



REMARKS BY SECRETARY EUGENE SCALIA  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
WELCOME EVENT  
DECEMBER 9, 2019

As Prepared For Delivery



Thank you Pat, for that introduction, and thank you all for being here today.

A special thanks to Secretary Chao, for rejoining us here at the Department where she had such an impact. That impact continues. The operating structure and priorities Secretary Chao established will be a model for how I run the Department. Elaine; it's such a privilege to be your cabinet colleague.

I'm grateful that Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump joined us. In my first week as Secretary, I met with her to discuss workforce development. I brought a pen and notecard in case she raised anything I should follow up on. I should have brought two aides with laptops; Ivanka greeted me with a torrent of ideas, details, and data that were truly inspiring—and just a little intimidating. We are fortunate she is so interested in our work.

And it's good to welcome Judge Silberman back. The Judge has had one of the great careers in the history of this city. He's a principal reason I first became interested in working at this Department—he served as Solicitor, as had my mentor at my old law firm, Bill Kilberg. They loved this place, and they passed that admiration on to me when I was a young lawyer.

With all respect to the Judge and Elaine, no one knows the Department better than Pat Pizzella. Pat and I worked together for Secretary Chao, and he has been a friend, advisor, and collaborator ever since. Pat is the best government manager I know. As Deputy Secretary and Acting Secretary, he has done a stupendous job putting us in position to fully implement the

President's priorities. Pat, we are so fortunate for your leadership, and we all thank you for what you've done.

Above all, I thank President Trump. He has placed great trust and confidence in me, and I will aim to honor that every single day that I'm here.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my wife Trish. Trish has been an infallible guide since we met nearly 27 years ago, helping me in every way imaginable. It's not just that I wouldn't be *here* without Trish—I wouldn't be *anywhere* without Trish.

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I'm also grateful to those who helped prepare me to serve as Secretary by working with me, and advising me, while I was Solicitor—many of whom are in this room. My time as Solicitor was a great education. A lot of that education was from career staff who had dedicated their professional lives to issues for which I was now responsible, too. I have valued no working relationships more than those I had with the attorneys of the Solicitor's office.

Now, as Secretary, I welcome the opportunity to call on the resources, expertise, and commitment of *all* the men and women of *all* the agencies of this Department. We have wonderful work to do together.

There is no group in this country with more collective knowledge about the American workplace than the men and women gathered in this room right now—plus those in our regional offices and elsewhere in this building watching by video.

Think about that for a moment—what a deep reservoir of knowledge and commitment we have in this room. There’s no gathering of people with more knowledge about the challenges American workers face; about the laws that protect them; about steps to ensure those laws are followed. There’s no group more knowledgeable than the career and non-career staff of this Department about what the federal government can do to help equip Americans to enter the workforce; how we strive to provide more skilled and prepared workers whom allow businesses to grow; how we can help soldiers move from the battlefield to civilian jobs; how government programs can promote equal opportunity for women, Americans with disabilities, and others.

This is all important work we have to do together. I’m excited to undertake such work with you.

Let me say a few words, first, about our enforcement programs. From my time as Solicitor, I know these programs well and recognize their importance. Together, we will continue this Department’s strong tradition of enforcement and compliance. That commitment has been evident this past year:

- The Employee Benefits Security Administration recovered more than \$2.5 billion in payments to plans, participants, and beneficiaries in Fiscal Year 2019—a record.

- The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs also set a record in Fiscal Year 2019, with more than \$40 million in settlements for affected class members.
- And in 2019, the Wage and Hour Division recovered a record \$322 million in wages for workers, while also holding 3,700 compliance assistance events.

I could cite similar achievements by other agencies. Those actions reflect that we as a Department will not shrink from vigorous enforcement of the laws that have been entrusted to us. Wrongdoers will be held accountable.

Of course, we know that enforcement is not the only means to assure that laws are obeyed and workers' rights respected—making the law known, and helping businesses understand their obligations, is an important component of our mission.

We will make the law known through compliance assistance; outreach; and other guidance—we will provide fair notice, and will not use litigation to announce new legal duties.

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A companion to our enforcement programs are our regulatory programs. These are of great interest to me. In the private sector I was an employment lawyer, and a regulatory lawyer. I want the best possible regulatory programs here. That includes trimming, tailoring, and revising our

regulations where we can reduce unnecessary burdens. That's a priority of the President to which I'm firmly committed. And just as there's no group with more knowledge about the American workplace than the people in this room, there's no group more knowledgeable about our regulations—and ways to make them better. I look forward to your help and your ideas.

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Another key responsibility we have at the Department is to help develop the job skills of American workers.

The single best thing government can do for American workers is to foster the conditions necessary to a thriving, pro-growth, job-producing economy. That has been a paramount objective of President Trump—cutting taxes and eliminating unnecessary regulatory burdens so that American businesses can offer more jobs, and more rewarding jobs, to the American people.

We're experiencing those conditions now. The Bureau of Labor Statistics brought us exceptionally good news yet again last week:

- The U.S. economy added 266,000 jobs in November. Market watchers had predicted about 180,000 new jobs—still a good number. We blew past that. The job numbers for September and October were also revised upward, adding another 41,000 jobs.

- Unemployment in November was at 3.5%, matching a 50-year low. The unemployment rate has been at or below 4% for 21 straight months.
- Wages are rising—we've had 16 straight months of wage growth of 3% or more. And wages have been rising more quickly among lower-wage workers. For example, the wages of production workers and non-supervisory workers have risen 3.7% over the past 12 months, year-over-year. The sectors of the economy where wages are rising fastest include retail and leisure and hospitality; these are sectors that historically provide many of our lower-paying, entry level jobs.

Our strong job growth has brought us 7 million job openings across the country right now—with only 6 million unemployed workers to fill them. We've run a surplus of job openings to job seekers for 19 straight months. One of business's biggest concerns today is finding workers. I hear that time again when I speak to leaders of large and small companies alike.

These conditions present a great opportunity—for American workers, and for us. I want to conclude by talking about that opportunity.

First, the current, robust American economy is providing jobs for segments of the population who historically have had less opportunity, and who even were excluded from some jobs. In recent months, we've seen all-

time record lows in unemployment for African-Americans and Hispanics, and near-record lows for adult women.

In a word, economic growth is helping promote equal opportunity.

Second, this economic growth is incentivizing business to address challenges that we all want to tackle as a society. In recent months, unemployment for Americans with disabilities has also been at an all-time low. Today, employers have a greater openness to accommodating people with disabilities and a greater willingness to welcome skilled workers from all segments of society into our workforce.

Employers also have an interest in helping us combat a crisis that's killing tens of thousands of Americans annually and devastating families and communities. The President rightly declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency. Recently, as one part of this Department's efforts, I announced a \$20 million grant program for the Department to help states, communities, and employers respond to the crisis through retraining and other important services. In this and other ways, we will work with businesses to bring back to the workforce men and women who've been hurt by this crisis.

Third, and more broadly, employers want to work with us, with the Department of Education, and with all levels of government to make lasting change in how the nation prepares Americans for the working world. I believe the current economy—this moment—gives all of us a nearly unprecedented chance to do that.

Thriving American businesses are scrambling for skilled workers right now. And they are acutely focused on finding ways to collaborate with the government and educators to establish systems and programs that develop the skills and attributes people need to succeed at work.

The business world is focused on one of our core missions as a Department, and it wants to help. Let's seize the moment to make lasting improvements.

Apprenticeships are one, powerful example of business's heightened interest in collaborating with the government and others in the education and development of young people—and of older workers, too. Apprenticeships are of course a priority for the White House and this Department. More than 650,000 new apprentices have been hired since January 2017—apprentices enter jobs that average \$70,000 in annual pay after the apprenticeship is completed. Last summer, the Department announced awards of more than \$180 million to develop and expand apprenticeships for education institutions partnering with companies that offer a funding match. An additional \$100 million was made available for expanding apprenticeships to meet the worker shortage. We also have an important apprenticeship rulemaking underway.

The collaboration between business, educators, and federal and state governments involved in apprenticeships can be a model in other areas, too. Businesses know better than we where the jobs are, and what skills are and will be needed. Their involvement can be invaluable. It can inform our Job Corps program, for example. And it can inform the curricula at our high schools and

post-secondary schools. There is now broad recognition, across public and private sectors, that our society has come to emphasize a four-year college degree at the expense of other honorable, valuable, and rewarding ways that young people can thrive after high school.

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So I am excited to join you, and this Administration, at this exact time. Conditions are ripe for us to do great things to further the Department's mission, and to make lasting change. Let's energetically undertake this work together, for the benefit of American workers, and for the American people.