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PRESS STATEMENT

The Friends of the Bureau of Labor Statistics excited about the update on the Contingent Worker Survey Data

This week, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released an update to its data on Contingent Worker and Alternative Employment Arrangements. The Friends of the BLS are excited about the updated release of Contingent Worker Survey data. It will provide a long-needed update on alternative work arrangements, an important and growing segment of our workforce.

BLS provides essential, trustworthy and high visible statistics about the U.S. economy. This update, conducted as a supplement to the Current Population Survey, is important due the changes in the economy and the technologies that have introduced significant changes in the structure of our labor force and jobs since 2005, when the survey was last conducted.

“We are thrilled to have this new reading of the gig economy from BLS. Twelve years is far too long to wait, we hope to see this study repeated at least biennially,” said Tom Beers, executive director of the National Association for Business Economics (NABE). “Business economists will use the Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements report to gain a deeper understanding of labor market dynamics and to spot evolving trends in how U.S. firms are meeting their needs for workers.”

In the last ten years, the “gig economy” generated much conjecture about the changing nature of work, but it has been hard to understand the scope and magnitude of those changes. It has presented many challenges to policy makers and businesses when trying to address shifts like this in labor market without current, reliable data. With this new survey, BLS will help shed light emerging work patterns, and help policy makers enable sustainable livelihoods.

“The attention focused on the 2017 Contingent Worker Survey shows us how important it is that all the public and private decisionmakers who rely on BLS data not be left in the dark about the future of work,” says Erica Groshen, chair of the Friends of BLS, and former BLS Commissioner (2013-2017)

Funding constraints at BLS significantly hamper its ability to modernize in response to the needs of a changing economy, including conducting this important survey with regularity. This prevents policy makers, businesses, and individuals from making informed decisions. With sufficient funding, BLS could provide regular updates to this survey to answer emerging questions for policy makers, businesses and individuals about the changing nature of work in the 21st century without jeopardizing the high-quality and vital work in other areas.

"In our dynamic economy, a statistical agency that does not have the resources to modernize and innovate is on a certain path to irrelevance. We cannot afford to keep starving ourselves of crucial data infrastructure like the CWS and other BLS products," Groshen continues.

This much needed and much appreciated update demonstrates the vital and important work of the Bureau of Labor Statistics to our nation’s data infrastructure, which informs decision making. The Friends of BLS commend the agency on providing its expert analysis and gold standard data, in the face of such significant budget challenges.

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The Friends of the Bureau of Labor Statistics are a network of individuals and organizations who support the Bureau of Labor Statistics as an institution because of the critical data and tools it provides to a wide variety users.