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Statement of

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Commissioner  
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Friday, April 7, 2006

Nonfarm payroll employment rose by 211,000 in March, following an increase of 225,000 in February. During the 12 months ending in March, monthly employment growth averaged 174,000. Over the month, there were widespread job gains in the service-providing sector. The unemployment rate was little changed at 4.7 percent.

Employment in professional and business services rose by 52,000 in March. Several component industries continued to add jobs, including architectural and engineering services, computer systems design, management and consulting services, and services to buildings and dwellings.

The leisure and hospitality industry added 42,000 jobs over the month, largely due to a sizable gain in food services and drinking places. Health care employment

increased by 24,000, reflecting continued growth in hospitals, physicians' offices, and home health care services.

A large job gain in general merchandise stores pushed employment in retail trade up by 29,000 in March. Wholesale trade continued to add workers over the month. Financial activities added 16,000 jobs, with continued growth in credit intermediation and in insurance.

In the goods-producing sector, mining employment continued to grow in March, largely in support activities in oil and gas. Employment in manufacturing was about unchanged, as a gain in computer and electronic products was offset by job losses in textile mills and in plastics and rubber products. Construction employment also was essentially unchanged in March, after rising by 81,000 in the previous 2 months.

Average hourly earnings for private production or nonsupervisory workers rose by 3 cents in March, following an increase of 6 cents in February. Over the year, hourly earnings increased by 3.4 percent. The average workweek was unchanged in March, at 33.8 hours. The manufacturing workweek and overtime hours also were unchanged, at 41.0 and 4.5 hours, respectively.

Turning to data from the household survey, both the number of unemployed persons (7.0 million) and the unemployment rate (4.7 percent) were little changed in March. Over the year, the unemployment rate has come down from 5.1 percent. Total employment and the labor force continued to trend up in March. The number of persons working part time for economic reasons edged down over the month.

This month, we again report on the labor force status of survey respondents who evacuated from their homes due to Hurricane Katrina. The data are derived from a special set of questions that have been included in the household survey since October to gather information about evacuees. The estimates do not account for all persons who evacuated from their homes due to the hurricane; information is not gathered on those evacuees who remain outside the scope of the survey, such as those currently living in hotels or shelters.

Data for March indicated that there were about 1 million persons age 16 and over who evacuated from their August residences due to Hurricane Katrina. In March, about one-half of the evacuees were again living in the homes they vacated in August. Among Katrina evacuees identified in March, 53.6 percent were in the labor force,

and their unemployment rate was 16.5 percent. Unemployment rates were much lower for those evacuees who were living at their pre-Katrina residences (5.3 percent) than for those who were living elsewhere (34.7 percent).

To summarize the labor market data for March, nonfarm payroll employment rose by 211,000, following a gain of 225,000 in February. The unemployment rate was about unchanged in March at 4.7 percent.