

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 2, 2017

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write today in support of and to expand on the concerns raised in a February 2nd letter from the House Committee on Education and the Workforce related to the independence and integrity of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Like our House colleagues, we seek a commitment from you, your staff, and your eventual Secretary of Labor and Commissioner of the Bureau to support and stand by the essential, independent work of the BLS.

We find it necessary to seek this commitment because you and representatives of your Administration have expressed a clear skepticism and distrust of, among other statistics, the monthly unemployment rate and employment reports. For example, the White House press secretary reportedly refused to cite the official unemployment rate when directly asked to do so by a reporter.¹ During your campaign, you stated the unemployment rate was “one of the biggest hoaxes in American modern politics.”² Last February, you also stated, incorrectly, that the unemployment rate is “probably 28, 29, as high as 35. In fact, I even heard recently 42%.”³ Only a few days earlier, the BLS had reported that the unemployment rate was 4.9%. The most comprehensive measure of unemployment and underemployment, the U-6 rate, was 9.9%.

BLS data are critical to the development of laws, policies, and businesses that affect Americans, and also to the interpretation of our country’s economic health and security. In addition to its monthly studies on employment and payroll, the BLS publishes five other measures of unemployment and under-employment. Those reports include individuals who are working part-time but want to work full-time, and those who want to work but believe a job search would be useless because of a perceived lack of available jobs. Collectively, these measures provide decision-makers with a more comprehensive view of our labor market.

For over a century, the BLS has produced these neutral and unbiased reports on our country’s labor market and unemployment rate. One of those reports has been the monthly employment situation report.⁴ Presidents, politicians of all parties, businesses, and all Americans have used this information to make decisions affecting our economy.

¹ Allan Smith, “Sean Spicer Won’t Say What the Unemployment Rate Is,” *Business Insider*, (January 23, 2017), available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/sean-spicer-unemployment-rate-2017-1>

² Julia Horowitz, “Will Trump team try to undermine official unemployment numbers?” *CNN Money*, (January 25, 2017), available at: <http://money.com/2017/01/24/news/economy/trump-administration-unemployment-bls/index.html>

³ Lori Robertson, “Fact Check: Trump Wildly Inflates Unemployment,” *USA Today*, (February 10, 2016), available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/02/10/fact-check-trump-wildly-inflates-unemployment/80202318/>

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Timeline,” (Last Modified Date: July 5, 2012), available at: <https://www.bls.gov/bls/history/timeline.htm>

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When you and your Administration fail to provide measurable, objective data substantiating unemployment rates, you whittle away at the public's understanding of our nation's economy. As your Administration works to develop economic policy, we urge you to refrain from discrediting or undermining the BLS. We ask that you commit to supporting and standing by the independence and integrity of BLS and its work for the good of employers, employees, and our nation's economy.

Sincerely,



Senator Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions



Senator Sherrod Brown
Ranking Member
Committee on Banking, Housing, & Urban Affairs



Senator Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance



Senator Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member
Joint Economic Committee



Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations



Senator Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry



Senator Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship



Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Ranking Member
Special Committee on Aging