacity. If we expect out-of-school youth, workers with disabilities, and other disadvantaged workers to succeed in the labor market over the long term, we must fund the basic skills training, job training, and supportive services they need to succeed. If we expect military servicemembers to transition into middle-class civilian jobs, then we must assure they get credentials, transition assistance, and placement services.

Finally, if I am confirmed, I hope to help the Secretary build a management structure and working environment that foster innovation, collaboration, creativity, and problem solving. We have not heard every good idea. We have not yet generated solutions to every conundrum. And we have not completed the list of every person who can contribute to the department's success. Ultimately, there can be only one final decision maker in the Labor Department and that is the Secretary of Labor. But Labor Department staff at every level and from every region can help the Secretary arrive at the best possible decision by providing her with the fullest possible information and the broadest range of ideas from which she can choose. It is management's task

to build processes that make that happen. It is a task that I view as essential to moving the Labor Department into the future.

Madam Chair, thank you again for inviting me to testify before the committee today. I look forward to your questions and the beginning of a longlasting dialogue with this committee.