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THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION: JANUARY 2002

HEARING

before the

JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

February 1, 2002

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THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION: JANUARY 2002

Friday, February 1, 2002

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:38 a.m., in Room 311, Cannon House Office Building, the Honorable Jim Saxton, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Representative Saxton; Senator Reed.

Staff Present: Chris Frenze, Bob Keleher, Colleen J. Healy, Darryl Evans, Brian Higginbotham, Patricia Ruggles, and Daphne Clones.

OPENING STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE JIM SAXTON, CHAIRMAN

Representative Saxton. Good morning. I am pleased to welcome Acting Commissioner Orr once again before the Joint Economic Committee (JEC) to testify on the January employment situation.

The employment data reported today appear to be somewhat affected by seasonable adjustment factors. Payroll employment declined by 89,000, while the unemployment rate declined to 5.6 percent. Some of the data in the report today seem to suggest more improvement in the employment conditions than may have actually occurred. We will explore some of these issues in more detail during the question and answer period.

Nonetheless, recently released economic data broadly suggests the economy may have bottomed out. For example, the decline in the manufacturing sector seems to have slowed. Housing and auto sales remain strong, and gross domestic product (GDP) actually eked out a small gain in the fourth quarter of last year. These and other encouraging signals have led many economists to conclude that the recession may be over.

While we certainly hope this is the case, the fact remains that much of this improvement is too recent and tentative to be called a trend. The fragility of the economy, particularly investment, remains a concern that justifies consideration of economic stimulus legislation by the Congress. Moreover, the economy is vulnerable to risks from adverse international economic developments, high debt levels, security costs and other factors.

Last September, I took note of the Federal Reserve's actions to reduce interest rates, the congressional effort to reduce taxes and the decline in energy prices. At that time it appeared that these factors might reasonably be expected to lead to an economic recovery by the first quarter of 2002. However, the events of September 11th created such an enormous disruption that this timetable for recovery could be viewed as unduly optimistic. Thus, the prospect of economic recovery in the near future is especially impressive and reflects the remarkable resilience of the American economy and the American people. In addition, the President's success in fracturing the terrorist network has undermined, or made it more difficult for the terrorists and their ability to strike. It has improved domestic security and renewed confidence to a great degree.

This restoration of domestic security is a key function of government, and it is an important precondition for the resumption of a healthy economic growth. As the President has emphasized, the war against terrorism is hardly over, but we have made a good start. To date, the terrorists have been unsuccessful in attaining their objective of seriously crippling the U.S. economy.

In conclusion, the recent signs of economic recovery are encouraging but tentative. The economy has proven to be incredibly resilient, but it remains to be seen whether a sustained economic rebound is under way. Congressional enactment of an economic stimulus package would be a prudent insurance policy against the potential for another dip in economic activity.

Senator Reed, the floor is yours for whatever comment you may have.

[The prepared statement of Representative Saxton appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 12.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED, VICE CHAIRMAN

Senator Reed. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman; and thank you for convening this hearing and for your thoughtful comments. I also want to welcome Acting Commissioner Orr and thank her for coming forward to testify today.

Despite some hopeful signs, the labor market remains weak as the economy continues to shed jobs. Today there are nearly eight million unemployed Americans and nearly five million more workers who want a job but are not counted among the unemployed.

Particularly troubling is the fact that the number of people who are unemployed for more than six months is rising, and Congress has still not acted to help them. Even if the economy begins to recover in the first half of 2002, as many analysts predict, overall unemployment is likely to continue to rise for some time. Moreover, the long-term unemployed are typically the last to join the economic recovery. On average over the post-war years, the unemployment rate for those who have been jobless for more than 26 weeks continued to rise for nine months after the economy had begun to recover.

The Department of Labor recently reported that the number of workers exhausting their regular unemployment benefits has risen substantially by the end of last year. In my home State of Rhode Island, the number of workers who have exhausted their benefits has increased by nearly 40 percent over the past year. There should be no doubt about the importance of extending benefits to unemployed workers.

This week Senator Susan Collins joined me in calling for an immediate vote on extending unemployment benefits by 13 weeks for the more than two million Americans who have exhausted their benefits since the start of the recession and the many more that will soon face the same fate, and I have a copy available of our letter to Senator Majority Leader Daschle and Minority Leader Lott. Both Republicans and Democrats have proposed extending unemployment benefits but have tied the extension to other economic stimulus provisions.

I strongly believe that passing an extended benefits bill, separate from other legislation, is the right thing to do now. American families are suffering, and simple common decency requires that we put aside our differences and come together to meet their needs now.

Extended unemployment benefits go to those who desperately need resources to purchase food, pay their bills and clothe their children. These benefits replace only a fraction of a worker's lost income, so most of the money will be put right back into the economy where it is spent immediately on wise necessities.

In addition, extending unemployment compensation involves no cumbersome implementation issues, since the benefit system already exists. As the recovery takes hold and laid-off workers find new jobs, the costs of the program decline.

The task before us as policymakers is to get the economy out of the recession quickly and put it back in the path of strong and sustainable growth. Extending unemployment benefits to workers right now will not only help millions of families weather these difficult economic times but it will also provide a boost to the economy without undermining our long-term fiscal discipline.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again, and I look forward to the testimony of Commissioner Orr on the state of our labor markets.

[The prepared statement of Senator Reed appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 13.]

Representative Saxton. Thank you very much, Senator.

Commissioner Orr, the floor is yours. We are ready and anxious to hear your testimony this morning.

OPENING STATEMENT OF LOIS ORR, ACTING COMMISSIONER, BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS:

ACCOMPANIED BY KENNETH V. DALTON, ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER, OFFICE OF PRICES AND LIVING CONDITIONS; AND PHILIP L. RONES, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OF CURRENT EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS

Ms. Orr. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity this morning to comment on the labor market data that we have just released.

Nonfarm payroll employment fell by 89,000 in January, following job losses that averaged 311,000 a month in the fourth quarter of 2001. Manufacturing and construction employment declined, while services employment was flat. The unemployment rate decreased by two-tenths of a percentage point to 5.6 percent, after rising by the same amount in December.

Looking in more detail at the data from our survey of employers for January, job losses continued in manufacturing – that is, a decline of 89,000 – although at the slowest pace since September. The largest decline in manufacturing occurred in transportation equipment – that is, 28,000 – as motor vehicle plants had temporary shutdowns and aircraft factories continued to lose jobs.

Sizable employment declines also occurred in primary metals, fabricated metals, industrial machinery and electronic equipment. On the other hand, job losses in manufacturing were not as widespread as they had been in the fourth quarter.

As you know, construction employment held up unusually well last year. Unlike past recessions when construction tended to be quite hard hit, the industry lost very few jobs during the last eight months of 2001. In January, however, employment in the industry declined by 54,000 on a seasonally adjusted basis, despite unusually mild weather during the month. The special trades and heavy construction components had the largest losses. Also, an industry closely tied to construction, that is, the landscaping component of agricultural services, also lost jobs in January.

Wholesale trade employment continued its declining trend. The industry has lost 145,000 jobs since November 2000.

Helping to offset these declines, retail trade employment rose by 62,000 in January after seasonal adjustment, as weak hiring for the 2001 holiday season resulted in fewer layoffs than usual in January. Putting this increase in perspective, employment fell by 241,000 on a seasonally adjusted basis in the last five months of 2001. The largest increases in January were in department stores, apparel stores and miscellaneous retail establishments, especially toy stores, where holiday hiring, and therefore post-holiday layoffs, are heavily concentrated.

Employment in finance, insurance and real estate edged up by 9,000 in January, as relatively low interest rates continued to spur growth in banks and mortgage brokerages.

Employment in the services industry overall was little changed, as several component industries had offsetting movements. Business services employment fell by 24,000, reflecting a sizable decline in computer and data processing services.

Employment in help supply services was little changed over the month, although I would note that the industry has been on a downward trend since September, 2000. Job losses continued in the hotel industry, bringing the total decline to 124,000 since the start of the recession. However, employment in health services continued its strong growth trend, and social services also had a job increase.

Transportation and public utilities employment was unchanged in January as well. Air transportation grew by 8,000 jobs after seasonal adjustment, as a very light holiday buildup in the air freight component resulted in fewer layoffs than usual. Employment related to airline passenger service continued to decline. The communications industry had job losses for the third consecutive month.

Both the total private sector workweek and the factory workweek edged down by a tenth of an hour in January to 34 hours and 40.5 hours, respectively. Factory overtime edged up by a tenth of an hour to 3.9 hours.

Average hourly earnings of production and nonsupervisory workers in the private sector were unchanged at $14.59 in January. This followed a gain of five cents in December, as revised. Hourly earnings increased by four percent over the year, that is, from January 2001.

Now turning to some of the measures obtained from our survey of households, the Current Population Survey (CPS), the number of unemployed persons fell and the unemployment rate returned to its November level of 5.6 percent, that is, from 5.8 percent in December. The jobless rate for adult women declined in January after rising in December, while the rates for adult men, teenagers, whites, blacks and Hispanics were essentially unchanged.

Looking at other measures of labor underutilization, we would note that the number of part-time workers who would have preferred full-time work did fall from December to January by 294,000 so that they now total four million.

The number of persons outside the labor force who said they want a job rose by 163,000 to 4.8 million.

There was a decline of nearly a million in the labor force, reflecting drops in both employment and unemployment between December and January. However, I would caution against reading too much into a single month's estimate for any data series, particularly in a month such as January when there are large seasonal movements that can be difficult to adjust for precisely.

To summarize, the jobless rate in January reversed its December increase, dropping back to 5.6 percent. The number of workers on nonfarm payrolls declined in January but at a slower pace than in recent months. A seasonally adjusted employment increase in retail trade partially offset losses in manufacturing and construction, while most other industries were little changed.

Thank you. My colleagues and I now would be glad to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Orr, together with accompanying press release, appears in the Submissions for the Record on page 15.]

Representative Saxton. Commissioner, thank you very much.

Let me begin with a thought and a question that has been something that we have tried to guard against here on the Joint Economic Committee for years. You said in the closing part of your statement that too much emphasis could be placed on one month's data, and we have watched and tried to protect ourselves from doing that for many years here, as long as I have been on this Committee, actually.

So translated into the current report and watching the unemployment rate drop by two-tenths of a percent and watching other factors, including job growth and the up-tick in the diffusion index for a month, this looks like a pretty good report. However, as you suggested, it would be a drastic mistake to draw conclusions based on just this data. Is that correct?

Ms. Orr. Correct.

Representative Saxton. Would you say why that is true?

Ms. Orr. Well, as I noted in my comments, seasonal adjustment between December and January always brings with it some difficulties.

If you look, for example, at our data for January, particularly retail trade and air freight, we have increases in employment for those industries for the month of January, in large part reflecting the fact that there was not the holiday buildup in December that we ordinarily would have expected. So then when we seasonally adjust the January numbers, we see an increase in employment that in part is an artifact of seasonal adjustment.

Representative Saxton. In other words, we do this seasonal adjustment every January to try to take into account the jobs that were added in the last quarter of the year because of the holiday seasons, et cetera.

Ms. Orr. Uh-huh.

Representative Saxton. This year it is particularly difficult, because those jobs may not have been added in the last quarter of the year because of the anticipated slow economy and anticipated slower than normal consumption for the last quarter of the year; and, therefore, the need may not be there to make the same kind of an adjustment in spite of the fact that the formula goes forward with the adjustment anyway. Is that—

Ms. Orr. Well, we are always adding new data to our adjustment so that we want it to be as current as possible, but we don't by any means always have a seasonal adjustment factor for each month that completely takes into account all the movements of the prior months as well as what is going on in that month.

So, if you recall, in our comments from late fall, we did note that there was not the usual holiday buildup in a number of industries. So our expectation, for example, might be of the loss of 100,000 workers between December and January, and if we experienced only 50,000, we would have a different seasonally-adjusted number than if we in fact had declines totaling 100,000 between December and January.

Representative Saxton. Now, in January, is it also true that adjustments are made because of the weather as it relates to construction?

Ms. Orr. The adjustments that are made with respect to construction would be caught up in the seasonal adjustment factor reflecting what has happened in years gone by—

Representative Saxton. Right.

Ms. Orr. —in terms of weather.

In construction for the month of January, we showed the first substantial decline since last April, despite the fact that we had relatively mild weather.

Representative Saxton. Well, the fact—

Ms. Orr. So had the weather been severe, we might have expected that there would have been a larger loss in the construction industry than what we have noted.

Representative Saxton. But the seasonal adjustment went forward in spite of the warm weather, is that correct?

Ms. Orr. We have continued to use the seasonal adjustment factor despite the warm weather, but it is not the first winter where we have had warm weather.

Representative Saxton. No, that is true, but I am just – what I am trying to get at is that the seasonal adjustment took place based on kind of an average of what happens through the year—

Ms. Orr. In prior years.

Representative Saxton. —and this year's weather was certainly an anomaly, and, therefore, the seasonal adjustment could have been part of the reason for the good report that we are seeing. It may be more optimistic than reality?

Ms. Orr. That is true. Correct.

Representative Saxton. Thank you.

We also saw the GDP report come out for the last quarter of the year, and it was also rather optimistic. As a matter of fact, we have a chart here which shows gross domestic product and what has happened through the last period of time, and we see that in the third quarter of last year, we had a negative dip, if you will, in GDP; and then, in the last quarter, it grew by two-tenths of a percent. Are you optimistic that this is a trend, or is this also something that we should be careful of?

Ms. Orr. I would say that I think this is something we would want to be careful of. You know, this is the preliminary estimate. You know, BEA will be making revisions – or will be evaluating the number—

Representative Saxton. That is a good point. The first point is that this 0.2 percent—

Ms. Orr. It is a preliminary estimate.

Representative Saxton. It is a preliminary estimate, and that will be adjusted based on other information that is gathered as we move forward.

Ms. Orr. When the Bureau of Economic Analysis produces this number, it doesn't have the complete data that they will later have in order to make the final estimate.

Representative Saxton. Yes.

I guess two other things I would just like to mention that could have caused this and leave us in a position to be cautious is that auto sales is one of the factors that is primarily responsible for this growth during the last quarter of the year when there was a program in place to permit people to buy cars interest free, and that not only could have encouraged people to buy cars during the last quarter of last year but it may have borrowed from the sales that will occur in the first quarter of this year.

So that is a factor that I think we need to be very careful of, as well as Congressional activity in spending money for security purposes. There was a lot of government spending during the last quarter of the year that was not anticipated, as well as the automobile sales activity. So it seems to me that we might want to be a little bit careful before we come to a final conclusion that the recession is over. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Orr. Yes.

Representative Saxton. Thank you. I am glad we are all agreeable this morning.

Ms. Orr. Well, it is a nice spring day out. Right?

Representative Saxton. Well, thank you.

Senator Reed, do you have questions at this point?

Senator Reed. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman; and thank you, Commissioner Orr and your colleagues, for your testimony this morning.

According to your release, the number of people in January who were in the labor force but reported that they wanted a job increased by about 163,000. Could the reason we saw a decline in the unemployment rate be that an increasing number of people are discouraged and just stopped job hunting and therefore would not be in your unemployment statistics?

Ms. Orr. I am sorry. Would you—

Senator Reed. Could the reason that we saw a decline in the unemployment rate be that an increasing number of people are discouraged and just stopped job hunting and therefore would not—

Ms. Orr. Well, those numbers don't suggest that is the case. The 4.8 million workers that we have reported would like a job was not much of a change from the prior month, 163,000 additional persons. That 4.8 million number includes what we call discouraged workers, which have increased modestly, but I don't think the change was such that it would account for the change in unemployment.

Phil?

Mr. Rones. Well, I generally agree. I mean, we do directly—

Ms. Orr. I hope we agree.

Mr. Rones. Yes. We are agreeing today, too.

Senator Reed. This is a remarkable moment of consensus. Go ahead.

Mr. Rones. We do directly ask questions in the survey related to the reasons for being outside the labor force and with a set of restrictions we do have a concept called discouraged workers, which are people who are not looking because they think there are no jobs available to them. In fact, that measure isn't up at all even over the year. It is small to begin with. It is only 300,000, and we haven't really seen much increase.

I think the interesting thing to note is that obviously you and others have noticed the large decline in the labor force this month of nearly a million. Now, people can take that and say, oh, these are people who were discouraged, but they are not showing up, even in the very broad category that you point out, just saying that they want a job. They are not even showing up as an increase there. So it could just be that, in a very good job market, as we had throughout the 1990s, it brings people in who otherwise may not have been working, and as the job market deteriorated as it did throughout most of last year, eventually you have people who leave the labor force, you know, people who were on the margin to begin with who leave the labor force.

With that said, though, I would still remind you that this is one month's data. When we have a big change in either direction in the labor force like we have here, we often see that that is corrected, or it is in a response to something that happened before.

I would note that we had an increase of I think 700,000 several months ago, I believe in September. So we had an increase of a very large magnitude.

Senator Reed. Thank you.

Again, I think the Chairman's point, which, being so agreeable today, we all accept, is that one month's data is not definitive. I think we will agree to that.

In that regard, Commissioner, does the unemployment rate always rise steadily during a recession? Haven't we in the past, during recessions, seen episodes where unemployment would decline and yet the recession would still continue and indeed unemployment would continue to grow? Is that historically something we have witnessed?

Ms. Orr. Uh-huh. Senator Reed, in the recession in the early 1980s and 1990s, we had at least a couple of months where the unemployment rate went up and then dropped back and then continued its upward trend.

Senator Reed. Thank you.

Ms. Orr. I can't give you the exact dates, but they are in the early parts of both of those recessions.

Senator Reed. In the early part of those recessions? That is interesting, too.

Ms. Orr. You know, I think it may have been mid-recession.

Senator Reed. Mid-recession.

Let me also ask another question, which is, from someone who is not adept at all in statistics, the job losses were higher than expected in your report, declining by 89,000, yet the unemployment rate went down to 5.6 percent. I have succeeded in confusing myself. Whether I have confused you yet is the question.

Ms. Orr. Well, I think that is one of the reasons that we said earlier that these data are ones about which we should be cautious, because that is not what we would ordinarily expect, that in the face of job loss we would have a reduction in the unemployment rate.

Senator Reed. And is this apparent contradiction explained by the seasonal adjustments which the Chairman and you discussed? What is the explanation for this apparent contradiction, or is it statistical aberration?

Ms. Orr. You have named them all.

Senator Reed. Thank you.

Ms. Orr. Very good.

Senator Reed. Yes. I got used to taking tests where you put everything you knew down and hoped that one was right.

Let me have a final question, if I can pursue this with respect to the conversation you had with the Chairman about the construction industry. I thought it was interesting that, as you say in your testimony, employment in the industry declined by 54,000 on a seasonally adjusted basis despite unusually mild weather, and special trades and heavy constructions had the largest losses, together with landscaping, et cetera. The construction industry has been remarkably strong throughout this recession, and for the first time now we are seeing a decline in that sector despite the fact that the weather was good. Does that suggest the first time we are seeing sort of a retreat in this sector, which might have more serious implications going forward?

Ms. Orr. There was a decline in April of last year, I think, of something in the order of 77,000, and since that point in time there have been modest increases or very modest declines, but this report does suggest that perhaps some of the negative factors are catching up with construction.

Senator Reed. When you say the heavy construction components, special trades, I don't know, but I would presume that would be those trades involved in the major construction projects, high-rises, highways, et cetera, as differentiated from home builders. Is that the fear?

Ms. Orr. Most of the decline in construction that we saw in our reports for January were in nonresidential construction, not home building. As we know, home building is continuing to maintain a fairly high level of activity. But you are right, it is in nonresidential.

Senator Reed. Is there any regional specificity to the declines – I know the data is very preliminary, and it is a month's data, but if—

Ms. Orr. Right. The data are very preliminary, but my recollection is that we saw some weakness in the West and the South.

Senator Reed. No, I am not—

Ms. Orr. We will subsequently have additional reports, including geographic data, but that is my recollection.

Senator Reed. I know these numbers are preliminary.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Commissioner.

Representative Saxton. Commissioner, I have no other questions today. Thank you for being here.

I guess that I would just like to say in conclusion that, while it is prudent for us to be cautious of numbers that come to us a month at a time, or to concentrate on one month's data – and while it may have sounded like we were being – or I was being more pessimistic than optimistic, obviously I am very hopeful that these optimistic single-month numbers continue, that in fact we have seen a bottoming out of the recession, and that in the months ahead we will see positive numbers from your report. We will see what happens.

So did you have a comment?

Ms. Orr. I was just going to note, being very agreeable today, that if you look at the fourth quarter of 2001, we did incur an average of 311,000 payroll job losses in each of those last three months. So a loss of 89,000 is of a different order.

Representative Saxton. We hope that we can all be optimistic when we come back a month from now to look at the February numbers.

Thank you very much. We appreciate, as always, your participation, and we look forward to seeing you next month.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:10 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE JIM SAXTON, CHAIRMAN

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While we all certainly hope this is the case, the fact remains that much of this improvement is too recent and tentative to be called a trend. The fragility of the economy, particularly investment, remains a concern that justifies consideration of economic stimulus legislation by the Congress. Moreover, the economy is vulnerable to risks from adverse international economic developments, high debt levels, security costs, and other factors.

Last September I took note of the Federal Reserve's actions to reduce interest rates, the Congressional effort to reduce taxes, and the decline in energy prices. At that time it appeared that these factors might reasonably be expected to lead to an economic recovery by the first quarter of 2002. However, the events of September 11 created such enormous disruption that this timetable for recovery could be viewed as unduly optimistic.

Thus the prospect of economic recovery in the near future is especially impressive and reflects the remarkable resilience of the American economy and people. In addition, the President's success in fracturing the terrorist network has undermined its ability to strike and has improved domestic security and renewed confidence. This restoration of domestic security is a key function of government and is an important precondition for a resumption of healthy economic growth. As the President has emphasized, the war against terrorism is hardly over, but we have made a good start. To date the terrorists have been unsuccessful in attaining their objective of seriously crippling the U.S. economy.

In conclusion, the recent signs of economic recovery are encouraging but tentative. The economy has proven itself to be incredibly resilient, but it remains to be seen whether a sustained economic rebound is underway. Congressional enactment of economic stimulus legislation would be a prudent insurance policy against the potential for another dip in economic activity.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED, VICE CHAIRMAN

Thank you, Chairman Saxton, for convening this hearing. I also want to thank Acting Commissioner Orr for coming to testify before us today.

Despite some hopeful signs, the labor market remains weak as the economy continues to shed jobs. Today, there are nearly eight million unemployed Americans, and nearly five million more workers who want a job, but are not counted among the unemployed.

Particularly troubling is the fact that the number of people who are unemployed for more than six months is rising, and Congress still has not acted to help them. Even if the economy begins to recover in the first half of 2002, as many analysts predict, overall unemployment is likely to continue rising for some time. Moreover, the long-term unemployed are typically the last to join in the economic recovery. On average over the postwar years, the unemployment rate for those who have been jobless for more than 26 weeks continued to rise for nine months after the economy had begun to recover.

The Department of Labor recently reported that the number of workers exhausting their regular unemployment benefits had risen substantially by the end of last year. In my home state of Rhode Island, the number of workers who have exhausted their benefits has increased by nearly 40 percent over the past year.

There should be no doubt about the importance of extending benefits to unemployed workers.

This week, Senator Susan Collins joined me in calling for an immediate vote on extending unemployment benefits by 13 weeks for the more than two million Americans who have exhausted their benefits since the start of the recession and the many more who will soon face the same fate. (A copy of the letter we wrote to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and Minority Leader Trent Lott is available here today.)

Both Republicans and Democrats have proposed extending unemployment benefits, but have tied the extension to other economic stimulus provisions. I strongly believe that passing an extended benefits bill, separate from other legislation, is the right thing to do now. American families are suffering, and simple common decency requires that we put aside our partisan

differences and come together to meet their needs now.

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Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the testimony of Acting Commissioner Orr on the state of our labor markets.