Jane Walstedt: Now I would like to ask Sarah Miller, a member of the team here in the Women's Bureau national office that plans these teleconference calls, to introduce our first speaker. Sarah…

Sarah Miller: Thank you, Jane. Bill Wiatrowski is Associate Commissioner for Compensation and Working Conditions at the Bureau of Labor Statistics. He's responsible for the Bureau's National Compensation Survey, which provides comprehensive information on employee wages and benefits, as well as the Occupational Safety and Health Statistics Programs. These programs serve as the nation's public health surveillance system for work-related fatal injuries and non-fatal injuries and illnesses.

Bill received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Economics and the History of Art from Yale University and a Masters of Business Administration Degree from The George Washington University. He's the author of numerous articles on employee benefits, compensation and occupational safety and health issues and speaks on these topics before a wide variety of audiences.

Thank you for being on the call today, Bill.

William Wiatrowski: Thank you, Sarah. My focus today is going to be on resources that are available to job seekers and also some assistance in helping to decide on a job offer and sort of what choices one might have and how to make that decision.

As Sarah mentioned, I work for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and we are part of the U.S. Department of Labor, and we're the agency that provides
information on employment and unemployment, on wages, on benefits, and on consumer prices.

In fact, we are the agency that releases the monthly unemployment data, and the July unemployment data is released tomorrow, August 1, at 8:30 in the morning.

And as you probably have noticed, unemployment data has received a fair amount of attention in recent months. The June unemployment rate released about a month ago was 5.5%, and in June of ’07, a year earlier, the unemployment rate was 4.6%. So you can see there's been quite an increase in the past year.

And that varies a lot depending upon the population. In June of this year the unemployment rate for adult women was 4.7%, which was lower than the unemployment rate for adult men at 5.1%. But both of those were much, much lower than the unemployment rate for teenagers, which was at 18.1%.


So these numbers give you just a little sense of the fact that unemployment has been sort of an increasing concern for the country and certainly for individuals. And I hope that sets the stage a little bit for some of the resources that I'm going to talk about.

One of the resources that Jane mentioned in her introduction is the BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook (http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm). This is a guide to hundreds of occupations and provides information such as the nature of the work; the type of work that someone would be doing in a
particular occupation; the education and training requirements for the occupation; the number of workers who are currently in that occupation throughout the country; salary information about that occupation; and also some employment projection information.

So it looks at which jobs are going to be more prevalent in the future. The Bureau of Labor Statistics produces information on projections of future employment every two years, and so it tracks that on an ongoing basis. So there are certain occupations that are growing and other occupations that are receding, and that might be good information for people who are in the job market.

The Occupational Outlook Handbook and all of the BLS data are available on our Web site, and that's at very simply www.bls.gov, and that's bls.gov. And on the left hands side…the Web site was just revised about two weeks ago and it looks very different. Those of you who've seen it in the past, it looks very, very different.

And on the left hand side there is a new section called “Resources,” and one of those--one of the buttons--leads to “Resources for Job Seekers (http://www.bls.gov/audience/jobseekers.htm).” And the resources for job seekers takes you to the Occupational Outlook Handbook and also takes you to other information about employment and about wages and about occupations. So there's a lot of good information there.

The other thing that I want to talk about is that once you are looking at a company and may by interested in a job there, or once you maybe are weighing a job offer, one of the things to keep in mind is the employee benefits that are offered, as well as the wages that are offered.
[Editor’s note: On the July 2006 Wi$eUp Teleconference Call, Martha Priddy Patterson also talked about the importance of looking at your total compensation package—salary plus benefits—when considering a job offer (http://wiseupwomen.tamu.edu/downloads/conference_calls/2006-07-31.speech2.pdf, starting on page 5). Kiplinger’s Personal Finance has a “Job Assessor,” which allows you to rate the importance of various criteria on a scale of 0 to 100. The criteria include cash compensation and benefits, among others. The Job Assessor can be found at http://kiplinger.salary.com/jobassessor/layoutscripts/joel_start.asp.]

And we are…my agency provides some information on the value of those benefits and also on how prevalent those benefits are. So I thought I'd spend just a few minutes talking about some benefit information just so you can keep in mind what you might be looking for if you're weighing a job offer.

As far as what employers are spending for benefits, 30 cents of every compensation dollar goes to benefits. So an employer pays for wages and the employer pays for benefits. And on average 70 cents out of the dollar goes toward wages and the other 30 cents goes toward benefits.

Looking at it in another way, benefits are about 44% of pay, so for every thousand dollars that you're paid in wages, your benefits on average are typically worth $440. So they are not to be overlooked. They're a fairly large chunk of the cost of compensation, and in fact they're an important protection for you and your family.

So I thought I'd spend just a minute saying, you know, what benefits to look for. One of the things, one of the statistics that we track at the Bureau of Labor Statistics is how prevalent are benefits. How often are certain benefits offered to individual employees.
Just over half of employees in the private sector are offered a 401(k) plan. About 70% of employees are offered health insurance from their employer. Seventy-seven percent are offered paid vacations, and about 30% are offered a dependent care reimbursement account.

Now this allows an individual to take their money on a pre-tax basis and use that for dependent care expenses, typically child care expenses, which can be an important way of helping to fund childcare expenses when you're looking for a job.

So those are the types of benefits that tend to be prevalent--the 401(k), the health insurance, the paid vacation. But there is also some responsibility on the part of the employee for all of these. In the case of the 401(k) plan, there is usually an employee contribution that's required, and then an employer matching contribution.

And you often hear it said that an employer matching contribution is like free money. As long as you are putting in your contribution, the employer is then matching at some rate. Now they may say for the first 5 or 6% of your pay that you put into the plan the employer will match at 50% or at 100%. So there's funds that are coming to you.

In the case of health care these days almost every plan requires an employee contribution so that again, there's sort of something that...some responsibility on the part of the employee in order to...in order to take advantage of the benefits. Those premiums that we've been tracking the dollar amount for, those premiums have been increasing over time.

In 2007, the last year that we have data for, the average premium for family coverage was $313 per month. So it has gotten - and that's what the employee
has to pay. The employer is typically paying quite a bit more than that. So it has gotten to be quite an expensive benefit.

I'm going to stop now and tell you that there are a lot more resources for job seekers on the BLS Web site, and I hope you take advantage of them. And at the end of the talk I'll be happy to answer questions.

Jane Walstedt: Thank you so much, Bill. You and I have talked about these employee benefits over time, but I'm glad to have the chance to ask you to share it with a larger audience.

William Wiatrowski: I'm happy to.