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Senior Leadership at DOL, OSHA, and MSHA Under a 2nd Trump Administration Is Taking Shape

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As Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer braces for a flurry of questions at her confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) on her way to a full Senate vote to become President Trump's Secretary of Labor, the Trump Administration is assembling its new senior leadership team to oversee workplace safety and labor policy. These key nominees will shape enforcement priorities, compliance strategies, and industry engagement across OSHA, MSHA, and the broader Department of Labor:

- **Lori Chavez-DeRemer – Nominee for Secretary of Labor:** A former mayor and member of Congress, with unexpected ties to labor, is expected to emphasize regulatory flexibility and employer engagement.
- **Keith Sonderling – Nominee for Deputy Secretary of Labor:** A former EEOC Commissioner and Dept of Labor official with expertise in AI, employment law, and compliance initiatives.
- **David Keeling – Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA:** A veteran of UPS and Amazon with decades of experience managing workplace safety in complex work environments.
- **Amanda Wood Laihow – Nominee for Deputy Assistant Secretary for OSHA:** A former Commissioner at the OSH Review Commission and legal and policy expert with the National Association of Manufacturers.
- **Wayne Palmer – Nominee for MSHA Administrator:** A regulatory veteran with previous leadership experience at MSHA and in the mining industry.

With these appointments, the second Trump Administration is signaling a shift in labor and workplace safety policy, though how far and how fast the pendulum will swing remains to be seen. Will workplace safety regulations lean toward deregulation, targeted enforcement, or greater collaboration with industry stakeholders? These questions will be central in upcoming confirmation hearings. Below is a deeper look at each nominee and the potential impact of their leadership on the operations of OSHA, MSHA, and the Department of Labor's many other divisions.

Secretary of Labor – Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer

- U.S. Representative for Oregon's 5th Congressional District (2023–2025), focusing on business, workforce, and economic issues.
- Former Mayor of Happy Valley, Oregon (2010–2018), where she worked on economic development and job creation initiatives. 

- Background in business, with a strong emphasis on employer perspectives in labor policy.

If confirmed, Chavez-DeRemer will be the top labor policymaker in the Administration, overseeing the Department of Labor's enforcement, rulemaking, and worker protection initiatives. Chavez-DeRemer's background includes serving as the mayor of Happy Valley, Oregon, and running a small business. What seems most notable about President Trump's nomination of Rep. Chavez-DeRemer is that during her time in Congress, she was recognized as the most pro-labor Republican in the House of Representatives. She was one of only three Republicans to co-sponsor the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which strengthens worker protections and union rights, and was the only Republican to back the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act.

Rep. Chavez-DeRemer's father, Richard Chavez, was a Mexican American Teamster worker at a milk plant in the Central Valley. With his support, she has successfully sought labor endorsements in various elections. The Portland-area Teamsters council pledged their support to Chavez-DeRemer in her congressional campaigns, the first Republican candidate they had backed for Congress in decades, and Sean O'Brien, the president of the Teamsters union, personally endorsed her for the role of Secretary of Labor in Trump's second term. He described her as:

"the exact type of champion for the American worker that Republicans should get behind if they are serious about becoming the working-class party."

Notwithstanding all of that, the AFL-CIO still rated her as having voted against worker interests on most issues, suggesting her labor support may not be as strong as it appears.

For employers, this nomination introduces uncertainty. Many expected Trump to appoint a pro-business, or even overtly anti-union, Secretary of Labor. And while a second Trump Administration is still expected to reinstate employer-friendly policies, changes to independent contractor rules and joint employer liability, and to stall and/or rescind workplace safety regulations, Chavez-DeRemer's history suggests she may take a more balanced approach.

Deputy Secretary of Labor – Keith Sonderling

- Commissioner, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (2020–2021): Confirmed by the U.S. Senate with bipartisan support; served as Vice-Chair.
- Acting and Deputy Administrator, Wage and Hour Division, U.S. Dept. of Labor:
 - Led record-breaking enforcement recoveries and nationwide compliance outreach.
 - Developed key deregulatory policies, issuing Opinion Letters, Field Assistance Bulletins, and All Agency Memoranda. 
 - Created the agency's first self-audit program, recovering more than \$7M in unpaid wages for nearly 11,000 workers.
- AI and Workplace Technology Leadership: A leading voice in ensuring AI-driven hiring and workforce technologies comply with civil rights laws; widely published and globally recognized for expertise in AI governance in employment.

Sonderling's nomination as Deputy Secretary of Labor brings back a highly experienced leader with deep knowledge of DOL's regulatory and enforcement functions. Sonderling has served at both the EEOC and DOL, bringing experience in federal labor enforcement and regulatory oversight. Having previously served in a senior role at the Dept. of Labor, he is well-prepared to navigate its priorities from day one. Sonderling is also one of the leading voices on AI regulation in employment. While at the EEOC, he worked to provide guidance on how employers can use AI tools in hiring and management while avoiding discrimination risks. With AI increasingly used in recruiting and workplace decisions, Sonderling's appointment could lead to new DOL guidance on AI, data privacy, and automation in employment practices.

Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health – David Keeling

- Began his career at UPS in 1985, eventually becoming Vice President of Global Health and Safety from March 2018 to July 2021.
- Most recently served as Director of Global Road and Transportation Safety at Amazon from July 2021 to May 2023. 
- His nomination is currently with the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, though a hearing date has not yet been scheduled.

David Keeling, President Trump's nominee to head OSHA, began his career as a package handler, and member of the Teamsters union, at United Parcel Service (UPS) in 1985, a position that shaped his long career in workplace safety. Over four decades at UPS, Keeling worked as a health and safety specialist, gaining valuable experience that he carried with him into various safety leadership roles. After his long career in safety at UPS, Keeling served as the Director of Road and Transportation Safety at Amazon from 2021 to 2023. Keeling's tenure at Amazon coincided with efforts to resolve OSHA investigations through improved ergonomic safety procedures.

Mr. Keeling's nomination has generally been well-received, particularly by the business community, who value his solid technical safety credentials and hands-on experience with workplace safety. Without question, he has tremendous practical experience in workplace safety and health and a genuine belief in OSHA's mission. His leadership will be crucial in balancing the challenges of reducing the federal workforce while sustaining OSHA's mission to protect workers.

Notably, during President Trump's first term, he [nominated another senior safety executive from the logistics and package delivery industry to run OSHA, Scott Mugno](#), former VP of Safety at FedEx. That nomination was voted favorably out of the Senate HELP committee a couple of times, but never advanced to a full vote of the Senate, so there was never a Senate-confirmed OSHA Administrator during President Trump's first term. Although no confirmation hearings have been scheduled for Mr. Keeling, his nomination comes much earlier in President Trump's second term than Mr. Mugno's did during the first Trump term, and this Administration already has a better track record of marshaling nominees to confirmation, so we anticipate Mr. Keeling will likely be confirmed this year.

Deputy Assistant Secretary for OSHA – Amanda Wood Laihow

- Former Commissioner on the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission (the independent agency that hears cases and appeals involving contested OSHA citations), from 2020 to 2023.

- Previously served as Chief Counsel to OSH Review Commission Chairman James J. Sullivan, Jr., advising Chairman Sullivan on agency and case-specific matters related to occupational safety and health law.
- Former Director of Labor and Employment Policy for the National Association of Manufacturers, where she advocated on key issues related to employee health and safety under the Occupational Safety and Health



Act.

- Held key roles in government legal affairs, including serving as Deputy General Counsel for the U.S. Senate's Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and Assistant General Counsel at the General Services Administration.

Amanda Wood Laihow was appointed by President Trump during his first term to serve as a Commissioner for the OSH Review Commission, and she served in that role from 2020 to 2023, when her term expired. At that time, the Review Commission was reduced to a single Commissioner and so was limited in the work it could accomplish without a quorum. Despite having been appointed initially by President Trump, Commissioner Laihow was renominated to the Commission by former President Biden, along with another nominee, for the two open positions. That renomination never advanced to a vote by the Senate, and the Commission continues to lack a quorum today.

Commissioner Laihow is expected to serve as the political appointee in OSHA's leadership team alongside career official Scott Ketcham, where she will play a critical role as Deputy Assistant Secretary in directing OSHA's enforcement actions, regulatory framework, and engagement with employers and workers to ensure compliance with safety laws. Notably, the political Deputy Assistant role at OSHA does not require Senate confirmation, so Commissioner Laihow can move immediately into the position, and would take on the role of Acting Assistant Secretary until Mr. Keeling's nomination is confirmed by the Senate.

OSHA has two deputy assistant secretary positions. One is already filled by Scott Ketcham, a career employee who was named to the post in December. Ketcham oversees OSHA's regional offices as well as enforcement and construction directorates, according to an OSHA organizational chart.

Commissioner Laihow's deep expertise in labor policy and occupational safety law positions her as a key figure in shaping OSHA's regulatory approach and ensuring the effective implementation of occupational health

regulations. Like Mr. Keeling, Ms. Laihow's written decisions while serving at OSHRC, demonstrate her to be a serious, reasonable, and qualified candidate for the leadership role at OSHA.

Head of the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) – Wayne Palmer

- Most recently worked as a Senior Advisor in the Department of Labor Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs.
- Served as an Advisor to the Industry Trade Advisory Committee on Critical Minerals & Nonferrous Metals at the Dept. of Commerce from 2023 to 2025.
- Held the role of Executive Vice President at the Essential Minerals Association from July 2021 until January 2023. 
- Served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at MSHA from 2017 to 2021 and the agency's Acting Head until David Zatezalo's confirmation in November 2017.

Palmer, who has deep personal ties to the mining industry, proudly traces his background to miners from Pennsylvania anthracite coal, Colorado silver, New Jersey iron ore, and Cornwall (UK) copper and tin. His extensive regulatory background and personal connection to the industry suggest a strong focus on mine safety and industry collaboration.

The DOL Leadership Team Takes Shape

With these nominations, the Trump administration is assembling a Department of Labor leadership team that marks a notable shift from its previous term. While some expect changes in enforcement priorities, the precise nature of these shifts—whether through reduced inspections, revised compliance strategies, or increased industry collaboration—remains uncertain.

For Chavez-DeRemer, Palmer, and Keeling, their Senate confirmation hearings will provide clearer insight into the Administration's workplace safety and labor agenda. These proceedings will likely clarify whether the DOL will pursue deregulation, targeted enforcement, or deeper collaboration with industry stakeholders. Regardless of political shifts, these nominees bring extensive experience that could shape OSHA's regulatory approach in a more pragmatic and industry-informed manner.