

Hearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget

Ms. Neera Tanden
Nominee to be Director, Office of Management and Budget
February 10, 2021

Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Graham, and Members of the Committee—

I am humbled and honored to be here today as President Biden’s nominee to serve as Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Chairman Sanders, I am grateful for your visionary leadership; and Ranking Member Graham, I look forward to working with you if I have the privilege of being confirmed.

I want to begin by thanking Senators Booker and Klobuchar for their gracious introductions. And I also want to recognize two members of my family who are here with me—my husband, Ben, and my daughter, Alina—as well two who aren’t: my son, Jaden, and my mother, Maya.

I owe my presence here to their love and support—and to the grit and resilience of my mother: an immigrant from India who was left to make it on her own in America with two young children after her divorce from my father.

Back then she faced a harsh choice—stay in the United States and rely on the social safety net. Or return to India where she knew her children would face the stigma of divorce. She had faith in this country and made the decision—I believe the courageous decision—to stay.

We relied on food stamps to eat, and Section 8 vouchers to pay the rent. At school, I remember being the only kid in the cafeteria line who used ten-cent vouchers from the Free Lunch Program. I remember using food stamps at the grocery store.

Within just a few years, my mother found a job, and a few years later she was earning a middle-class salary. Soon, she was able to buy a home, and eventually see her children off to college and beyond.

I spend every day of my life grateful for a nation, and a government, that had faith in my mother and in me—that invested in our humanity and gave me a fair shot to pursue my potential.

As I sit before this Committee, I’m mindful that my path in life would never have been possible without budgetary choices that reflected our nation’s values—many of them made in the very agency I am now nominated to lead.

That recognition and gratitude has been the north star of my career. I’ve spent the past twenty years at the forefront of some of our country’s most important policy debates. And for the past decade, I’ve led a major think tank that engages many areas that OMB handles every day—from budget plans, to regulatory proposals, to efforts to make government more effective.

My experience also extends to both the legislative and executive branches, having served in the U.S. Senate, at the White House under President Clinton, and at an agency under President Obama.

I believe that experience provides me with a strong foundation to lead OMB.

I also know that the role of OMB director is different from some of my past positions. Over the last few years, it's been part of my role to be an impassioned advocate. I know there have been some concerns about some of my past language in social media, and I regret that language and take responsibility for it. I understand that the role of OMB director calls for bipartisan action, as well as nonpartisan adherence to facts and evidence.

OMB will play a vital role in addressing many of the biggest challenges we face: from beating back the virus, to delivering aid that will help ensure a strong economic recovery for all families, to ensuring we build back better than before.

If I am privileged to serve as Director, I would ensure that OMB uses every tool at its disposal to efficiently and effectively deliver for working Americans, small businesses, and struggling communities.

I would vigorously enforce my ironclad belief that our government should serve all Americans—regardless of party—in every corner of the country.

I would ensure that our budgets reflect the values of a nation built on hard work, human dignity, common purpose, and boundless possibility.

And I would work in good faith with **all** Members of this Committee to tackle the challenges Americans are facing: the COVID pandemic, the deep economic pain across our country, climate change, and racial inequity.

Let me finally say this. As a child in line with my mom at that grocery store—feeling shy and a bit embarrassed as my mother used food stamps instead of money—I never dreamed that one day I would be sitting in this august room, with great leaders like all of you. I am so incredibly grateful for the opportunities this country has given me. And I am profoundly honored by the possibility to serve and to help ensure we provide real opportunities for those who come after us.

Thank you for inviting me before this Committee, and I look forward to your questions.