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LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

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The New York Times

Martin Walsh, Boston's Mayor, Confirmed as Labor Secretary

Noam Scheiber - March 22, 2021

According to an article posted online by the *New York Times* ©, the Senate confirmed Martin J. Walsh, the mayor of Boston and a former leader of the city's powerful building trades council, as labor secretary on Monday. The vote was 68 to 29. In a statement after the vote, Mr. Walsh said that he was grateful for the Senate's bipartisan support and that he shared Mr. Biden's and Vice President Kamala Harris's "commitment to building an economy that works for all."

"I have been a fighter for the rights of working people throughout my career, and I remain committed to ensuring that everyone — especially those in our most marginalized communities — receives and benefits from full access to economic opportunity and fair treatment in the workplace," Mr. Walsh said in the statement. "I believe we must meet this historic moment, and as the nation's secretary of labor, I pledge to help our economy build back better."

Mr. Walsh's nomination had won widespread praise from union officials, who were enthusiastic about having one of their own oversee the department, a historical rarity. Many union officials

regard his close relationship with the president as an advantage for labor groups.

One of Mr. Walsh's top priorities as labor secretary will be re-energizing the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which critics have accused of failing to protect workers during the pandemic. The safety agency recently put out new guidance to employers on protecting workers from Covid-19 and is considering a new rule to mandate safety measures that the former administration rejected.

The department has already moved to set aside a number of rules issued by the former administration that weakened worker protections. One of those rules would probably have deemed most gig workers to be independent contractors rather than employees, making them ineligible for the federal minimum wage and overtime pay.

Under Mr. Walsh, the department will be charged with crafting replacements for some of these rules. It will most likely move to expand other protections, such as raising the threshold — currently set at about \$35,500 — below which most salaried workers are automatically eligible for time-and-a-half overtime pay.