

STATEMENT OF JENNIFER ANN ABRUZZO
NOMINEE FOR GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE
APRIL 29, 2021

Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today. I am honored to appear before you as the nominee for General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and grateful for the time that you took meeting with me.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my family for all their love, support and encouragement throughout the years – my husband Bill, my parents George and Sandy Burgess, my sister Courtney and brothers Chris and Matt, my second mother Mary Damiani, who recently passed away, and last, but certainly not least, my son Adam Schertz, who is a pulmonary critical care doctor at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital, and his talented wife Brenna, who bestowed upon me two of life's greatest gifts -- my grandsons Henry and Dean.

I also wish to express my gratitude to President Biden and Vice President Harris for entrusting me with this nomination. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to protect the rights of workers to freely associate and act collectively to improve their wages and working conditions if they so choose. And, I will promote productive relationships so that businesses can flourish. Just as was contemplated when the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA or statute) was enacted during the Great Depression, strong enforcement of the statute helps level the playing field and build a better economy for workers, families, communities, and our great country.

I know firsthand the difference effectuating the mission of the NLRB can make in the lives of so many. I grew up in a working class neighborhood in Queens, New York as the oldest child of four. Both of my parents, an electrical engineer at a utility company and a X-ray technician at a hospital, were union members, who instilled in me a tremendous work ethic and a belief that there is strength in numbers when trying to garner decent wages, safe and productive workplaces, better health and retirement benefits, and dignity and respect.

I spent most of my professional career - about 23 years – as a career public servant at the NLRB working in various capacities in the field and headquarters, culminating with my service as Acting General Counsel and Deputy General Counsel. During that time, I partnered with colleagues at other agencies to educate workers, labor organizations and businesses about statutory rights and to promote better enforcement of labor and employment laws and help prevent exploitation of vulnerable workers. And, on a daily basis, I collaborated with board agents of all ages, backgrounds and political parties. I can unequivocally attest to the fact that the NLRB is filled with dedicated public servants who are committed to enforcing the primary labor law in this country.

I am a direct beneficiary of my parents' union jobs and understand the power of the right to organize and collectively bargain. Workers are able to bring about opportunities to change their lives by exercising this right. I was fortunate enough to see this first hand while working at the NLRB. One matter, which has stayed with me for over fifteen years, occurred in Miami. I was the attorney of record on a case where a few employees were fired during an organizing drive and other employees protested in response causing many of them to be threatened, retaliated against, and permanently replaced. The courtroom where I was seeking an injunction to force the employer to reinstate the workers and to cease engaging in these acts was packed. After my long oral argument, the judge advised that he would issue a decision within a few days. So, I packed up, left the courtroom and went to the elevator banks for the trip down to the lobby. But I couldn't even get on the elevator as I was surrounded by workers who hugged me, patted me on the back or shook my hand. Many of them were not English speakers and could not follow much of what I said during my presentation, but they thanked me anyway – why - because I defended them and their rights under the NLRA – that gave them a voice and power.

If confirmed as General Counsel, I will dedicate myself to enforcing the statute to the fullest degree possible and will lead by: promoting a greater understanding for and interest in issues facing workers; embracing more productive labor-management partnerships; engaging with workers, advocates, employers and other stakeholders; collaborating with colleagues throughout the government; and enabling all board agents to effectively enforce statutory rights in a neutral manner by giving full opportunity for employers and unions to have their positions heard.

My past three years at Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO have deepened my belief that strong enforcement of the NLRA is crucial for workers and their advocates to advance improvements in workplace conditions, particularly during these challenging times. Too many workers have had to choose between their safety and their livelihood. Now more than ever, we must ensure that working families, who have built this great country, are empowered and enjoy a better life -- a life where workplace wages, conditions and benefits continue to improve, where work-life balance is sustainable, where diversity is embraced and all are treated with dignity and respect, and where workplace protection laws are effectively enforced.

Committed people acting together can make a difference. I commit to you that, if confirmed, I will do all that I can to build a better future for our workers, our businesses, our communities and our nation.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

