

Donald Trump names fast-food exec Andy Puzder as labor secretary

By: S.A. Miller

A frustrating week for Democrats grew more vexing Thursday when President-elect Donald Trump announced he would put a fast-food executive in charge of the Labor Department, the latest Cabinet pick to run afoul of liberal sensibilities.

Mr. Trump said his selection of Andy Puzder, the chief executive officer of the company that owns fast-food chains Hardee's and Carl's Jr., was the latest pick to set off alarm bells for Democrats who fear the next administration will undo much of President Obama's legacy.

Mr. Trump said he was putting a proven job creator in the driver's seat at the Labor Department.

"Andy Puzder has created and boosted the careers of thousands of Americans, and his extensive record fighting for workers makes him the ideal candidate to lead the Department of Labor," Mr. Trump said in a statement.

"Andy will fight to make American workers safer and more prosperous by enforcing fair occupational safety standards and ensuring workers receive the benefits they deserve, and he will save small businesses from the crushing burdens of unnecessary regulations that are stunting job growth and suppressing wages," he said.

Mr. Puzder, who was one of Mr. Trump's most fervent supporter in the business world and a fundraiser for the campaign, said he looked forward to helping "restore America's global economic leadership."

"The President-elect believes, as do I, that the right government policies can result in more jobs and better wages for the American worker. I'm proud to be offered the chance to serve in his Administration," he said.

Democrats took a decidedly different view. "The Labor Secretary should be someone who wakes up every day thinking about how they can raise American wages and fight for American workers. Mr. Puzder's career has shown exactly the opposite," fumed Sen. Charles E. Schumer, New York Democrat and incoming Senate minority leader.

"Turning the Labor Department over to someone who opposes an increase in the minimum wage, opposes the overtime rule that would raise middle class wages, and whose businesses have repeatedly violated labor laws might be the surest sign yet that the next cabinet will be looking out for the billionaires and special interests, instead of America's working class," he said.

The reaction among Democrats was similar to the outrage a day earlier when it was revealed that Mr. Trump would nominate Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt to lead the Environmental Protection Agency, the same agency he repeatedly sued to block President Obama's climate change agenda.

The liberal Center for American Progress labeled Mr. Puzder the "anti-labor secretary" and described him as a "supervillain."

"He's against raising the minimum wage and the new rule to ensure people get paid overtime. He's anti-worker and anti-ACA. He

blames low-wage workers for poverty and supports replacing workers with machines," the group's political action arm said in an email to supporters. "In other words, he opposes almost everything the Department of Labor was created to do."

Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune said Mr. Puzder was bad for workers and the environment because he was the product of a business model that exploits both.

"Trump's nomination of Andrew Puzder as Labor Secretary continues his long line of backwards nominees focused on protecting corporate interests over the health, safety, and prosperity of the American people," said Mr. Brune.

The anger over the nominations has been intensified by Senate Democrats' likely inability to block confirmation, a predicament they brought upon themselves. In 2013, they resorted to the "nuclear option" rule change that required a simple majority 51 votes to confirm nominations rather than the previously required 60-vote supermajority.

The changed allowed Democrats, then in the majority, to push through Mr. Obama's nominees. But now Republicans are the majority party and Mr. Trump is moving into the White House.

Mr. Puzder runs California-based CKE Restaurants. He has been a fierce free-market advocate and spoken out against burdensome federal regulations, which Mr. Trump has vowed to roll back as president.

He has opposed liberals' push to more than double the federal minimum wage to \$15, which he says would kill jobs, especially for young people, though he also said he doesn't necessarily oppose every raise in the wage, or indexing it to inflation.

Business groups applauded the nomination. David French, the chief lobbyist at the National Retail Federation, called Mr. Puzder "someone with the real-world experience to understand workforce issues and how jobs are created."

"Careers in retail and restaurants offer a path forward for millions of Americans, and hiring an employer from this sector for the important role of labor secretary would show that President-elect Trump knows the value of these opportunities," he said.

The Job Creators Network, a nonpartisan business association of which Mr. Puzder is a member, said he would be a win for business owners and the people they employ.

"Puzder's understanding of labor markets and job creation stand in stark contrast to the existing Labor Department, which has taken a hostile approach to small business job creators with its support for dramatic minimum wage and overtime exemption increases, a joint-employer mandate, a blacklisting rule, and mandatory paid time off regulations — to name a few," said Alfredo Ortiz, president of the group.