



American Economic Association

Committee on Economic Statistics

December 16, 2016

Mr. Loren Smith
Labor Department Liaison
Presidential Transition Team
Washington, DC

via: loren.a.smith@ptt.gov

Dear Mr. Smith,

We write on behalf of the American Economic Association (AEA) to recommend that you place the nomination of a highly qualified Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) on President-elect Trump's near-term agenda.

The AEA is the leading professional association of economics in the country, with over 20,000 members spread over academic, private firm, and governmental positions. Members of the AEA have served in every modern federal government, in both the executive and legislative branches and regardless of political party. The AEA itself is nonpartisan and its mission is solely to promote high-quality research and economic statistics.

For more than a century, the AEA has specifically promoted economic research based on current, detailed, and relevant statistics. And, no coincidence, over the same period the United States Government has maintained and regularly enhanced the world's most useful, reliable economic statistics system. Relying on their country's high quality statistics, American economists have facilitated the development of the U.S. economy as the largest and most dynamic in the world.

The BLS, the nation's oldest continuously operating principal federal statistical agency, sits at the core of this statistical system. Founded but one year apart, the BLS and the AEA have grown up together. Each has made the work of the other possible.

The congressionally-mandated duties of the BLS are reflected in the titles of its four programs – labor force statistics, prices and cost of living, compensation and working conditions, and productivity and technology. Congress has given the BLS these responsibilities in order to achieve important public policy goals:

- Effective fiscal and monetary policy
- U.S. businesses competitive in world markets

- Efficient U.S. markets for labor, goods, and services
- Research that describes and explains the current and historical dynamics of the U.S. economy

Given the breadth of these aims, it is fair to say that the health of the U.S. economy very much depends upon the value of the statistics produced by the BLS. In AEA's view, that value historically has been extraordinarily high.

To maintain this value, BLS requires a knowledgeable, strong, and well-respected leader. The BLS Commissioner's term is fixed at four years from the date of swearing in and it is our understanding that the term of the current Commissioner ends on Friday, January 27, 2017, barely a week after the President takes office. Our purpose in writing you, then, is two-fold.

First, we ask that the Presidential Transition Team encourage President-elect Trump to select, as soon as feasible, his nominee for the next BLS Commissioner. The long-term absence of a Presidentially-appointed Commissioner, particularly as President Trump's Administration gets underway, could have a negative effect on current agency efforts to improve its statistics.

Second, we ask the Presidential Transition Team to suggest that Mr. Trump select a nominee who meets these criteria, as well as others:

- Has a sterling reputation among his or her fellow economists for expertise in labor statistics;
- Has a strong background in either government statistical agencies or in positions where heavy use of such statistics has been made;
- Has demonstrated strong leadership and good management;
- Recognizes the need for statistical innovation in an era of declining survey response rates, Big Data, and the bipartisan support for evidence-based decision-making;
- Will actively uphold the laws that protect Americans' privacy and the confidentiality of their statistical records; and
- Is committed to consistently communicate to the public the integrity and objectivity of BLS statistics and the Bureau's commitment to those values.

Thank you for considering our request regarding this important position. We are available to discuss the specifics of the BLS Commissioner's role, if useful, and to recommend specific individuals, if desired. We also suggest that you consider consulting with the Chief Economist of the Department of Labor and the Council of Economic Advisers on the BLS Commissioner post.

We wish you all best in your important duties leading up to January 20th.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Moffitt
Chair, American Economic Association Committee on Economic Statistics
Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Economics
Johns Hopkins University

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