

Elaine Chao's record suggests skepticism on new safety regs

By Joan Lowy and Jonathan Lemire
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Elaine Chao's record at the Labor Department suggests she'd have a light hand when it comes to safety regulation as Transportation Secretary and would seek to shift responsibility from the federal government to states where possible.

Chao, 63, was Labor Secretary under President George W. Bush and the first Asian-American woman to serve in a president's cabinet. She also is the wife of senate majority leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, which might be of help if President-elect Donald Trump is to fulfill his promise of generating \$1 trillion in infrastructure spending.

Chao's record suggests she'd be skeptical of new safety regulations and may attempt to roll back existing regulations. Under Chao, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration didn't issue a single significant new safety regulation for four years, and mine safety



AP Photo/Carolyn Kasper

inspectors were cut and inspections reduced, said Thomas McGarity, a University of Texas law professor and author of *Freedom to Harm*, a book about the labor department

SECOND STINT AS SECRETARY. Elaine Chao's record at the Labor Department suggests she'd have a light hand when it comes to safety regulation as Transportation Secretary and would seek to shift responsibility from the federal government to states where possible. Chao, 63, was Labor Secretary under President George W. Bush and the first Asian-American woman to serve in a president's cabinet.

that includes Chao's tenure.

Among the pressing issues facing the next transportation secretary will be how to boost the nation's aging infrastructure so that it can accommodate population growth and not become a drag on the economy; modernizing the nation's air traffic control system; ensuring that new transportation technologies are adopted in a safe manner; and responding to a surge in traffic fatalities.

Whether it's integrating drones into the national airspace, deploying self-driving cars, or "some other new technology, she's not going to be especially inclined to second guess the industry when they say that this will be safe," McGarity said.

As Labor Secretary, her job was to protect the nation's workforce, including setting safety standards and addressing issues related to wages and retirement. She updated overtime regulations for "white-collar" workers and rules intended to force unions to disclose more details on their financial condition to members.

Chao is "a strong advocate of letting the markets function as they will, not intervening into privacy sector arrangements," McGarity said.

Mitch Bainwol, president of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, applauded Trump's selection of Chao as "a superb choice."

"Big issues await," he said. "The traditional regulatory approach is increasingly challenged to keep pace with the rapid rate of innovation in our sector."

More recently, Chao had been on the board of directors for Bloomberg Philanthropies, run by former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg. She resigned last year after learning the organization planned to expand an environmental initiative to shutter coal-fired power plants. Almost 90 percent of Kentucky's electricity comes from coal, and her ties to the organization were used against McConnell in his senate race.

Chao came to the United States from Taiwan with her family at age eight. They settled in New York, where her father, James Si-Cheng Chao, became a wealthy shipping magnate.

Chao received her undergraduate degree from Mount Holyoke College and a Master of Business Administration from Harvard. She went on to become head of the Peace Corps and deputy secretary at the Transportation Department. She was head of the United Way of America and worked at the Heritage Foundation, a Washington think tank, before becoming labor secretary.

Lucky Dragon casino-hotel opens just off Las Vegas Strip

LAS VEGAS (AP) — An Asian-themed property catering to Chinese gamblers and guests has become the first new casino-hotel to open in nearly six years along the Las Vegas Strip.

The Lucky Dragon Hotel and Casino began operations in late November, in what officials characterized as a soft opening, ahead of the official grand opening on December 3, KSNV-TV reported.

With about 200 hotel rooms, the property just off Sahara Avenue is small by Las Vegas standards. The casino has more baccarat than blackjack, and only about 300 slot machines, compared with thousands at most Strip resorts.

The *Las Vegas Sun* reports the center of the casino surrounds a 15-foot, 1.25-ton glass sculpture of a dragon, and the food court was built to resemble Asian night markets with multiple restaurants and street food vendors. Dave Jacoby, chief operating officer, told KSNV that the Lucky Dragon aims to attract overseas tourists and local residents looking for authentic Asian cuisine and popular games.

Guest signs are in Chinese and English, and the hotel elevator doesn't list a fourth floor because the number is considered unlucky in some Asian cultures.

The *Sun* reported that when the resort won final Nevada Gaming Commission approval, general manager Matthew Harkness said it will market to Asian customers in Las Vegas, Southern California, and the Pacific Northwest in the U.S., and in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The casino was financed with money from Chinese investors and developed by privately held Las Vegas Economic Impact Regional Center through the EB-5 visa program, which grants green cards to foreigners in return for investments of at least \$500,000 on job-creating projects.



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