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Statement of

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Commissioner  
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Friday, December 3, 2004

Nonfarm payroll employment increased by 112,000 in November, following a gain of 303,000 in October. Since its most recent low point in August 2003, payroll employment has increased by 2.3 million, or 152,000 per month. In November, there were job gains in health care and social assistance, professional and technical services, and other service-providing industries. The unemployment rate was essentially unchanged in November at 5.4 percent.

Employment in health care and social assistance continued to expand in November, with an increase of 28,000. Over the year, the industry added 316,000 jobs, with gains throughout the component industries. Over the month, employment increased in doctors' offices, hospitals, and nursing and residential care facilities.

Professional and technical services added 16,000 jobs in November. The gain was concentrated in computer systems design and in architectural and engineering services. Within administrative and support services, employment in temporary help continued to trend upward in November. Since its most recent low point in April 2003, temporary help services has added 402,000 jobs.

Employment in the credit intermediation industry, which includes mortgage-related industries and commercial banks, increased by 14,000 in November. Job growth in credit intermediation has picked up in the last 3 months.

Within the goods-producing sector, employment in construction edged up in November (11,000). This followed an unusually large job gain in October (65,000) that partially reflected rebuilding and cleanup activity following the four hurricanes that struck the U.S. in August and September. Since its most recent low point in March 2003, construction employment has expanded by 373,000.

There was little movement in manufacturing employment in November. Factory employment has held fairly steady over the past 6 months, following some growth earlier this year. In November, the factory workweek edged down by 0.1

hour to 40.5 hours, and average overtime was unchanged at 4.5 hours.

Average hourly earnings of private production or nonsupervisory workers were up by 1 cent over the month, following a 4-cent increase in October. Over the year, average hourly earnings grew by 2.4 percent.

Turning now to information from our household survey, the unemployment rate was essentially unchanged in November at 5.4 percent. The jobless rate has been either 5.4 or 5.5 percent in each month since July, slightly below the rates that prevailed in the first half of the year. In November, the civilian labor force increased to 148.3 million. The labor force participation rate was 66.1 percent.

Employment as measured by the household survey rose to 140.3 million in November; the employment-to-population ratio edged up to 62.5 percent. The ratio declined by about 2 percentage points from spring 2000 to late 2002. Since then, the ratio has stayed within a range of 62.1 to 62.5 percent.

In summary, nonfarm payroll employment increased by 112,000 in November and has risen by 2.3 million since August 2003. The unemployment rate was essentially unchanged over the month, at 5.4 percent.