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**OPENING STATEMENT -- ORAL
ALEXIS HERMAN
SECRETARY OF LABOR DESIGNATE
LABOR AND HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES SENATE
MARCH 18, 1997**

[Mr. Chairman, I ask that my full written statement be included as part of the record.]

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Committee, I want to thank you all for the courtesy you have shown me in the period leading up to this hearing. I have had the opportunity to meet with most of you privately and I am grateful now for the chance to come before you in this public session, to discuss the issues we will address together, if I am confirmed as Secretary of Labor. In many ways this is a homecoming.

Twenty years ago I came before Senator Kennedy and this same Committee as the nominee to head the Women's Bureau in the Department of Labor, and I should say that I appreciate the confidence Senator Kennedy showed in me at that time. Today, Mr. Chairman, I look forward with enthusiasm to working with the Committee on the important agenda before us. This hearing is only the beginning of a dialogue I hope and expect will continue throughout my service if I am confirmed as Secretary of Labor.

I am honored that the President has asked me to serve as the 23rd Secretary of Labor.

Bolstered by his faith in me, my abiding faith in God, and the support of so many friends and family, I approach this challenge with both humility and confidence. In seeking to meet this challenge, I will be mindful of -- and grateful for -- the honorable service of the 22nd Secretary of Labor, Bob Reich, who worked so hard to expand opportunity and security for America's workers.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to especially acknowledge my 92-year old grandmother, Margaret Dozier, my Aunt Longenious Leubers and so many friends from my home state. I would also like to thank all of my friends from across the country who have

supported my nomination. Allow me to also publicly thank Senators Shelby and Sessions and Congressman Callahan for their kind introductions and the rest of the Alabama congressional delegation who accompanied me.

Much of what I know and have put into practice about creating hope and opportunity, I learned as the child of a single mother growing up in Mobile, Alabama in the days when the struggle for civil rights was a daily part of our lives. Although my parents lived apart, I learned valuable lessons from both.

Watching my mother rise from a life of working in odd jobs to fulfill her dream of being the first in our family to receive a college education and then go on to inspire young people through teaching inspired *my* commitment to help people reach their full potential. And watching my father beat the odds by becoming a pioneer in business and politics at a time when there were few opportunities for southern blacks, showed me how it is possible to work within the system for change. Following their example, I have spent my life on the front lines of the changing workforce --- as a businesswoman, a government executive, and a community leader --

seeking to remove barriers, build bridges, and point the way to common ground.

What I want for America's workers is simple and to the point. I want workers to get and keep good jobs. I want working families to enjoy a rising standard of living. And I want workers and their families to have dignity and security throughout their lives.

I have always believed firmly in the dignity of work. Like the President, I am convinced that a thriving private sector and a sound, growing economy create opportunities for jobs. My own experience has shown me that strong businesses --

both large and small -- are critical to the success of communities throughout our country. At the same time, our nation is fortunate to have a healthy and vibrant labor movement that advocates for America's workers. If America's workers are going to succeed in the workplace and at home, then businesses and unions, mayors and governors, the Administration, Members of Congress, and a host of other interested parties must work with the common purpose of assuring opportunity and security for every worker.

The President and his economic team have laid the groundwork by sustaining a remarkably strong economy over the past four years.

Unemployment is low. Almost 12 million jobs have been created. And incomes have begun to climb again after two decades of stagnation, although we can do better.

But we face new challenges in this new era. Today, there is both an old economy and a new economy. The new economy harnesses high technology and skilled workers to expand global markets and increase productivity. But there are millions of Americans who still toil daily in the old economy with bare hands and traditional machines.

It is our responsibility to make sure that all workers, regardless of their jobs, have economic security with rising wages, pensions, health benefits and opportunities to improve their skills. We must make sure that every workplace supports families, respects diversity, and fosters cooperation between employers and workers. The best way to achieve these goals is to expand opportunity and security for all workers. The specific goals I will set for the Labor Department over the next four years will build on this strategy and the successes of the past four years.

Goal #1: Lifelong Learning and Skills Development

My first goal is to equip every American worker with the tools needed throughout their careers to be productive and raise their incomes. Education does not end with a high school degree or a college diploma. Education means lifelong learning and the development of new skills. Our best companies understand that and know that investing in their workers' skills is the surest path to greater productivity and higher profits. Last year, the Administration and Congress reached consensus on many elements of a plan to reform the way we provide opportunities for adults to learn new skills.

If I am confirmed, I hope to work with this committee to complete a reform package this year.

Goal #2: Welfare to Work

My second goal is to help assure the success of the welfare reform effort launched last year. In our new system, hundreds of thousands of people must make their way from a welfare check to a paycheck. I started my career helping people move from welfare to work and I can tell you it will not be an easy task. In the early 1970s, I worked with young men facing dead-end futures and few opportunities in Mobile, Alabama's Roger Williams housing project.

I knew that they could be productive if they were given the chance, so I helped prepare them for the culture of work and arranged for them to meet with potential employers. Ultimately, working with the local AFL-CIO and supportive business leaders, we placed these young men in good jobs and skilled apprenticeships at the Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

It will take this same type of commitment from every sector including churches and community organizations if we are to create opportunities for welfare recipients to find real jobs at fair wages that reward work.

Goal #3: Retirement Security

My third goal is to assure that workers are economically secure when they retire. Like skills development, economic security is a lifelong concern. My contemporaries in the "baby boom" generation are beginning to realize that retirement is just over the horizon. While preserving Social Security is vital, we must also continue to expand access to our private pension system and assure that private pension funds are secure and properly administered. The Administration and Congress were able to enact several important pieces of pension legislation during the President's first term.

If I am confirmed, I will work with Congress and others to address the challenge of expanding access to private pensions for everyone.

Goal #4: Safe and Equal Opportunity Workplaces

My fourth goal is to guarantee every worker a safe and equal opportunity workplace. I spent a substantial portion of the 1970s helping to overcome barriers to employment opportunity. I spent much of the 1980s advising companies on how to create a climate of understanding so that those hired would stay on and succeed in their corporate cultures. In this intensely competitive new economy, smart employers must utilize all of the talent that is available to them.

We also must do all we can to guarantee safety and health in the workplace as well as other important worker protections. If an employer's practices threaten workers' safety and health; are discriminatory; or deprive workers of fair wages or benefits, tough enforcement is necessary. But our ultimate goal must be compliance with employment laws, not punishment for its own sake. If confirmed, I will pursue the Department's efforts to strengthen enforcement and build partnerships with businesses and unions that broaden the spectrum of approaches to securing compliance with basic employment laws.

Goal #5: Balancing Work and Family

My fifth goal is to help workers balance work and family. The ways in which families seek this balance are as varied as the many challenges they face.

The Family and Medical Leave Act has helped millions of families find that balance. During my tenure at the Women's Bureau in the 1970s, we made the Department a model workplace by significantly expanding one of the first child care centers for federal employees. Since that time, I have worked with dozens of major corporations and unions that have adopted policies that support families. This is simply good business and good family values.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, as I indicated near the beginning of this statement, my vision for America's workers is simple and direct: they should be able to get and keep good jobs; they should enjoy a rising standard of living for their families; and they and their families should be able to live their lives with dignity and security. Should I be confirmed as Secretary of Labor, I will seek to make this vision real by pursuing the goals I have set forth today -- working with the President, the Committee, the Congress, business and labor, and communities throughout this nation.

We all have a stake in building a brighter future for the working families of the 21st century.

Thank you. I will be happy to take your questions.

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Much of what I know and have put into practice about creating hope and opportunity, I learned as the child of a single mother growing up in Mobile, Alabama in the days when the struggle for civil rights was a daily part of our lives. Although my parents lived apart, I learned valuable lessons from both. Watching my mother rise from a life of working in odd jobs to fulfill her dream of being the first in our family to receive a college education and then go on to inspire young people through teaching inspired *my* commitment to help people reach their full potential. And watching my father beat the odds by becoming a pioneer in business and politics at a time when there were few opportunities for southern blacks, showed me how it is possible to work within the system for change. Following their example, I have spent my life on the front lines of the changing workforce --- as a businesswoman, a government executive, and a community leader -- seeking to remove barriers, build bridges, and point the way to common ground.

What I want for America's workers is simple and to the point. I want workers to get and keep good jobs. I want working families to enjoy a rising standard of living. And I want workers and their families to have dignity and security throughout their lives.

I have always believed firmly in the dignity of work. Like the President, I am convinced that a thriving private sector and a sound, growing economy create opportunities for jobs. My own experience has shown me that strong businesses -- both large and small -- are critical to the

success of communities throughout our country. At the same time, our nation is fortunate to have a healthy and vibrant labor movement that advocates for America's workers. If America's workers are going to succeed in the workplace and at home, then businesses and unions, mayors and governors, the Administration, Members of Congress, and a host of other interested parties must work with the common purpose of assuring opportunity and security for every worker.

The President and his economic team have laid the groundwork by sustaining a remarkably strong economy over the past four years. The economy is growing at a steady rate. Unemployment is low, and there is no sign of rising inflation. Almost 12 million jobs have been created. And incomes have begun to climb again after two decades of stagnation, although we can do better.

But we face new challenges in this new era. Today, there is both an old economy and a new economy. The new economy harnesses high technology and skilled workers to expand global markets and increase productivity. But there are millions of Americans who still toil daily in the old economy with bare hands and traditional machines. They may not know what skills are in demand, they may feel they are too old to learn new skills, they may be unable to uproot themselves to move where jobs in the new economy can be found. It is our responsibility to make sure that all workers, regardless of their jobs, have economic security with rising wages, pensions, health benefits and opportunities to improve their skills. We must make sure that every workplace supports families, respects diversity, and fosters cooperation between employers and workers. The best way to achieve these goals is to expand opportunity and security for all workers. The specific goals I will set for the Labor Department over the next four years will build on this strategy and the successes of the past four years.

Goal #1: Lifelong Learning and Skills Development

My first goal is to equip every American worker with the tools needed throughout their careers to be productive and raise their incomes. Education does not end with a high school degree or a college diploma. Education means lifelong learning and the development of new skills. The first step is to smooth the transition from school to work. I worked for four years in the White House with business leaders who strongly support the School to Work Opportunities Act and the principle of national skills standards. They need and want an ever-expanding pool of skilled workers at every level of their organizations. I worked with many of these same employers in the 1970s and 1980s at the Women's Bureau and as a businesswoman to expand skilled apprenticeship opportunities, particularly for women and minorities.

But more and more Americans have to continue the hard work of skill-building even after they have completed their formal educations and taken on the other responsibilities of adulthood. We all have heard the stories of middle-level managers and experienced white-collar and factory workers losing their jobs without warning and wondering how they will acquire the skills to find productive work that sustains their standard of living. It is clear: we must invest in workers' skills so they have the tools to adapt to new technologies and economic changes. Our best companies

understand that and know that investing in their workers' skills is the surest path to greater productivity and higher profits. The President's G.I. Bill for America's Workers will put more resources and information directly into workers' hands and his Hope Scholarships proposal will open community college opportunities to more workers. Last year, the Administration and Congress reached consensus on many elements of a plan to reform the way we provide opportunities for adults to learn new skills. If I am confirmed, I hope to work with this committee to complete a reform package this year.

Goal #2: Welfare to Work

My second goal is to help assure the success of the welfare reform effort launched last year. In our new system, hundreds of thousands of people must make their way from a welfare check to a paycheck. I started my career helping people move from welfare to work and I can tell you it will not be an easy task. In the early 1970s, I worked with young men facing dead-end futures and few opportunities in Mobile, Alabama's Roger Williams housing project. I knew that they could be productive if they were given the chance, so I helped prepare them for the culture of work and arranged for them to meet with potential employers. Ultimately, working with the local AFL-CIO and supportive business leaders, we placed these young men in good jobs and skilled apprenticeships at the Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

It will take this depth of commitment -- learning what kinds of skills companies are looking for, equipping welfare recipients with those skills, and then convincing employers to hire them -- if we are to succeed. Together with governors and mayors, businesses and unions, churches and community organizations, our goal must be to create opportunities for welfare recipients to find real jobs at fair wages that reward work.

Goal #3: Retirement Security

My third goal is to assure that workers are economically secure when they retire. Like skills development, economic security is a lifelong concern. My contemporaries in the "baby boom" generation are beginning to realize that retirement is just over the horizon. While preserving Social Security is vital, we must also continue to expand access to our private pension system and assure that private pension funds are secure and properly administered.

At the Women's Bureau, I launched an initiative focusing on the needs of women who, because they entered the labor market late, faced the prospect of retiring without a pension. Even today, retired women are less likely to receive a pension than retired men, and, if they get a pension, their benefits are on average substantially smaller. The Administration and Congress were able to enact several important pieces of pension legislation during the President's first term. If I am confirmed, I will work with Congress, employers, unions, and others both in and out of government to address the challenge of expanding access to private pensions for everyone.

Goal #4: Safe and Equal Opportunity Workplaces

My fourth goal is to guarantee every worker a safe and equal opportunity workplace. I spent a substantial portion of the 1970s helping to overcome barriers to employment opportunity. I spent much of the 1980s advising companies on how to create a climate of understanding so that those hired would stay on and succeed in their corporate cultures. In this intensely competitive new economy, smart employers must utilize all of the talent that is available to them.

We also must do all we can to guarantee safety and health in the workplace as well as other important worker protections. If an employer's practices threaten workers' safety and health, discriminate against women, minorities, veterans or people with disabilities, or deprive workers of fair wages or pension and health benefits, tough enforcement is necessary. But our ultimate goal must be compliance with employment laws, not punishment for its own sake. I last worked with OSHA almost twenty years ago, and I have been reassured to learn how over the past four years OSHA has adopted innovative approaches to securing safe and healthy workplaces. If confirmed, I will pursue the Department's efforts to strengthen enforcement and build partnerships with businesses and unions that broaden the spectrum of approaches to securing compliance with basic employment laws.

Goal #5: Balancing Work and Family

My fifth goal is to help workers balance work and family. The ways in which families seek this balance are as varied as the many challenges they face.

The Family and Medical Leave Act has helped millions of families find that balance. During my tenure at the Women's Bureau in the 1970s, we made the Department a model workplace by significantly expanding one of the first child care centers for federal employees. Since that time, I have worked with dozens of major corporations and unions that have adopted policies that support families. This is simply good business and good family values.

We can and should do more. The President has proposed expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act. I look forward to working with this Committee on that proposal and others to strengthen working families.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, as I indicated near the beginning of this statement, my vision for America's workers is simple and direct: they should be able to get and keep good jobs; they should enjoy a rising standard of living for their families; and they and their families should be able to live their lives with dignity and security. Should I be confirmed as Secretary of Labor, I will seek to make this vision real by pursuing the goals I have set forth today -- working with the President, the Committee, the Congress, business and labor, and communities throughout this nation. We all have a stake in building a brighter future for the working families of the 21st century.

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