

Biden, Sworn in, Unveils Political Hires at Labor Department (2)

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- Building trades leader Looman to guide Wage and Hour
- Jenny Yang hired to direct contracts compliance office

President Joe Biden installed political appointees throughout the U.S. Labor Department on his administration's first day, including new leaders for at least six subagencies who will help to change the department's response to the pandemic.

"I can promise we will take a hard look at how the Department has been responding to its mission during these unprecedented times, both in terms of how we are protecting workers, but also how we are protecting you and your families," Obama-era DOL Solicitor Patricia Smith, who returns as a senior counselor in the secretary's office, said in an internal email to staff. "Within the next few days, President Biden will be unveiling a number of initiatives, many of which will prominently feature our work. There is no time to waste."

The new arrivals include former Minnesota construction union official Jessica Looman, to serve as acting Wage and Hour Division administrator; former EEOC Chair Jenny Yang, as director of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs; and union-side attorney Jeffrey Freund, as director of the Office of Labor-Management Standards.

There were at least 20 other first-day political hires at DOL, and more were said to be on the way. In addition to pandemic response, their mission is to help fulfill Biden's promises to reorient the Labor Department in workers' direction by undoing business-friendly, Trump-directed regulations and by boosting enforcement of workplace laws. Some of the new hires will helm subagencies on a temporary basis, until Biden nominates permanent leaders and the Senate approves them.

Al Stewart, a veteran career official at DOL, was appointed as acting labor secretary while the Senate considers Biden's nominee for the department's top job, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh.

"Due to how crucial our work is to changing the trajectory of the pandemic and the tremendous impact

it is having on our nation's workers, we will be joined from day one by an extensive number of appointees," Stewart said in a staff-wide email Wednesday afternoon. "Some have previous experience working at DOL, so many of you will be reuniting with familiar faces. Those new to DOL all have deep expertise in their subject matter."

Stewart's email, which was shared with Bloomberg Law, identified a number of political hires who were not announced earlier in the day through an update to the department's website posted shortly after Biden was sworn in Wednesday.

OSHA Leaders

The personnel list also made official that Biden has tapped former United Steelworkers safety official [Jim Frederick](#) as acting head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, where he'll have a lead role in implementing the administration's push to bolster workplace safety requirements to protect workers from Covid-19 infection.

There will also be a new position at OSHA: Joseph Hughes will serve as deputy assistant secretary for pandemic and emergency response.

Hughes, who holds a master's degree in public health, has been working in Durham, N.C., at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, part of the Department of Health and Human Services. Hughes was chief of the Worker Education and Training Branch.

A third political staffer at OSHA, Ann Rosenthal, came out of retirement to serve as a senior adviser on a short-term basis. She is a former DOL associate solicitor for occupational safety and health, and served on the Biden labor transition team.

Politically appointed acting leaders of key subagencies, such as the Office of the Solicitor and the Employment and Training Administration, have yet to be unveiled. Walsh is the only DOL nominee to be announced, though several other Labor Department posts require Senate sign-off.

Walsh, a newcomer to federal government service, if confirmed, will be assisted by the homecoming of several experienced DOL hands. That includes Michelle Rose, who returns to DOL as acting assistant secretary of the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, as Bloomberg Law

reported Tuesday. She served in several roles at the agency during the Obama administration, including as a senior legislative officer.

Jesse Lawder, who was chief of staff at the department's Office of Public Affairs under former President Barack Obama, will return to OPA as deputy assistant secretary.

Two new senior counsels are joining the Solicitor's Office, a part of DOL that will be instrumental if the agency wishes to re-interpret labor laws and rules to provide greater protections for employees. They are Ming-Qui Chu, who had been the labor bureau civil enforcement section chief at the New York attorney general's office, and Emily Tulli, a former workers' rights attorney at the National Immigration Law Center.

Mix of Backgrounds

Selecting [Yang as OFCCP director](#) sends a message that the administration is likely to address wage inequality through the subagency, which polices federal contractors for compliance with anti-discrimination laws.

During Yang's tenure as an Obama appointee on the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, she [spearheaded an initiative](#) to collect pay data from private employers, a step many civil rights groups say is vital for eradicating pay disparities experienced by women and people of color.

Looman is a Washington outsider. Since 2019 she has served as executive director of the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council, an umbrella group representing some 70,000 unionized construction workers in the state. She gives construction unions an ally inside DOL, with the prospect that Walsh, a former building trades union leader in Massachusetts, could soon be running the department.

Looman was previously commissioner of Minnesota's Department of Commerce and also assistant commissioner for the state's Department of Labor and Industry, according to a [biography](#) from her former employer. She also spent a decade as general counsel of the Laborers' District Council of Minnesota and North Dakota.

Her background in the building trades includes expertise on [construction union wage protections](#) under the Davis-Bacon Act, which the WHD enforces. She arrives at the agency at a time when it will be under pressure to review a series of late-term Trump regulations, such as a landmark final rule that makes it easier for businesses to classify workers as independent contractors.

Freund will direct the Office of Labor-Management Standards after 40 years as an attorney representing unions for Bredhoff & Kaiser. He's served as general counsel of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International Union and the American Federation of Musicians, according to his [firm bio](#).

His appointment maintains the Democratic administration tradition of appointing union allies to run Labor-Management Standards, an agency that enforces union financial disclosure law.

Additional Hires

Other hires mentioned in Stewart's note include:

- Chief economist Janelle Jones, a former Economic Policy Institute analyst;
- Policy adviser to the secretary Katelyn Walker Mooney, previously the associate general counsel for House labor committee Chairman Bobby Scott (D-Va.);
- Counselor to the secretary Peach Soltis, who was a senior adviser to Yang at the EEOC;
- Senior adviser to the secretary Raj Nayak, a former DOL deputy chief of staff under Obama;
- White House liaison Taylor Barnes Lord, a former Democratic National Committee official;
- Senior adviser in the policy office Deborah Greenfield, a former DOL deputy solicitor and AFL-CIO attorney.

—*With assistance from Paige Smith and Bruce Rolfsen*

(Updates with additional reporting throughout, including identities of some appointees.)

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