

Senator Elizabeth Warren
Opening Statement at Forum on Labor Secretary Nominee Andrew Puzder
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*****As Prepared for Delivery*****

Thank you all for being here. I'd like to welcome the fast food workers here with SEIU and the Fight for \$15, and the federal contract workers here with Good Jobs Nation.

President-elect Trump has selected nominees to run his government. If confirmed by the Senate, they will have enormous power.

Their decisions will touch the lives of every single person in this country. Their decisions will affect the safety of the food we eat, the cleanliness of the air we breathe and the water we drink.

They will decide if millions of Americans continue to have medical care, or whether to rip it away. Whether to stand up for students being crushed by student loans or to stand aside and watch while their futures are stolen away. Whether to rein in Wall Street or to let it once again run wild. Whether to stand up for working Americans or to let big companies just roll right over them.

That is why our Constitution requires that the Senate provide its advice and consent before any senior government nominee can take on a job. It's one of the most important responsibilities we have, and every Senator should take it extremely seriously.

It's especially important today, because while the President-elect ran for office on his promise to "drain the swamp" in Washington and stand up for working people, many of his cabinet nominees are billionaires and Washington influence-peddlers who have long histories of doing exactly the opposite.

Despite the Constitution's clear requirements, it's clear that the Republicans who run the Senate have no intention of seriously examining the President's nominees. The Senate Republicans are handing out free passes to all the Trump nominees, no matter what.

Most cabinet nominees have not completed their required FBI background checks or ethics agreements to ensure that they will put the national interest – and not their personal business interests – first.

Last Friday, the head of the nonpartisan Office of Government Ethics said he had "great concern" that Republicans were rushing hearings on these nominees and said that his office is

under “pressure to cut corners and ignore conflicts of interest.” Those are serious allegations. Failing to comply with these ethics requirements is serious, and violating ethics rules could result in jail time for cabinet nominees. But Mitch McConnell’s response was to call them “little procedural complaints.”

The Trump transition team may not mind running a rubber-stamp confirmation process, and Senator McConnell might not care if these nominees follow our criminal and ethics laws or are even qualified to serve. But many of us in the Senate—Republicans and Democrats—take our constitutional responsibilities seriously, and we will work hard to fulfill those obligations over the coming days and weeks.

Today’s forum is part of our effort to meet our responsibilities.

On December 8th Donald Trump nominated Andrew Puzder to serve as the Secretary of Labor. If you work for a living, this man is important to you. The Secretary of Labor is responsible for protecting the interests of 150 million American workers. He will be the person responsible for enforcing the laws that ensure that employers actually pay workers for every hour they work, and setting standards to prevent workplace injuries and deaths.

Unfortunately, Mr. Puzder is not the kind of person the American people can trust to stand up for workers.

Since 2000, Mr. Puzder has served as the CEO of the billion-dollar company, CKE Restaurant Holdings. You may know it better as the parent company of Carl’s Jr. and Hardee’s. These two fast-food chains are known for paying very low wages to workers.

Mr. Puzder also has a long record of cheating workers out of overtime. He’s paid out millions of dollars to settle claims when he was caught cheating.

According to a survey of 550 Carl’s Junior and Hardee’s employees released just this morning by the Restaurant Opportunities Coalition United, about 1/3 of respondents reported that they were illegally forced to work extra hours without pay. Over 1/3 of respondents reported unpaid overtime or not receiving the breaks that the law requires. 79% reported working while sick either because they couldn’t get the day off, or they needed the money. Over half experienced unwanted sexual advances at work.

These are not isolated incidents. They reflect the kind of business that Mr. Puzder has built.

Mr. Puzder is a frequent political pundit and commentator who has vocally opposed higher minimum wages. He has also strongly opposed new overtime protections that would give 4 million Americans a \$1.5 billion raise in a single year.

Mr. Puzder also delights in expressing personal disdain for his workers. He bragged that his very first memo as CEO he wrote that he wanted “no more people behind the counter unless they have their teeth.” Ha, ha. He said he’d like to replace his workers with robots because “they are

always polite, they always upsell, they never take a vacation, there's never a slip-and-fall, or an age, sex or discrimination case.”

Mr. Puzder will have an opportunity to explain these views and actions next week in his confirmation hearing. But talk is cheap. The Senate has an obligation to hear from those who are best qualified to tell America about Mr. Puzder's suitability to be Labor Secretary and stand up for American workers—his own workers.

That's why my colleagues and I asked the Chairman of the HELP Committee last week to include Puzder's workers in his confirmation hearing. When he refused to do so, we had no choice but to hold today's forum ourselves.

I'd like to introduce our panelists.