

Opening Statement by Dr. Rebecca M. Blank
Nominee for Under Secretary for Economic Affairs
U.S. Department of Commerce
Before the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee
May 19, 2009

Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Hutchison, and distinguished members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today as the nominee for the position of Under Secretary for Economic Affairs at the Department of Commerce. It is an honor to be nominated for this job by President Obama, and I look forward to the possibility of working with Secretary Locke, and with the others in leadership at the Department of Commerce. I'm also pleased that my husband, Hanns Kuttner could be here today, as well as my daughter Emily.

There are really two parts to the Under Secretary job. The first is management and oversight of two of the top statistical agencies in the United States, the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). This management role is particularly important in the next year, as the Census Bureau undertakes its 2010 decennial census. I realize that one of the most important and immediate responsibilities of this position is to become completely conversant with the decennial Census plans in order to provide focused oversight and guidance to ensure the 2010 Census is complete and accurate. But the Census Bureau does much more than conduct the decennial census. It and the BEA collect and disseminate a wide range of data, and my role as Under Secretary would be to work with both of these agencies to develop a long-term strategic plan for improving America's statistics, and to make sure that these agencies have the expertise and the resources needed to implement that plan.

The second part of the Under Secretary's job is to serve as head of the Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA), providing high quality economic analysis inside the Department of Commerce. I understand there is an excellent group of career economists at ESA. If confirmed as Under Secretary, we would make sure the Secretary had the best possible economic information as he interacts with industry and community leaders. ESA also track important trends and changes in the economy, and works with economists elsewhere around the Administration to develop and analyze the policies that will define President Obama's administration.

Particularly in the current economic environment, as we deal with the worst recession in the past 60 years, good economic analysis is in high demand. I look forward to taking on some questions that are particularly relevant to the Department of Commerce and its interests; questions such as „How is the current recession leading to restructuring in manufacturing industries in the U.S. and abroad and what are the implications for jobs, productivity, and profits among U.S. manufacturers?“ “Is the U.S. as competitive as it should be?

Which industries are leading in productivity, innovation, and competitiveness in the U.S., as we come out of the current recession?“ or “What would rapid growth in environmentally-focused products mean in terms of industry and job expansion?“

In the past, I have had the pleasure of working in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. Many years ago, I worked with a variety of heavy manufacturing industries as a consultant with an economic forecasting company, a job which taught me a great deal about

the real world of business. I went on to acquire a Ph.D. in economics and in the years since I've held three types of positions.

First, I am an economic researcher and am deeply interested in the ways in which the U.S. economy interacts with government policy. My work has focused on labor markets, on the well-being of American families, on effective measurement of key economic concepts, and on the impact and evaluation of government policy efforts. I have worked on a variety of measurement issues and interacted with the staff at Census and BEA on a regular basis for years. I have used their data and have consulted with them about measurement issues. As a result, I know those organizations and deeply appreciate what they do and how well they do it.

Second, I have been an administrator and manager in the field of Higher Education. I have run two major research centers and spent eight years as dean of the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. That job gave me the opportunity to oversee and manage a growing educational and research enterprise, inside a very large University, and provided me with the hands-on management experience that I know will be very important background experience for my job as Under Secretary.

Third, I have been a public servant and government employee. I worked for a year as a Senior Staff Economist at the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) during the President George H.W. Bush Administration, and I returned as one of the three members of the CEA during the second term of President Clinton. In these jobs I learned how to write one-page policy memos and how to produce the wide-ranging economic analysis that is constantly in demand inside government. While it is an honor and a privilege to work in the White House, when I left that job I thought to myself, "If I ever come back into an Administration job, I want to be in one of the agencies actually running programs." This nomination gives me the opportunity to do that. I believe the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs to be one of the best agency jobs available, and I am grateful for the privilege of being considered for this position.

In this economy, we need good data---collected in a timely and reliable way by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis-- so we can understand how businesses and families are faring. We also need high quality economic analysis, analyzing the trends and patterns that indicate both where there is economic pain and where there are signs of recovery. We particularly need to keep track of industry shifts and how they affect American competitiveness in a global economy. Finally, we need high quality policy analysis, looking at the impacts of existing and proposed policies on American businesses, American families and on the competitiveness and health of the

U.S. economy. The Under Secretary position would give me the opportunity to work on all of these issues.

I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today. If my nomination is approved by this committee and confirmed by the full Senate, I look forward to working with you and your staff members on all items of shared interest and concern. Thank you