



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 30, 2013

GOP Opposes Obama Labor Secretary Nominee Perez

As the Senate awaits a vote on the confirmation of President Obama's nominee for secretary of labor, Thomas Perez, it is uncertain as to whether strident Republican opposition to the nominee will delay or even prevent a vote in the Democrat-controlled upper house.

The last action on Perez's nomination was on May 16, when the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) voted 12-10 along party lines to report the nomination out of committee and send it to the full Senate.



A [Reuters report](#) the day of the committee vote quoted a remark made by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) the prior week charging that Perez has shown throughout his career a "flippant and dismissive attitude about the boundaries everyone else has to follow" and accused him of being an ideologue. Senator John Cornyn (R-Texas) also condemned Perez's record on the Senate floor.

A key point of criticism made by Republicans against Perez is that he convinced St. Paul, Minnesota, officials to withdraw a Supreme Court appeal in exchange for the Justice Department not pursuing allegations that the city filed false claims in a government funding application. Perez is the assistant attorney general for the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice.

In a speech back on May 8, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell was firm in his criticism of the nominee: "Unbound by the rules that apply to everyone else, Mr. Perez seems to view himself as free to employ whatever means at his disposal, legal or otherwise, to achieve his ideological goals."

[Reuters](#) quoted a statement about McConnell's speech made by George Washington University's Sarah Binder, described as "an expert on Congress," in which Binder suggested that the GOP leader intended to rally opposition to the nomination.

"I think it matters that it is Mitch McConnell here, laying the marker down on why he's opposing the nominee," said Binder. "There's no doubt that many nominations are killed by being drawn out and wearing down the nominee," she continued.

On May 8, Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) made a statement that he thought Perez would be a "disastrous" choice.

"Many Americans, especially those of us of Hispanic descent, celebrate his success and his personal story," Rubio said. "Unfortunately, intellect and work ethic are not sufficient qualifications for a cabinet secretary."

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney responded to opposition charges in a statement to reporters: "[Perez] is enormously qualified and there has not been a case made that is not political and partisan against his nomination, and we hope and expect the Senate will move forward."

The [Tampa Bay News](#) quoted another statement from Rubio on May 8, in which the Florida senator



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pulled no punches:

Before joining the Obama Administration, Mr. Perez built a long record as a committed liberal activist and politician, particularly in the areas of labor and immigration. It was that record that gave many senators pause over his initial nomination to be Assistant U.S. Attorney General. Those who voted against his confirmation then feared that he lacked the capacity to put his political agenda aside when he became a federal official tasked with enforcing the law. Unfortunately, his record as Assistant U.S. Attorney General confirmed those fears.

In a May 9 article in the [Washington Post](#), writer Juliet Eilperin continued an ongoing theme that has often been applied to the immigration reform issue: “Could the campaign to block Perez’s appointment damage the GOP’s standing with Latinos?”

The writer drew no firm conclusions, and balanced Sen. Rubio’s Hispanic heritage as a mitigating plus against any negative political fallout that might arise from Republican opposition to Obama’s sole Hispanic nominee for his second-term cabinet.

“Tom Perez has broad and deep support in the Latino community,” Eilperin quoted [Janet Murguia](#), president and CEO of the National Council of La Raza, in an interview. “It’s just not helpful for Republicans to be seen as taking down what is seen as a qualified candidate.” But as journalist Alex Newman noted in an [online article](#) for *The New American* on July 9, 2012:

“Despite receiving millions of dollars from taxpayers, ‘La Raza’ is a deeply divisive outfit known for race-mongering and advancing flawed collectivist notions of Latinos and Hispanics as a monolithic bloc rather than unique individuals — bizarrely emphasizing ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity,’ superficial and largely irrelevant characteristics, above other, more important traits.”

The article also quoted Glen Bolger, identified as a Republican pollster at Public Opinion Strategies, who said he is skeptical that the political battle over a Labor Secretary nominee will influence public opinion about where Republicans stand on “Hispanic issues.”

“Latino voters are paying a lot more attention to immigration reform and what happens to that than a nomination to a Cabinet post in a Cabinet that has not played a major role with this president,” said Bolger. “This is a much, much smaller factor in how voters perceive the GOP than what Republicans in the House and Senate do on immigration.”

Among the liberal-left organizations with historic ties to the Democrat Party that are solid Perez cheerleaders is the Teamsters Union, which posted an online article on May 17 headlined [“Teamsters Applaud Senate Labor Committee Vote to Approve Perez Nomination.”](#)

“Thomas Perez is the right choice for Labor Secretary and the Senate needs to get him confirmed as soon as possible,” Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa was quoted in the article. “I believe that we can take a significant step toward getting this country back on track with Perez running the Labor Department.”

The Perez nomination vote is as sharply divided along partisan lines as most other issues. But the nominee’s unfavorable track record is likely to bolster Republican efforts to derail his confirmation.

Bill Wilson, a member of the board of directors of Americans for Limited Government, recalled in a [May 28 column](#) that three years ago Perez testified under oath before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights about a well-documented 2008 voter intimidation case involving the New Black Panther Party. Wilson writes: “During his testimony, Perez stated that no political leadership at the U.S. Justice Department



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was involved in the decision to dismiss several defendants in that high profile case. This testimony turned out to be patently false — with the Justice Department’s own inspector general later [noting](#) Perez’s testimony ‘did not reflect the entire story regarding the involvement of political appointees.’ ”

The Perez nomination vote is not (and should not be) a referendum on the ethnic identity or friendliness to big, organized labor of the next secretary of labor, but an effort to evaluate the fitness of a Cabinet secretary to uphold the Constitution of the United States. With enough deliberation, the proper decision should be made.

Photo of Thomas Perez: AP Images



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