

President's Pick to Lead Labor Dept. Is Confirmed

BYLINE: By MAYA SALAM

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R. Alexander Acosta, the dean of Florida International University College of Law and a former United States attorney, was confirmed as labor secretary by the Senate on Thursday, becoming the only Latino in President Trump's cabinet.

We're excited to welcome Alexander Acosta to the DOL family as the 27th U.S. Labor Secretary. Follow @SecretaryAcosta for updates. pic.twitter.com/IW5jiegJd -- US Labor Department (@USDOL) April 27, 2017

The confirmation of Mr. Acosta, 48, completes Mr. Trump's cabinet and comes at a crucial moment for the president, as he nears the 100-day mark in office. In the 60-to-38 vote, eight Democrats and one independent voted in favor of Mr. Acosta.

Mr. Acosta, who has been endorsed by a number of unions, including the Laborers' International Union of North America, will be taking over a department that has been without a secretary for three months -- pressing him to address some issues fairly quickly. Among them is an Obama-era rule that requires brokers to put the interests of clients who are saving for retirement above their own. Mr. Trump has requested the rule be reviewed and possibly unraveled.

In interviews with The New York Times this year, several people who have worked with Mr. Acosta expressed mixed feelings of him as a colleague. Some said he was a passive leader, even using inaction to serve his interests. But others, including professors at Florida International University's law school, said Mr. Acosta was unbiased and did not let his political views color his professional decisions.

Facing the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in March, Mr. Acosta defended himself against Democrats who voiced concerns that he might allow conservative political ideologues to shape the department. He assured them that he would put the interest of workers first.

"As a former prosecutor, I will always be on the side of the law and not any particular constituency," he told senators.

Senator Lamar Alexander, Republican of Tennessee and the committee's chairman, said that Mr. Acosta "understands how a good-paying job is critical to helping workers realize the American dream for themselves and for their families."

A 2008 investigation by the Justice Department found that while Mr. Acosta was in charge of the Justice Department's civil rights division in southern Florida, his office had violated federal law and department policies by considering political affiliations when hiring and assessing employees, thus stacking the ranks with political allies during the administration of George W. Bush.

Most of the blame fell on Bradley Schlozman, Mr. Acosta's subordinate, but the report concluded that Mr. Acosta had ignored signs that these practices were taking place.

Mr. Acosta has also faced renewed criticism of his role in what some consider a mild plea deal given to Jeffrey E. Epstein, a billionaire New Yorker who was accused of paying underage girls for sexual acts. As part of the deal struck by Mr. Epstein's lawyers, the office of Mr. Acosta, a federal prosecutor in Miami at the time, agreed not to bring federal charges against Mr. Epstein.

In the committee session in March, Mr. Acosta defended the deal and said it was offered based on the evidence, noting that Mr. Epstein was required to register as a sex offender.

Mr. Trump's first pick of labor secretary, Andrew F. Puzder, a fast food executive, withdrew from consideration in February after facing disapproval from Democrats and Republicans about his past labor practices and allegations of domestic abuse.

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