

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE THOMAS E. PEREZ  
NOMINEE FOR U.S. SECRETARY OF LABOR  
CONFIRMATION HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS  
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Introduction

Good morning. Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Alexander, and other members of the Committee -- thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I've had the pleasure in the last several weeks of meeting with most of you, hearing directly about your ideas and your priorities regarding the state of our economy, our workforce, and other challenges facing the Department of Labor. I am eager to continue those conversations today and hopefully for the next several years, as I will seek further counsel from all of you if I am confirmed by the full Senate.

I want to thank my Senators, Senator Barbara Mikulski and Senator Ben Cardin, for those kind introductions and for their tireless work on behalf of our beloved state of Maryland.

I'm deeply grateful to President Obama for the confidence he's shown in me with this nomination to be United States Secretary of Labor. It's been a privilege to serve his Administration, and I hope to continue doing so in a new capacity. I share President Obama's vision of a growing economy powered by a rising middle class, with ladders of opportunity available to everyone willing to climb them. The Department of Labor plays a critical role in ensuring people have the skills to succeed in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, and that an honest day's work in a safe working environment leads to a decent living.

I also want to thank Secretary Hilda Solis for her service, for her deep commitment to American workers and her stewardship of the Labor Department. Since her departure in January, the Department has been led with great energy and expertise by Acting Secretary Seth Harris. It would be an honor to take the baton from them and build on their legacy of excellent work. The mission of the Department of Labor, now more than ever, is the mission of America.

Before I continue, I also want to thank my wife and my three children for their ever-present patience and support. A life dedicated to public service is only possible when everyone is onboard. Ann Marie Staudenmaier, my wife of almost 25 years and an accomplished public interest lawyer, and my children, Amalia, Susana and Rafael, have been my foundation on this incredible journey. I am eternally grateful for their sacrifice and partnership.

Family: A Legacy of Public Service

Let me take a moment to introduce myself to you – to give you a window into my background and my personal history, and how I came to be here today.

My family's story is similar to so many American stories – stories of immigrants looking for a better place to work, to raise children, to access opportunities. Both of my parents came to this country seeking refuge from a repressive regime in the Dominican Republic. My mother arrived in the 1930s when her father was appointed Ambassador to the U.S., and then stayed after he was declared “non grata” for speaking out against the dictator following the brutal massacre of thousands of Haitians. My father fled the same ruthless regime later and came to this country seeking a better life. He developed an immediate and deep gratitude for the freedom he found here, and gave back by serving with distinction as a physician in the United States Army, followed by a career at the Veterans Administration hospital in Buffalo, New York. My father never got rich working at the VA hospital, but the non-monetary rewards were priceless. In my current job, we have dramatically expanded our work on behalf of servicemembers. Whenever I am working on these cases, I think of my father.

My parents taught my four siblings and me to work hard, aim high, give back and to never forget our responsibility to help pave a path of opportunity for those less fortunate. They also taught us that education was the great equalizer – each of my four siblings would go on to become doctors.

To grow up in Buffalo is to be part of a city that is remarkably resilient, and has seen its share of hard knocks. It's one of those places we can't ever afford to give up on, that we must lift up and help succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

My father died suddenly when I was 12, leaving a deep personal void and also a financial strain on my mother and our family. But we pulled through in large part because my mother was a rock, my siblings always looked after their kid brother, and we lived in a place where neighbors looked after neighbors. There was no shortage of role models, mentors and support. I was fortunate to have a kind of surrogate dad – my best friend's father – a man of enormous character and wisdom. Though he never finished high school, he passed on to me the life lessons you don't find in a textbook, lessons about the dignity of work, and the importance of treating people fairly.

I was also fortunate that the federal government invested in my future. With the help of Pell grants, work study jobs, and other scholarships, I was able to attend Brown University, Harvard Law School, and the Kennedy School of Government. My parents always taught us that to whom much is given, much is expected. With the support of my wife and family, I have been fortunate to dedicate my entire career to public service -- at the local level as a member of the Montgomery County Council, at the state level as Maryland's Secretary of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, and at the federal level as a career prosecutor, as an aide to the late Senator Edward Kennedy, and most recently as the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.

Professional Experience: Collaboration, Consensus-Building, Common Sense and Results

While I am currently a political appointee in the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, I spent the bulk of my 13-year tenure there as a career criminal prosecutor. I have had the privilege of working under four Presidents -- Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and now President Obama. One of my mentors and supporters is John Dunne, who served as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights under President George H.W. Bush, and who taught me so much about public service and the effective stewardship of the Division. He taught me that so much of what the Division does is nuts-and-bolts law enforcement that may not make the headlines, but is critically important in making communities safer and ensuring a level playing field.

I am proud of the accomplishments of the Division. We have increased the number of human trafficking cases by 40 percent during the past 4 years, including a record number of prosecutions in 2012, and we dramatically stepped up our hate crimes enforcement.

In the past four years, the Division has done more work on behalf of servicemembers than ever before. We recovered more than \$50 million for servicemembers whose homes were improperly foreclosed on while they were deployed, and these recoveries go directly to the servicemembers. We have taken significant steps to ensure that military voters are able to vote and have their vote counted, and in the past four years, we increased the number of cases filed to protect the employment rights of servicemembers by 44 percent.

Our work on behalf of people with disabilities in the past four years has been groundbreaking. We worked collaboratively with Governors in four states -- Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina and Delaware (two Republican Governors and two Democrats) to expand opportunities for people with disabilities to live and thrive in their communities. I applaud the leadership of Governors McDonnell and Markell from Virginia and Delaware, respectively; and former Governors Sonny Perdue and Beverly Perdue of Georgia and North Carolina, respectively.

In addition to enforcement, mediation, education, technical assistance and voluntary compliance are important components of our civil rights work as well.

From 1995 to 1998, I had the opportunity to work for Senator Edward Kennedy, whose leadership of this committee in particular was responsible for so much bipartisan consensus that made a powerful difference in the lives of so many Americans. I learned so many lessons from Senator Kennedy, perhaps the most important of which was that idealism and pragmatism are not mutually exclusive. They are both critical ingredients in any recipe for sound policymaking. Government at all levels works best when men and women of good faith and integrity come together, guided by conviction but prepared to seek principled compromise for the sake of progress and the good of the country.

These are the principles underlying Senator Enzi's "80/20 rule" and his success in working with Senator Kennedy. These are the principles that enabled Senators Kennedy and Hatch to forge bipartisan consensus on hate crimes, children's health insurance, and so many other important issues. We ought not make the perfect the enemy of the very good. There is so much that

unites us – Democrats and Republicans; President Obama and the Congress. And in fact so much of what unites us falls directly under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Labor.

I am confident that we can all agree on the critical need to create jobs to build a stronger middle class; we can all agree that we need to invest in human capital to build a skills infrastructure and a competitive workforce for our businesses to grow; we can all agree that everyone should have a chance retire with dignity and a measure of economic security; we can all agree that workers deserve a fair wage and safe working conditions; we can all agree that we must find a place for our nation’s veterans in the civilian economy; we can all agree that historically marginalized populations, including people with disabilities, have so much to contribute and need to be brought into the economic mainstream.

At the confirmation hearing for then-nominee Hilda Solis, then-ranking member Enzi stated “the successful stewardship of the Department of Labor requires the ability to work constructively with many stakeholders.” I couldn’t agree more. And indeed, it is that approach that I have taken throughout my career.

As an elected member of the Montgomery County Council, I worked with people from both parties and stakeholders of all stripes -- small businesses and developers as well as the civil rights community and many others.

As Secretary of the Maryland Department of Labor, I focused on workforce development, workplace safety, wage enforcement, and unemployment insurance, among many other functions. I am especially proud of our work to re-engineer our state workforce system to make it more demand-driven, responsive to the needs of employers and workers alike. We made room for everyone around the table and embraced the input of everyone who had skin in the game – including businesses and community colleges, which are such a critical engine of workforce innovation.

We were successful in Maryland because we abandoned the “train and pray” practice. It is wasteful and inefficient to provide workers with skills training and then pray that a suitable job exists. Instead, we must train people for jobs that we *know* exist, and forging industry partnerships enables us to match skills training with actual need. And we must measure our success by results and outcomes – did people get good jobs and did employers thrive?

In all these capacities, I’ve always tried to listen more than I talk; to approach contentious issues with an open mind and basic respect; to build broad coalitions of business leaders, labor unions and others in pursuit of constructive solutions to tough problems, and to disagree without being disagreeable.

### DOL: A Steadfast Mission Amid a Century of Change

This year, the Labor Department marks its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In March 1913, the Department first opened its doors to -- in the words of its charter -- "foster, promote and develop the

welfare of working people, to improve their working conditions, and to enhance their opportunities for profitable employment." Still today and in fact more than ever before, Americans are depending on the Department to continue to fulfill its historic mission. We read each month about the nation's unemployment rate – but you and I know they are more than just numbers in the newspaper. They are single mothers trying to put food on the table, or young adults trying to break into the workforce. They are middle-aged, laid off workers trying to gain new skills for the modern economy, or returning veterans trying to take what they've learned protecting our nation and put it to use here at home. They are people with disabilities, long-term unemployed and others all too frequently left behind.

They are the backbone of our nation, and they are the people who will populate our workforce and propel our nation forward. A workforce development system must serve a dual mission – to help individuals gain the skills needed to build meaningful careers, and to help ensure those skills are the ones our employers needed to grow and thrive. We must have demand-driven workforce development strategies. Programs to train widget makers are useless if there is no demand in our economy for widgets. We must understand the needs of employers, not only today, but 10 years down the road.

As our nation continues to emerge from one of the worst recessions in our history, I see an opportunity to take the same collaborative and bipartisan approach I have applied throughout my career to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act. I applaud the bipartisan efforts of this Committee to reauthorize WIA, and I look forward, if confirmed, to working with you on this important task. I learned many lessons about job creation and workforce development during my tenure in Maryland. Perhaps most importantly, businesses will always be the primary generator of good jobs, and we can't have a strong economy unless industry is not just surviving, but thriving.

At the same time, government can be an active partner and a force-multiplier. The Department of Labor can work with state and local partners, businesses, community colleges and other educators, workers, unions, and other key stakeholders to ensure that businesses have access to a strong, agile and skilled workforce, and the ladder of opportunity is open for any person wishing to maximize their own gifts and talents and earn a decent living.

The Department must continue to perform its critical tasks of ensuring a safe and equal opportunity workplace. Job safety and job growth are not mutually exclusive, and it is not necessary to choose between jobs and job safety.

Pension security is also an important Labor Department priority, as is the evenhanded enforcement of wage and hour laws. If an employer does not comply with overtime laws, or pays workers under the table, that employer is not simply violating the law and harming workers, but also creating an unlevel playing field for the vast majority of employers who play by the rules.

I share President Obama's vision of a growing economy powered by a rising middle class, with ladders of opportunity available to everyone. The President has asked us all to consider three questions in all of the decisions we make: How do we make America a magnet for jobs? How do we equip our people with the skills they need to succeed in those jobs? And how do we ensure that an honest day's work leads to a decent living?

These questions are at the core of the mission of the Department of Labor. If confirmed, I will keep them there.

With that, let me once again thank the Committee for your consideration of my nomination. I look forward to your questions.

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