

STATEMENT OF MARTIN J. WALSH  
NOMINEE FOR SECRETARY OF LABOR  
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS  
OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE  
FEBRUARY 4, 2021

Thank you Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr. Thank you to all the members of the Committee, for inviting me to speak today, and for our conversations in recent days.

I want to thank President Biden and Vice President Harris for the honor of this nomination. I share their commitment to the health and safety of the working people who are carrying our country through this pandemic. I share their commitment to build back better – with an economy that works for every single American worker.

In many ways, this has been my life's work. I want to start by telling you why the mission of the Department of Labor is so important to me. My father and mother emigrated from Ireland in the 1950s. They both worked hard but our American Dream did not take shape until my father joined the Laborers Union, Local 223 in Boston. The union was our way into the middle class. It meant a fair wage, so we could have a home, and give back to our community. It meant safety on the job, so we didn't have to live in fear of an accident derailing our lives. It meant a pension, so my parents could retire with dignity. And it meant health insurance.

At the age of 7, I was diagnosed with a form of cancer called Burkitt's Lymphoma. It was my parent's worst nightmare and every parent's worst nightmare. But with health insurance, with great treatment by doctors and nurses at Boston Children's Hospital and Dana Farber Cancer Institute, and the prayers of nuns and priests on both sides of the Atlantic; I recovered and I've had amazing experiences on my life's journey.

As a young man, I followed my father into construction and joined the same union that he joined when he came over from Ireland. I worked on job sites all over Boston and saw the sacrifices working men and women make for their families every single day. In my 20s, because of the same benefits that enabled my cancer treatment as a child, I was able to seek treatment for my alcoholism. I am a proud member of the recovery community. Later on, as a full-time legislator, I went back to school and earned my degree from Boston College at the age of 42.

I share these personal details, because they shape my understanding of the struggles working people and families face each and every day. And, they inform my deep belief in the work of the Department of Labor:

Protecting all workers: with fair pay, healthcare and unemployment benefits, safety in the workplace, and a secure retirement.

Ensuring equal access to good jobs -- and the right to join a union and engage in collective bargaining.

Continuing education and job training.

Access to mental health and substance use treatment.

These are not just policies to me. I've lived them. Millions of American families right now need them. And I've spent my entire career fighting for them.

As a State Representative for 16 years, I fought for good jobs and the rights of working people. I worked in collaboration with one Democratic governor and four Republican governors including Senator Romney, whose Administration I worked with to reform public construction.

As General Agent for the Metro Boston Building Trades Council, I advocated for 35,000 union members. I worked with developers and contractors to secure good jobs and brought new housing, small businesses, and infrastructure to communities across Greater Boston. I also created a program called Building Pathways that provides pre-apprenticeship training and union careers for people of color and women so their families can join the middle class, the way my family did.

I am committed to making sure that everyone – including veterans, LGBTQ Americans, immigrants, and people with disabilities – gets full access to economic opportunity and fair treatment in the workplace.

For the last 7 years, I have had the honor of serving as Mayor of my hometown, Boston. In that time, we proved that you can create a dynamic, competitive economy that works for working people. We secured a \$15 minimum wage, paid sick leave, and paid parental leave. We expanded workforce training – in partnership with businesses, community colleges, unions, and the U.S. Department of Labor. We created groundbreaking policies to close the gender wage gap, and increase racial equity. We invested in affordable housing, clean energy, and resilient infrastructure.

And during my administration, business thrived, attracting \$43 billion of investment and creating 77 million square feet of new development.

We became a global leader in fields from robotics to athletic shoes. Small businesses grew in every neighborhood. And we expanded the job base of a major American city by nearly 20 percent.

We also showed that investing in working people is fiscally smart. As the City's chief executive, I lead a workforce of 18,000 employees, represented by 41 unions. We worked together as partners to put our pensions on track to be fully funded by 2024. And we earned AAA bond ratings for 7 consecutive years – which has never been done before in Boston.

So when COVID struck, we were ready to meet the needs of working people. We were the first city to pause construction. We worked with employers and labor on strong COVID protocols that allowed us to restart with confidence.

Throughout my career, I've led by listening, collaborating, and building partnerships. That's how, if confirmed, I will lead the Department of Labor.

Right now, this work is critical to the future of our economy, our communities, and our families. We are depending on working men and women all across this country to keep us going – as they always have done. They are depending on us.

I believe we must act with urgency to meet this moment to strengthen and empower our workforce as we rebuild. If confirmed, I pledge to lead this work in partnership with workers and businesses; states, cities, and tribal territories; employees in every agency of the Department of Labor; the Administration and members of Congress from all parties; and all the members of this Committee.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.