

STATEMENT OF JULIE A. SU
NOMINEE FOR SECRETARY OF LABOR
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS
OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE

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Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. I have enjoyed our discussions prior to this hearing about the Department of Labor and its critical role in meeting some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

I am grateful to have my daughter, LiMei, a college senior who is graduating from Yale next month, with me today. As a political science major, she—and I—are aware of how amazing it is for her not only to be here for me, but also to get to see democracy in action up close. My other daughter, AnLing, is in her sophomore year at Amherst College, where she is on the basketball team, and is taking an Economics midterm today, which we decided she should not miss. And my parents, sister, and brother-in-law are all up early watching from California.

I want to start by thanking President Biden for this incredible opportunity. As Deputy Secretary of Labor, I have worked hand in hand with Secretary Walsh to deliver on the President’s promise of an economy built from the bottom up and middle out. And the results speak for themselves: the U.S. economy has added a record 12.6 million jobs, and the unemployment rate has been below 4 percent for more than a year—close to the lowest it has been in more than 50 years, all while labor force participation by prime age workers has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

When he announced my nomination for U.S Secretary of Labor, the President called me “the American Dream.” My parents believed in it, I benefited from it, and I want to do my part to make sure it is a reality for workers across the nation. The dream for my family began with my mom’s 30-day voyage on a cargo ship to the United States because she couldn’t afford a passenger ticket. Both of my parents came to America for opportunity, and they found it: in Provo, Utah, where they studied; in Madison, Wisconsin, where my sister and I were born; and in Southern California, where they settled and built a life.

To get through school, my parents worked minimum wage jobs. When I was 6 years old, my mom got a job working for Los Angeles County as an office clerk. That job gave our family two crucial things: financial security and health insurance. It also afforded my mother a pension—something that guarantees my mother and father’s financial security into their old age. This level of economic security seemed impossible as they worked long hours and came home every night with the same first question for my sister and me, “Did you finish your homework?” But that is the transformative power of a good union job, something I can speak to personally.

While I was growing up, my family also saw opportunity and their shot at the middle class in the form of small businesses. They owned a dry cleaning and laundromat business, and then a franchise pizza restaurant. For years, my dad would work his day job and then head right to the pizza shop, returning home after 10 pm, often with leftover pizza for our school lunches the next

day. I know small business owners are the engines of our economy, because I watched it every day.

I also grew up translating for my parents, a common experience in immigrant families. After college, I went to law school and became the first lawyer in my family. My experience as a translator at home shaped my commitment to making the law understandable and meaningful to individuals and communities too often left out of our economy.

Immediately after law school, I spent nearly two decades representing workers. What I learned is that too many people still work full-time, year-round and live in poverty. Too many are denied a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. At the same time, I learned that working people, when given a chance to organize, to be heard, not only make things better for themselves, but bring the American Dream within reach to those around them. If confirmed, I will bring these lessons and experiences to my role as we continue to rebuild the economy. I will work to ensure that hard work pays off for workers and small business owners, just like it did for my family.

Prior to coming to the Department of Labor, I served the people of California for a decade. I saw firsthand that government has a meaningful role to play in providing support to the overwhelming majority of employers who play by the rules. One of these roles is investments in workforce programs to provide training to meet employers' need for skilled workers and to give more workers access to quality jobs.

Over the last two years, Secretary Walsh and I worked side by side to expand apprenticeships in in-demand industries and training opportunities for jobs like building roads and bridges, manufacturing semiconductors, building wind turbines, solar panels, and so much more. Many of these jobs do not require a four-year degree. We created a national Youth Employment Works Strategy and expanded investments in rural communities, tribal communities, mental health, and other initiatives to ensure that our nation's workers are ready to meet the needs of employers in jobs across America. I have been a leader dedicated to finding and expanding the vast areas of common ground between employers and employees.

While my job as Deputy Secretary meant my primary focus was on the internal operations at the Department, Secretary Walsh's leadership style was to involve me as a true partner. I was with him for the 20-hour negotiation between rail employers and rail unions in our office. I have traveled from New Orleans to Detroit, Indianapolis to Nashville, San Juan to Houston, where I have seen first-hand the strength and creativity of American workers and business owners.

Secretary Walsh and I also expanded our compliance assistance for employers and employees—providing real-time information through MSHA's new Miner Safety and Health app to keep miners safe; helping employers work with employees with disabilities to put job accommodations in place; and supporting employers to adopt workplace health and safety programs, including how to find and fix hazards. I believe that the Department of Labor should make it as easy as possible for employers to keep workers safe on the job. If confirmed, you can count on me to listen to employers' views about how best to do that.

All of this experience brings me to today. President Biden asked me to “finish the job” that Secretary Walsh and I started. If confirmed as the Secretary of Labor, I would work to preserve and expand the American Dream for all Americans, and I look forward to working in partnership with you on this shared endeavor. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.