

Statement of the Honorable Victoria A. Lipnic
Hearing on Nominations to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.
Thursday, November 19, 2009

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, Distinguished Members of the Committee. It is my honor to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to serve as a Commissioner on the U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

This is the second time in my career that I have been considered by the United States Senate for confirmation. I recognize the special obligations carried by the Senate in considering nominees and I am deeply honored by President Obama's nomination of me. I am humbled and grateful for this additional opportunity for public service.

I'd like to take a moment at the outset to thank my family, wonderful friends and colleagues whose encouragement, love and support and confidence in me over the years has brought me here today. My thanks especially to Senator McConnell for recommending me for this position. I'd also like to acknowledge the members of the House of Representatives from the Education and Labor Committee who gave me an opportunity to work on issues of importance to all working Americans. I will be forever grateful to former Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao for making me a part of her team at the Department of Labor.

I'd also like to recognize my fellow nominees to the Commission today. They bring a wealth of experience and commitment to civil rights for all Americans and it is a privilege to be considered with them today. My appreciation also extends to the current serving Commissioners: Stuart Ishimaru, Connie Barker and Christine Griffin for their dedication and service to the work of the EEOC.

I learned a long time ago, but especially from my tenure working in the House of Representatives and at the Department of Labor that you are really only ever as good as the people you work with. My special thanks to the men and women at the Department of Labor who dedicate their careers to public service and to my former colleagues from the House Labor Committee who work tirelessly in support of creating fairness and opportunity in workplaces across our country.

I am deeply grateful to my colleagues at Seyfarth Shaw for their encouragement and support and the work they do every day to make so many workplaces better for all. A finer group of attorneys I could not know.

And most of all, my thanks to my parents – Janet and Ed Lipnic -- for everything they ever taught me, but especially for the great gifts – of a deep and abiding love of our country and belief in the dignity of public service. My mother, who is watching from home in Carrolltown, Pennsylvania, and my father, a decorated WWII veteran and long time mayor of my hometown, who is watching from above.

As I ended my tenure at the Department of Labor, and was about to embark on a new phase in my career, I was asked by many not only what I was interested in, but what was I passionate about? My response was automatic and almost instinctual -- I care deeply about people's working lives. I believe mightily in the dignity of work and the transformational power

of it. And that is why I believe equal opportunity in work is critical to all Americans and to who we are and how we define ourselves as a nation. I am especially mindful of this as the country is going through a wrenching period of unemployment, when the reality of being without work is facing so many American families.

The EEOC faces many challenges and unique opportunities as a guardian of civil rights in the 21st century. Indeed, we are a far different, more open and tolerant country than in 1964. Yet, one need only peruse the case law to know that discrimination exists and persists in many forms and in many venues. When you look at all of the laws the EEOC enforces they are as relevant today as when they were first enacted. Certainly our changing demographics, increasingly pluralistic society, aging workforce, and greater labor force participation by women have changed the circumstances and attitudes under which we all share the workplace today, but they present a different if no less important set of challenges to the mission of the EEOC today than when the agency began. You have my commitment today to work with my fellow nominees and especially men and women who make up the Commission throughout the country to be about its mission every day.

I learned from my experience as Assistant Secretary of Labor that when you are privileged to serve in a position like that, or the one for which I am now nominated, you stand on the shoulders of all who came before you – not just in your particular position, but more than that, of the legislators, activists, thought leaders and ordinary working men and women who at some point took a stand against intolerance and helped us to become a more generous nation. Mr. Chairman, should I be confirmed for this position, I can only hope that I will carry out my responsibilities in a manner that will do honor to all who have advanced the cause of civil rights in our country – with understanding and respect toward all.

Chairman Harkin, Senator Enzi, thank you again for considering me. I'd be happy to take your questions.