

**The American Economic Association's  
Committee on Economic Statistics**  
(Contact: K. Evans Smith, 301-974-1644)

May 23, 2017

Secretary R. Alexander Acosta  
Office of the Secretary  
Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Acosta,

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of Labor. We are writing to you on behalf of the American Economic Association (AEA) Committee on Economic Statistics. With more than 20,000 members, the AEA is the primary professional association of economists in the United States, and the AEA Committee on Economic Statistics acts as its representative for government statistics.

We write to provide our perspective on, and to express our strong support for, the critical Federal data sources that inform and strengthen our nation's world-leading economic, educational, democratic, and civic institutions and that contribute to their successes. As you know, the Department of Labor houses one of the most important federal statistical agencies: The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Our Federal statistical and data systems provide information that is uniquely accurate, objective, relevant, timely and accessible. America's families, firms and policymakers are able to make informed decisions because they have open access to this unbiased high-quality information. The BLS provides statistics that track employment, unemployment, wages, prices and productivity, and is a critical component of this data infrastructure. The BLS works closely with its sister agencies (such as the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Economic Analysis at the Department of Commerce) to produce an integrated system of Principal Federal Economic Indicators. In this respect, the Federal statistical system depends not only adequate support for each agency but also on the coordination and integration of statistics across the agencies.

Economists have been actively engaged with the Federal Statistical agencies both as users of the data and by playing a major role in developing the economics measurement methodology that the agencies themselves use. The U.S. has the largest and most dynamic economy in the world and economists actively use Federal economic statistics to help track and understand the ever changing structure of the economy. Given the rapid pace of change in the economy, the economics profession has worked closely with the Federal statistical agencies to develop a strong, inventive, and adaptive national system of economic statistics. Staying at the cutting edge of economics measurement is critical for the continued success of the U.S. economy.

The Federal Statistical agencies produce key economic indicators that enable:

- Effective fiscal and monetary policy
- Efficient U.S. markets for labor, goods, and services
- U.S. businesses that are competitive in world markets
- The equitable distribution of federal resources in light of state and area economic characteristics
- Robust evaluation of the impacts of federal financial assistance programs and regulation
- Economic research useful for guiding public policy

The economics profession views the statistical system as providing a critical public good essential for the success of the U.S. economy. While funding for statistical programs comprises a very small part of the federal budget, the public return on investment in these programs can be extraordinarily high. Reliable statistics make markets work better, and better informed businesses enable the U.S. to remain at the frontier of innovation and productivity growth. Moreover, with reliable statistics, the design and evaluation of federal programs to address economic problems—such as unemployment and underemployment—can both be more effective and cost efficient.

To aid you in communicating the economic benefits of the statistical system, we would be pleased to connect you with AEA members knowledgeable about the value of individual statistics programs. Please let us know if we can be of assistance in this regard.

We thank you for considering our viewpoint, wish you all the best in your important efforts, and look forward to being of assistance as useful and appropriate.

Sincerely,

*John C. Haltiwanger*

John C. Haltiwanger, Chair  
Committee on Economic Statistics,\* American Economic Association, and  
Professor of Economics, University of Maryland

*\*This letter was endorsed by the AEA Committee on Economic Statistics (<https://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/committees/economic-statistics>). Members of this Committee who are government employees recused themselves from all deliberations concerning this letter, and from its recommendations.*