

December 7, 2009

TO: American Economic Association Executive Committee

FROM: Katharine G. Abraham, Chair

American Economic Association Committee on Government Relations

SUBJECT: Annual Report on Committee's Activities

The Executive Committee voted at its January 2009 meeting to establish a new Committee on Government Relations. The Committee was authorized to establish a Washington office for the Association and to hire a part-time Washington representative. Katharine Abraham (University of Maryland) was appointed chair of the new committee. The other members are Angus Deaton (AEA President and Princeton), Catherine Eckel (University of Texas-Dallas), Robert Hall (AEA President-Elect and Stanford), Robert Moffitt (John Hopkins), Charles Plott (California Institute of Technology), Richard Schmalensee (MIT), Charles Schultze (Brookings Institution), and James Smith (Rand Corporation). Rebecca Blank (formerly of the Brookings Institution) served as a member of the Committee until she was confirmed as Undersecretary of Commerce in June 2009.

The Committee's first tasks were to develop a mission statement for the new Washington office and a description of the duties to be performed by the Association's Washington representative. Both were approved by the Executive Committee at its April 2009 meeting and are posted to the Committee's new website; for reference, copies are attached to this report. The Washington representative is charged primarily with developing information about legislation, regulations and agency decisions pertinent to the scientific interests of the AEA and, working closely with the Committee on Government Relations, to keep members of the Association informed about these developments. On occasion, the Washington representative may be asked to provide informational materials to congressional staff, Members of Congress and Executive Branch officials, but under no circumstances will s/he express any view or take any position in an official capacity that might be construed as partisan.

The Washington representative position was advertised in the spring. Roughly forty applications were received and a hiring subcommittee interviewed the top few applicants in mid June. Based on the report of the interviewing subcommittee, the full Committee's consensus choice to fill the position was long-time National Science Foundation program officer Dan Newlon, who retired from the NSF in August. Newlon accepted the offer of a half-time position and began work October 1. A blast email that went out to AEA members in October announced the formation of the Committee and Dan's appointment as the AEA's new Washington representative. Dan's appointment also is noted on the Committee's website. Dan is a very capable person who has the additional advantages of being well-known to economists and very familiar with the concerns of the economics profession. We are delighted he has agreed to take on this new role.

Since October 1, Newlon has been meeting with representatives of various organizations whose interests overlap with those of the AEA. The Committee has met by phone with Newlon roughly once every two weeks. Much of the time during those meetings has been devoted to defining more clearly the role of the committee and the

Washington representative. The Committee has authorized Newlon to move forward with several activities:

- Taking steps to ensure that economists who might be interested in applying are made aware of key current and prospective job vacancies at the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. Having people in these jobs who understand economists' concerns and appreciate the value of economic research is important to the economics profession.
- Partnering with the Association of Public Data Users (APDU) to publicize to economists a web-based listing of Federal Register requests for comment on federal data collection activities that APDU has developed and maintains. Having access to this listing should be of value to economists who use data collected by the federal government and may wish to weigh in when changes to those data collections are proposed.
- Discussing with the Department of Labor possible changes to the guidance for advertising jobs to comply with foreign labor certification requirements. This is relevant to colleges and universities who may hire foreign nationals for teaching positions. The current guidance states that print advertisements are required and Departments of Economics spend a considerable amount of money placing print advertisements, despite the fact that the vast majority of responses to their job postings come in response to web-based advertisements.

There is some overlap between the interests of the Committee on Government Relations and the Committee on Economic Statistics. The chairs of the two Committees have agreed to keep each other informed about their respective Committees' activities and to collaborate as appropriate. For example, they plan for the two Committees to work together to publicize the APDU web tool mentioned above; to disseminate the forthcoming report of the Committee on Economic Statistics on data needs for research on international trade; and to help with educating members of Congress about the value of proposed legislative changes that would allow better synchronization of economic data from BEA, BLS and the Census Bureau.

In the case of other issues that have arisen, the Committee on Government Relations has concluded that action would not be appropriate. Examples include the following:

- Early in November, the Committee was asked to endorse the \$10.4 billion provided to the National Institutes of Health through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, much of which has gone to support research on substance abuse funded through the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Members of the Committee felt that a significant number of economists might reasonably object to our taking this position and declined to sign the letter that had been shared with us.
- Early in December, it was suggested that the Committee might want to endorse the statement being circulated by Anil Kashyap in support of the independence of the Fed. The Committee members agreed that it would not be appropriate for the Committee to take any position on this sort of policy matter.

The Committee also has been presented with other potential activities for which it is less clear what if any action is appropriate. At its December 15 phone meeting, the

Committee plans to discuss several of these items that we think provide useful examples of possible activities in this middle ground. An additional memorandum outlining these issues and requesting advice about them from the members of the Executive Committee will be circulated prior to the Executive Committee's January 2010 meeting.