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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6350

WESTON J. COULAM, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR
PATRICIA R. FORBES, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR AND CHIEF COUNSEL

May 26, 2006

The Honorable Kathleen P. Utgoff
Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics
U.S. Department of Labor
Postal Square Building
2 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20212-0001

Dear Commissioner Utgoff:

As you know, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita destroyed or damaged thousands of businesses throughout the Gulf region, and countless business owners have been displaced. In Louisiana alone, over 18,000 businesses were catastrophically destroyed and 365,200 residents were displaced by the storms. Many of these damaged or interrupted businesses have slowly begun rebuilding their operations in the nine months since the storms, but others have yet to return to the region or to resume operations. We are both concerned about this business activity since our small businesses are the engine driving Louisiana's economy.

On May 5, 2006 we had the opportunity to tour some of the hardest hit areas of New Orleans and to meet with affected business owners. Following this tour, we participated in the Louisiana "Back to Business" roundtable with affected businesses, state and local officials, and business groups. We learned many things after meeting with these businesses but one issue came up again and again: Many businesses are still struggling to find the resources necessary to re-open and remain open. We are concerned that, lacking access to needed capital, many of these businesses will face a difficult Summer and Fall unless there is a significant change in conditions on the ground. Both of us will continue our efforts to assist the businesses in the region, however the lack of concrete business activity data to track business conditions in New Orleans is complicating recovery efforts.

In an effort to provide some clarity on the conditions on the ground, we would like to request that the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provide our offices with monthly business activity updates on New Orleans, beginning on May 31, 2006 and ending on October 31, 2006. These updates should include the latest employment and business activity figures for the New Orleans metropolitan area, including the total number of non-farm employees in the area for the previous month, along with a graph of the figures for comparison beginning on January 2005. In these updates, we would also like to be provided with the latest quarterly figures on business openings and closings for the previous months, should they be released during this time.

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Furthermore, so that we may have the full picture of the impact of Katrina and the success of recovery efforts, we request that BLS provide our offices with post-Katrina employment trends and business openings and closings in the New Orleans metropolitan area for the year following the impact of Katrina. In particular, we would like to be provided with the administrative data, including information on business openings and closings, as well as the employment data for the metropolitan area for the period from September 2005 to September 2006. As some of this data will not be released until October, we ask that you provide us with a comprehensive report on this data no later than November 31, 2006.

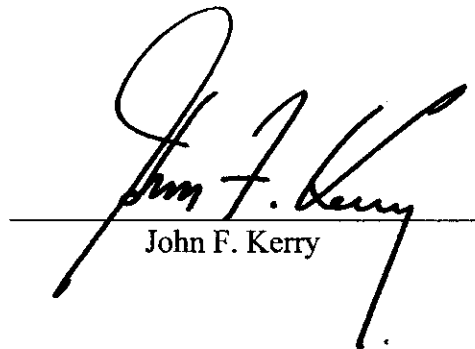
Should you have any questions on this request, please contact Brian van Hook in Senator Landrieu's office at (202) 224-5824 and Brian Rice in Senator Kerry's office at (202) 224-7834.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this request.

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu



John F. Kerry