

Fast-food mogul Andrew Puzder withdraws as Trump labor nominee

A reporter
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Multimillionaire fast-food boss Andrew Puzder withdrew his nomination to head the Department of Labor Wednesday, in another sign of the deepening political crisis of the Trump administration. He is the first one of Trump's 16 cabinet picks to fail to win confirmation.

Puzder withdrew after four Republican senators on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee announced they would vote against him, enough to block the nomination in committee, since every Democrat was opposed. Another dozen Republicans had refused to commit themselves to vote for Puzder in a vote on the Senate floor, the first time a Trump nomination has attracted significant Republican opposition.

In the end, the split in the Republicans is what torpedoed the nomination, since the Senate has confirmed a series of Trump nominees by near party-line votes, including Steven Mnuchin for Treasury secretary, by 53-47, and Betsy DeVos to head the Department of Education, by 52-48.

The Democrats had staged their usual for-the-record opposition, citing Puzder's opposition to increasing the minimum wage and his role as a typically vicious exploiter of workers, for which the fast-food industry is notorious.

What undermined his support among Republicans however, were two aspects of his personal life: allegations of domestic violence by his first wife, and his hiring of an undocumented woman as a housekeeper, while concealing his payment of wages. He did not pay the back taxes for her employment until nominated to become head of the Department of Labor.

Puzder's first wife ultimately retracted the domestic violence charge as part of her divorce settlement, but last week a 29-year-old television tape from the Oprah

Winfrey Show, in which she detailed the abuse while wearing a disguise, was sent to the US Senate for review. It was widely circulated on Capitol Hill.

Even more significant in the shift among the Republicans were suggestions from right-wing groups that Puzder's hiring of an undocumented housekeeper was part of a larger pattern, and that he was insufficiently militant in his hostility to immigrant workers. On that basis, the ultra-right magazine *National Review* called Wednesday for the Senate to reject his nomination.

There was also some hostility to Puzder's nomination among Christian fundamentalist groups over sexually provocative television ads for his hamburger chains. These groups, however, endorsed Trump's presidential campaign, making it difficult for them to exercise a veto based on such moralizing.

Puzder had the full support of industry groups, including the US Chamber of Commerce, the International Franchise Association, the National Restaurant Association and the National Retail Federation, as well as such Republican Party bigwigs as former presidential candidate Mitt Romney.



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