



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

House Committee on Education and Labor Full Committee Hearing
Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Labor
Wednesday, June 9, 2021 | 12:00 p.m.

Today, we are meeting to discuss the Department of Labor's budget request for Fiscal Year 2022 and examine the Department's priorities to support workers, job seekers, retirees, and their families.

I want to start by welcoming our distinguished witness, Secretary Marty Walsh, to the Education and Labor Committee. We are grateful for your time and look forward to discussing your vision for how the Labor Department can help achieve a strong and shared economic recovery.

To understand the Department's policies and priorities, we must first consider the labor market that you inherited.

For years, the Trump Administration made it harder for low-income and middle-class workers to succeed in America.

While corporations made record profits and reaped an overwhelming share of the benefits from the almost \$2 trillion GOP tax cut, many workers continued to work long hours in difficult jobs and still had trouble making ends meet for themselves and their families.

Other policies include the Trump Administration's overtime rule, which has stripped millions of middle-class workers of their right to receive overtime. The Trump Administration's Independent Contractor rule – which the Biden Administration recently withdrew – would have cost workers an estimated \$3 billion every year in lost wages and benefits. And the Trump Administration abandoned a nearly complete infectious disease standard when it took office. That standard was almost complete when the Administration came in, which would have been a valuable tool for OSHA to better protect workers against COVID-19.

Secretary Walsh, your task is to restore the Labor Department's focus on strengthening workers and their families.

Thankfully, the Biden-Harris Administration and Congressional Democrats have taken decisive steps to turn our economy around and get workers back on their feet.

For example, in March, the Administration worked with Congress to enact the *American Rescue Plan Act*, which provided emergency funding to save our child care system from collapsing, offered health care subsidies to cover the full cost of COBRA premiums so that laid-off workers can maintain affordable health coverage during the pandemic, and provided emergency financial assistance – including relief checks, the expanded Child Tax Credit, and the improved Earned Income Tax Credit – that is projected to cut child poverty in half.

We also fully protected the hard-earned pensions of over one million Americans who were projected to lose those pensions through no fault of their own.

Not a single Republican supported this package, but it is producing results for workers, businesses, and communities. The economy has created 2.2 million jobs since the Biden-Harris Administration took office.

Unfortunately, we still have a lot of work to do to ensure that all workers benefit from a strong recovery. Today, our economy remains more than 8 million jobs behind where we were at the start of the pandemic.

This is why it is essential that we create millions of good-paying jobs by investing in our infrastructure and helping workers get the skills and support to fill those jobs.

Mr. Secretary, we look forward to your testimony on how the American Jobs Plan and American Families Plan would make smart investments to build back a better economy to enable workers to get back to work.

We're interested to know what the budget does for affordable child care and to make college degrees more accessible as well as how you plan to expand job training at a time when countless businesses are desperate for talented workers and workers are looking for new, high-quality careers.

We're also interested in what the budget includes for worker protection agencies, including OSHA, the Wage and Hour Division, and the Employee Benefit Security Administration, which have faced decades of budget freezes and shrinking staff capacity.

We also want to hear about the policies to reinvigorate the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, what you will do to combat worker misclassification and wage theft, and what you will do to expand overtime pay protections.

Finally, we must also address the historic workplace safety crisis caused by the pandemic. In January, President Biden signed an executive order that instructed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to consider issuing an emergency temporary workplace safety standard, or E-T-S, by March 15.

I understand that you will give us an update on the status of that standard.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for joining us today. I will now, at this time, recognize the distinguished Ranking Member for the purpose of her opening statement.