Statement of

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The unemployment rate declined by 0.2 percentage point to 4.5 percent in March. Nonfarm payroll employment edged up by 98,000, following gains in January (+216,000) and February (+219,000). In March, job gains occurred in professional and business services and in mining, while retail employment declined.

Employment in professional and business services increased by 56,000 in March and has grown by 639,000 over the year. Within the industry, services to buildings and dwellings (+17,000) and architectural and engineering services (+7,000) added jobs over the month.

Mining added 11,000 jobs in March, mostly in support activities for mining. Employment in the industry has expanded by 35,000 since a recent low point in October 2016.

In March, health care employment continued to trend up (+14,000). Over the month, hospitals (+9,000) and outpatient care centers (+6,000) added jobs. In the first 3 months of this year, health care has added an average of 20,000 jobs per month, compared with an average monthly gain of 32,000 in 2016.

Employment in financial activities also continued to trend up in March (+9,000). Over the year, employment in the industry has increased by 178,000, with much of the gain in credit intermediation and in real estate.

Construction employment changed little in March (+6,000), following a gain of 59,000 in February. Employment in construction has been trending up since late last summer, largely among specialty trade contractors and in residential building.

In March, retail trade employment declined by 30,000. Within the industry, employment in general merchandise stores fell by 35,000 over the month and has declined by 89,000 since last October.

Employment in other major industries--manufacturing, wholesale trade, transportation and warehousing, information, leisure and hospitality, and government--showed little or no change over the month.

Average hourly earnings of all employees on private nonfarm payrolls increased by 5 cents in March, following a gain of 7

cents in February. Over the past 12 months, average hourly earnings have risen by 2.7 percent. From February 2016 to February 2017, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) increased by 2.8 percent (on a seasonally adjusted basis).

Turning now to data from the survey of households, both the unemployment rate, at 4.5 percent, and the number of unemployed people, at 7.2 million, declined in March. The number of people searching for work for 27 weeks or more was little changed at 1.7 million. These long-term unemployed accounted for 23.3 percent of the total unemployed.

The labor force participation rate remained at 63.0 percent over the month, and the employment-population ratio, at 60.1 percent, changed little. The employment-population ratio has edged up over the year, while the labor force participation rate has shown no clear trend.

Among people employed in March, the number working part time for economic reasons, also referred to as involuntary part-time workers, was 5.6 million. This measure was little changed over the month but was down by 567,000 from a year earlier.

In March, among those neither working nor looking for work, 1.6 million were considered marginally attached to the labor force, little different from a year earlier. Discouraged workers, a subset of the marginally attached who believed that

no jobs were available for them, numbered 460,000 in March, down by 125,000 from a year earlier. (People who are marginally attached to the labor force had not looked for work in the 4 weeks prior to the survey but wanted a job, were available for work, and had looked for a job within the last 12 months.)

In summary, the unemployment rate declined to 4.5 percent in March, and nonfarm payroll employment edged up by 98,000.