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Statement of

Kathleen P. Utgoff  
Commissioner  
Bureau of Labor Statistics

before the

Joint Economic Committee

UNITED STATES CONGRESS

Friday, May 6, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the labor market data we released this morning.

Nonfarm payroll employment rose by 274,000 in April, and the unemployment rate held at 5.2 percent. The increase in payroll jobs followed revised gains of 300,000 in February and 146,000 in March. Over the month, employment growth was widespread. Notable gains continued in construction, mining, food services, and health care.

Among the goods-producing industries, construction employment rose by 47,000, continuing the strong growth trend of the last 2 years. Most of April's increase

occurred in specialty trade contracting (40,000), with gains in both its residential and nonresidential components. Mining added 8,000 jobs in April. Over the past 6 months, mining employment has risen by 31,000, largely reflecting increased hiring for support activities for oil and gas operations.

Manufacturing employment was essentially unchanged both in April and over the year. The manufacturing workweek was up by one-tenth of an hour over the month, and factory overtime held at 4.5 hours.

In the service-providing sector, food services added 35,000 jobs over the month. Following a lull in hiring last summer, industry employment has risen by 183,000 since September. Health care employment increased by 25,000 in April. The job gain was concentrated in hospitals and in doctors' offices.

Employment in the information industry increased by 12,000 over the month, with gains in motion pictures and telecommunications. Job growth continued in a number of other service-providing industries, including financial activities, professional and technical services, and transportation.

Average hourly earnings of private production or nonsupervisory workers rose by 5 cents in April to \$16.00,

following a 4-cent increase in March. Over the year, average hourly earnings grew by 2.7 percent.

Looking at the measures from our household survey, total employment rose in April by 598,000 to 141.1 million. The labor force participation rate and the employment-population ratio each edged up by 0.2 percentage point to 66.0 and 62.6 percent, respectively. The number of discouraged workers (persons outside the labor force who had stopped looking for work because they believed their job search efforts would be fruitless) declined by 99,000 over the year to 393,000 in April (not seasonally adjusted).

Both the number of unemployed persons and the unemployment rate were unchanged in April. About 1 in 5 unemployed persons had been jobless for 27 weeks or longer. The long-term unemployed have accounted for over 20 percent of total unemployment for 31 consecutive months.

As part of our mission of reporting on America's workers each month, and in recognition of Mother's Day this Sunday, I would like to mention a few facts about working mothers. In today's labor market, 7 out of 10 mothers are in the labor force, compared with 5 out of 10 in 1975. Working moms account for almost one-fifth of all employed individuals, and nearly three-fourths of employed mothers

usually work full time. Mothers who usually work full time also spend more than 2 hours each weekday performing active childcare, cleaning house, and preparing meals. In addition, nearly 4 out of 10 mothers who work full time perform volunteer work at some point during the year.

I also would note that an updated version of a report by BLS on women in the labor force, which includes data on working mothers, will be posted on our Web site next week. This report is a compilation of information on women workers by various characteristics, including age, education, occupation, and earnings.

To summarize April's labor market data, nonfarm payroll employment increased by 274,000. The unemployment rate was unchanged over the month, at 5.2 percent.

My colleagues and I now would be glad to address your questions.