

STATEMENT OF RAJESH NAYAK
NOMINEE FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF LABOR FOR POLICY
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS OF
THE UNITED STATES SENATE
MAY 27, 2021

Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee, I'm honored to appear before you today as the nominee for the Assistant Secretary for Policy at the United States Department of Labor.

I need to start by thanking President Biden and Vice President Harris for giving me the opportunity to earn your approval, and to Secretary Walsh for his support. I also want to thank my family -- starting with my wife, Rebecca, who always asks the tough questions about policy; and my children, Lila and Jay, who are a little too young to be here, but who keep me grounded by giving me important jobs like Daisy Troop Co-Leader and Lunch Bag Illustrator.

I also need to thank my parents, Dharmadev and Chitra Nayak – immigrants who arrived here from India 50 years ago. They were newly married, and they didn't have much. My father went through medical school on scholarships and eventually found a home in Effingham -- a small town in South Central Illinois where I was born, spent my first eighteen years, and made some of my best friends still today. My parents worked hard to earn the trust of neighbors in a place where there were only handfuls of immigrant families; my dad cut short many nights at home to check on patients, and my mom became active in the community, in addition to all she did for my brother Mike and me. Thanks to that town and this nation, my parents did well, helped us go to great schools, and gave us the chance to pursue dreams and opportunities that led me to sit before you today. I'm proud of my AAPI heritage and thankful for the support of the broader Indian-American community as the nominee for this position.

I have worked for most of my career focused on employment and labor policy. I spent nearly half of the past fifteen years in government, serving previously at the Department of Labor as Senior Counsel, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, and Deputy Chief of Staff. During that time, I was privileged to play a lot of different roles – as a lawyer, as a coordinator, and as a manager. I saw the Department's work from many angles. Most importantly, I got to work with amazing people. The career staff at DOL are smart, creative, and tremendously dedicated. I've seen teams go the extra mile time and time again to fulfill the Department's critical mission of promoting the welfare of this nation's workers, job seekers, and retirees.

It's been a highlight of my career to return to the Department this year on a temporary basis to help transition in a fantastic new team of leaders. It's been especially fulfilling to reconnect with those dedicated career staff.

As I hope is obvious, I fully support the Department's mission and staff, and I care deeply about how our policy impacts workers, and especially workers who are too often left behind, be they workers of color, immigrant workers, or workers in rural communities (like where I grew up) who have lost their jobs due to deindustrialization. More recently, I was the Deputy Executive Director of the National Employment Law Project, an advocacy organization that is committed to protecting the rights of all workers.

A common thread throughout my government *and* nonprofit experience is that I've held management roles where I've had to make tough calls as a manager, and where I've also learned what it's like to be the employer who is notified about a new policy, and who has to figure out how to implement it. I know how important it is for the government to listen to employers, to hear out their concerns, to consider flexibilities to make laws work in practice, and always to give employers and workers alike the clear, concrete guidance they need to understand their rights and responsibilities.

I believe that I have the skills and experience to find common-sense solutions that consider the views of employers and workers alike. If confirmed, I will take seriously the responsibility to pursue policy that reflects the input of a broad set of stakeholders, and would appreciate the opportunity to hear from workers and their representatives, employers and industry groups, interagency colleagues, and members of this committee to find common ground, not to prejudge outcomes.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.