

# THE FRANCES PERKINS CENTER

CARRYING ON THE WORK OF THE FIRST FEMALE CABINET SECRETARY, PRINCIPAL AUTHOR OF THE NEW DEAL, AND DEDICATED ADVOCATE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, ECONOMIC FAIRNESS, AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKING PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

RE: Frances Perkins Center Announces Appointment of Laura A. Fortman as Executive Director

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## **Frances Perkins Center Announces Appointment of Laura A. Fortman as Executive Director**

The Frances Perkins Center is pleased to announce that former Maine Commissioner of Labor Laura Fortman has been named the organization's executive director.

Fortman, who served as labor commissioner for seven years, joins the Center effective immediately.

The Frances Perkins Center is dedicated to celebrating and advancing the goals and principles of Maine resident Frances Perkins, who spearheaded the nation's response to the Great Depression. She was also a champion of fire-safety regulations that save lives, improved infant and maternal care and the introduction of workplace standards that ensure a good quality of life for American workers. She was also the primary architect of Social Security. Perkins served as U.S. secretary of labor from 1933 to 1945.

Fortman's goals, dreams and successes have mirrored those of Frances Perkins.

"Laura Fortman is a tireless advocate for working people and we are thrilled to have her at the helm of the Frances Perkins Center," said Leah Sprague, Chair of the Center's Board of Directors. "At Maine's Department of Labor, Fortman administered the very laws and regulations that Perkins set in place, first as New York industrial commissioner and then in the nation's capital. In addition, Laura's skills as a manager and her expertise in strategic planning will be invaluable as the Frances Perkins Center enters the next phase in its growth, creating new opportunities for dialogue in today's national debate about economic security."

Fortman said she considered the new job the perfect next step in a lifelong effort to improve the lives of today's workers and their families.

"Leading the Frances Perkins Center provides an opportunity for me to continue to work on the economic security issues that I am passionate about---minimum wage, worker safety and health, unemployment insurance and social security-- through the lens of promoting and

preserving Frances Perkins's legacy," Fortman said.

Prior to her service in state government, Fortman was the Executive Director of the Maine Women's Lobby and Maine Women's Policy Center, where she was an effective advocate for Maine's women and girls. A graduate of the University of New Hampshire and Harvard's F. Kennedy School of Government senior executives program, Fortman also holds a master's degree in Leadership from Northeastern University. She serves on the board of the National Employment Law Project, a nationwide effort to restore the promise of economic opportunity to American workers. Fortman joined the board of the Frances Perkins Center earlier this year.

Frances Perkins, a native daughter of Maine whose forbears pioneered the state's coastal regions, became a fire-safety advocate after witnessing the historic and devastating Triangle Shirtwaist fire in Manhattan in 1911, and wrote the fire-safety code that was adopted in New York and then globally in the years thereafter. Next, as head of the private, non-profit Maternity Center Association, Perkins opened a network of free infant and maternal care clinics in New York City. In 1933, Perkins was the first woman appointed as a member of a President's Cabinet. She was the principal architect of the New Deal, championing rules banning child labor and establishing the minimum wage, unemployment insurance and 40-hour work week. She considered the Social Security Act her greatest contribution to the country.

Today nearly 55 million people in the United States receive Social Security, most having earned their way to the pensions through payroll contributions made over a lifetime. Some 6.9 million receive unemployment insurance, a program that is providing a vital lifeline to American workers at a time of record joblessness. Today, some 9.1 percent of workers—about 14 million people—are unemployed. About 6 million of them have been unemployed for six months or more, according to the US Department of Labor.

"The terror Americans faced during the Great Depression is echoed today in the millions of homes where breadwinners have lost their jobs to financial cutbacks or outsourcing," said Kirstin Downey, author of *The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life and Legacy of Frances Perkins—Social Security, Unemployment Insurance and the Minimum Wage*. "As labor commissioner in Maine, Laura Fortman dealt with many of the same issues that confronted Frances Perkins during the 1930s. Fortman will bring new ideas and her boundless energy and resolve to confronting these problems, as Frances Perkins did."

The Frances Perkins Center was founded in 2008. It is based at the historic Perkins family homestead in Newcastle, Maine. The center is dedicated to perpetuating for future generations Frances Perkins' legacy of promoting social justice and economic security through education, scholarly research and fostering meaningful policy dialog.

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*The Frances Perkins Center carries on Frances Perkins's commitment to social justice and economic security and tells the story of her accomplishments as the first female Cabinet member, FDR's secretary of labor for 12 years, and a principal author of the New Deal. Information about the Center and upcoming events can be found at <http://FrancesPerkinsCenter.org>. Contact the Center at [info@FrancesPerkinsCenter.org](mailto:info@FrancesPerkinsCenter.org) or call 207-208-8955.*