



# Walsh Confirmed as Secretary of Labor

By Allen Smith, J.D.

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**O**n March 22, the Senate voted 68-29 to confirm Boston Mayor Marty Walsh as secretary of labor.

Before the vote, Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., voiced his support for Walsh and urged others to vote to confirm him, saying Walsh had the skills to balance labor and management interests and was beholden to neither.

Walsh emphasized his collaborative approach at his Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee confirmation hearing on Feb. 4, promising increased diversity, equity and inclusion and ramped-up employee safety enforcement. In his opening statement, Walsh testified, "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."

When Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., asked how Walsh planned to fight systemic racism, Walsh noted that he created an Office of Equity in Boston and said there needed to be more conversations about the problem. Walsh suggested that a task force be formed with the NAACP, the National Urban League and employers to address systemic racism.

Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., called on Walsh to commit to the issuance of emergency temporary standards ([www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/coronavirus-oshma-may-issue-covid-19-standards.aspx](http://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/coronavirus-oshma-may-issue-covid-19-standards.aspx)) during the pandemic. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., also urged Walsh to adopt emergency temporary standards.

Walsh said he would "do everything I can, if confirmed, to advance worker rights."

We've gathered articles on Walsh from *SHRM Online* and other trusted media outlets.

## Increased Job Training

In response to questioning from Burr during the confirmation hearing, Walsh said he would focus on job-training programs, saying they are a pathway to the middle class. In Boston, Walsh worked with community colleges on job training and internships in high school. "Job training is not a Republican or Democrat issue," Walsh said, adding that people in the disability community and people recovering from substance abuse should not be overlooked.

(*SHRM Online* ([www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/walsh-confirmation-hearing.aspx?\\_ga=2.240063683.1730038707.1616414856-1102745045.1615925853](http://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/walsh-confirmation-hearing.aspx?_ga=2.240063683.1730038707.1616414856-1102745045.1615925853)))

## Enforcement Changes

Employers "should expect abrupt and far-reaching changes to the administration of federal workplace laws and regulations," according to Bob Nichols, an attorney with Bracewell in Houston. "For instance, employers must be prepared for vigorous enforcement of requirements related to occupational safety and health, payment of overtime, proper administration of employee benefit plans, and affirmative action."

(Forbes (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/edwardsegal/2021/02/11/senate-committee-confirms-walshs-nomination-to-be-secretary-of-labor/?ss=leadership-strategy&sh=3c583a4e4da1>))

**Union Background and Backing**

The AFL-CIO's two largest affiliates, the American Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, supported Walsh, a onetime leader of the Boston Building and Construction Trades Council—an umbrella group for unions—to be labor secretary. Walsh is the first labor secretary to come from a union background in nearly 50 years.

(Politico (<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/07/biden-chooses-boston-mayor-walsh-as-labor-secretary-455899>) and *The Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/03/22/marty-walsh-confirmation-labor-secretary/>))

**Working-Class Roots**

Walsh worked his way up from laborer to leader in Boston's building trades unions. He took night classes at Boston College to earn his degree at age 42, while serving in the state legislature. He then became a two-term mayor—all the while remaining in the working-class neighborhood where he grew up.

(Bloomberg (<https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/marty-walshs-story-gives-him-an-edge-in-biden-labor-messaging>))

**Confirmation Hearing of Nominee for Deputy Labor Secretary**

During her confirmation hearing, California Labor Secretary Julie Su, who has been nominated to be deputy U.S. labor secretary, faced questioning about unemployment insurance fraud in California. Burr said the nation shouldn't follow in California's footsteps. But Su said the amount of fraud in California has been proportional to what other states have experienced. Democrats praised Su's background as the daughter of working-class immigrants and her career as a civil rights attorney. Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., said Su's experience dealing with fraud in California would help her fight it nationwide. A vote on her nomination has not yet been set.

(KQED (<https://www.kqed.org/news/11865018/republicans-grill-california-labor-secretary-on-edd-fraud-in-confirmation-hearing>))

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