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Statement of

Keith Hall  
Commissioner  
Bureau of Labor Statistics

before the

Joint Economic Committee

UNITED STATES CONGRESS

Friday, April 1, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the employment and unemployment data we released this morning.

In March, nonfarm payroll employment rose by 216,000, and private-sector employment rose by 230,000. The unemployment rate was little changed at 8.8 percent; the rate has declined by one percentage point since November 2010. Since a recent low point in February 2010, nonfarm payroll employment has risen by 1.5 million. Private-sector employment rose by 1.8 million over the same period, an average of 138,000 per month. In March, job growth occurred in professional and business services, health

care, leisure and hospitality, and mining. Manufacturing employment continued to trend up over the month.

Professional and business services employment rose by 78,000 in March. This industry has added 692,000 jobs since a recent low point in September 2009. In March, employment in temporary help services rose by 29,000. Temporary help services has added about a half million jobs since August 2009.

Employment in health care continued to rise in March (+37,000). The increase was spread among several components, including ambulatory health care services (+18,000), hospitals (+10,000), and nursing and residential care facilities (+9,000). Since the start of the recent recession in December 2007, health care employment has risen by 902,000, while total nonfarm employment has declined by 7.2 million.

The leisure and hospitality industry added 37,000 jobs in March. Growth in food services and drinking places (+27,000) accounted for most of the increase.

Within goods-producing industries, mining employment rose by 14,000 in March, mostly due to an increase in support activities for mining (+9,000). Since a recent low point in October 2009, mining employment has risen by 96,000.

Employment in manufacturing continued to trend up in March (+17,000). Factory job gains continued to be concentrated in durable goods, with over-the-month increases in fabricated metal

products (+8,000) and machinery (+5,000). Construction employment changed little over the month.

Employment in local government continued to trend down over the month (-15,000). This sector has lost 416,000 jobs since its employment peak in September 2008.

Average hourly earnings of all employees on private nonfarm payrolls were unchanged in March at \$22.87. Over the past 12 months, average hourly earnings have risen by 1.7 percent. From February 2010 to February 2011, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) increased by 2.2 percent.

Turning to measures from the survey of households, the unemployment rate was little changed at 8.8 percent in March. The jobless rate has declined by one percentage point since November 2010. Over that period, unemployment declined by nearly 1.5 million, and employment rose by 1.4 million, leaving the labor force nearly unchanged on net (after accounting for the population adjustment in January).

In March, the labor force participation rate held at 64.2 percent, and the employment-population ratio, at 58.5 percent, was little changed. The number of long-term unemployed remained high at 6.1 million, 45.5 percent of total unemployment. Over the month, the number of individuals who were working part time although they would have preferred full-time work was 8.4 million, down from 9.0 million a year earlier.

In summary, nonfarm payroll employment rose by 216,000 in March, and the unemployment rate was little changed at 8.8 percent.

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