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**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN EDWARD M. KENNEDY ON THE NOMINATIONS OF
SETH HARRIS AND PATRICIA SMITH**

United States Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Hearing

As Entered into the Record

Today the HELP Committee is considering nominees for two critical positions at the Department of Labor – Professor Seth Harris for Deputy Secretary and Commissioner Patricia Smith for Solicitor of Labor.

In today's tough economic times, the role of the Department of Labor is more vital than ever. America's workers are struggling, and they need a strong advocate on their side, protecting their rights and helping them build new opportunities for the future. President Obama is deeply committed to ensuring a level playing field for working families. And Secretary Solis has risen to this challenge, setting forth an ambitious agenda for the Department that will rebuild security for working families and help put our economy back on track.

The two positions we consider today will be absolutely vital in helping the Secretary achieve these important goals. The Deputy Secretary and Solicitor of Labor will lead the Department's efforts to keep our workplaces safe, ensure fair pay, prevent unlawful discrimination, and train America's workers for the jobs of the 21st century. The decisions they make will affect the daily lives of every working man and woman in America.

President Obama has made excellent choices for these critical leadership roles. Professor Harris and Commissioner Smith have dedicated their careers to public service and advancing workers' rights. They are uniquely qualified for the positions of Deputy Secretary and Solicitor. I believe they possess the experience, skill and vision necessary to manage the Department during an economic crisis and revitalize the agency in its core mission to support, protect, and advocate for workers.

The Deputy Secretary is the number two official at the Department of Labor. He is responsible for managing the Department's budget and spearheading the Secretary's legislative and regulatory agenda. Professor Harris is an excellent choice for this position. He has a sharp intellect, vast knowledge of labor law and policy, and extensive experience with the Department of Labor. In more than a decade of government service, he has served as a senior advisor to two Labor Secretaries and he has led the Department of Labor's policy office. As a scholar, he has written articles on many aspects of labor and employment law and advocated persuasively for the rights of American workers, particularly the protection of workers with disabilities. I believe he will be a tremendous asset to the Secretary and is well-qualified to fill this vital position.

Commissioner Patricia Smith has been nominated to serve as Solicitor of Labor. As the chief legal officer of the Department, the Solicitor has the profound responsibility of enforcing more than 180 laws affecting America's workers. Because many of these laws reserve enforcement authority exclusively for the Department, the Solicitor's office is often a worker's last best hope to obtain justice when his or her rights have been violated. Thus, the Solicitor of Labor must truly be the workers' lawyer, with a clear vision of how to prioritize limited resources to most effectively promote workers' rights. This is a weighty task, but one that Patricia Smith is eminently qualified to shoulder.

Commissioner Smith's impressive career as the Commissioner of Labor of New York, and as Chief of the Labor Bureau in the State Attorney General's office, has provided her with a wealth of invaluable experience in interpreting and enforcing a wide variety of labor and employment laws. She has emerged as a pioneer in state labor law, promoting innovative solutions to the complex new challenges that arise in the modern workplace. In addition, her decades of experience as an attorney and leader of a large state agency have given her the tools and skills she needs to effectively manage one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the Federal government. I am confident that with Patricia Smith at the helm, the Solicitor's office will have a new focus, and a new commitment to putting the needs of American workers first.

I thank our nominees for answering the President's call to serve our country, and I look forward to hearing more today about their plans for the Department of Labor.

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