

STATEMENT OF JOSE JAVIER RODRIGUEZ
NOMINEE FOR U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
CONFIRMATION HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
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Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee, I'm honored to appear before you today as the nominee for Assistant Secretary of Labor for Employment and Training.

I thank President Biden for nominating me. I share his commitment, and that of this Administration, to a strong and competitive American workforce. If confirmed, I look forward to serving the American people during these times that have been so challenging for workers and their families, for businesses and their communities.

I thank my wife Sonia who is in the committee room with us today. She travelled with me from Miami. Both of us say hello to our two boys who are watching from home with their grandparents.

I am also grateful to my parents. I grew up bicultural and bilingual. My mother Joyce grew up in rural Indiana. Until her retirement she worked in bedside nursing at our local public hospital. She and our family instilled strong values in my brother and I; and helped inspire my public service.

My father Guillermo left communist Cuba alone as a boy during Operation Pedro Pan, a program that evacuated unaccompanied Cuban children in the early 1960s. After paying his way through college, serving in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and working as a corporate executive, my father went on to start and run a successful small business. From him, I learned the value of hard work and making the most of the opportunities that no other country offers.

The American Dream is that hard work will meet with success if given the opportunity. That is my family's story. And it has motivated a career of service dedicated to making sure those opportunities remain open.

Before law school I served in the Peace Corps in West Africa, first training small business owners and then helping design training programs in the Employment Section at Senegal's Ministry of Labor.

I returned to my beloved Miami after earning a Harvard Law degree. I worked as a legal aid lawyer representing employees, homeowners and small businesses who could not afford a lawyer but needed help as they fought to improve their economic futures.

I later went into private practice. I am currently partner at a labor and employment firm where among many other matters I've had the chance to work with joint apprenticeship and training committees.

For eight years I had the honor of serving my fellow Floridians in the state legislature. In my first campaign, my platform included reform of our state jobs programs. So I was thrilled when one of the first bills I presented after arriving at the Capitol became part of that year's bipartisan economic development and jobs program reform.

That first year I also proposed legislation that would have been part of modernizing our unemployment system. I'm proud to report that some of that work bore fruit before I left. Much of that work, however, remains to be done. The pandemic made that painfully clear.

Like many colleagues I took pride in the constituent services my legislative office offered. During the pandemic, we served small businesses together with our local workforce board. We also served hundreds of constituents that desperately needed an economic bridge but were failed by an inadequate and unreliable unemployment system.

If confirmed, I hope to serve the many Americans who need and deserve a responsive, modern workforce system.

They're workers willing to put in the time to earn a higher wage.

They're disadvantaged youth or returning citizens who will thrive in the workforce with some assistance overcoming barriers.

They're young people who want a career rather than a series of jobs.

They're employers in growth industries that need skilled workers.

Or employers in industries battered by change that need to upskill their current workforce.

They're hard-hit communities looking for the added economic stability that temporary support programs can provide.

And they're workers who will be able to compete and lead as our nation tackles the climate crisis.

Delivering on all of these is the business of the Employment and Training Administration. If confirmed, I would be honored to lead this critical mission.

Thank you. I look forward to addressing any questions you have.