Jane Walstedt: Now I would like to ask Lucia Bruce, the Women’s Bureau Regional Administrator in Philadelphia to introduce our first speaker. Lucia?


She oversees the staff that develops national long-term occupational employment projections, as well as numerous career information publications, including the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

The Web version of the Handbook is one of the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ most frequently visited Web sites and recently won an Award of Excellence from the Society for Technical Communication.

While working at BLS she also assisted in developing and later managing the BLS American Time Use Survey - the only continuous survey of how people in the United States divide their time among work, child care, education, leisure and other activities. Welcome, Ms. Bartsch.

Kristina Bartsch: Thank you very much, Lucia. I also want to thank the Women’s Bureau for inviting me to be here.

I’d like to start today’s discussion by talking about some employment and labor force data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics obviously.
As Lucia mentioned, I oversee a staff of economists who develop long-term occupational employment projections. But before I talk about the long-term job outlook, I’d like to first talk a little bit about the current employment situation.

As everybody knows, the country’s in a recession. It started in December of 2007, so so far it’s lasted 13 months.

Now as Jane has already mentioned, the current unemployment rate is now 7.2%. And this compares with an unemployment rate of 4.9% just one year ago.

Many industries and occupations, some of which have grown quite strongly over the last several years, have seen job losses during this time.

Construction is probably the most dramatic example of this, although in the long run we expect average employment growth in that industry. We’ve seen a very sharp downturn in employment since this recession began.

Not surprisingly, employment in the financial services industry -- and this is the one that includes banks and credit unions and insurance carriers -- has also dropped, after climbing strongly for most of this decade.

And the same is true of real estate. This is an industry that’s been heavily impacted by the problems in financial institutions and the slowdown in mortgage lending.

Likewise businesses in leisure and hospitality and retail trade are also experiencing severe job losses because of considerable slowdowns in consumer spending.
And manufacturing employment, which has been falling historically—and we expect - the Bureau expects—that employment to continue to fall, has been losing jobs at an even faster pace since the recession began last year.

Now on the flip-side, there is one industry that’s projected to grow over the long term and has continued to grow even during this recession. And that is healthcare and social assistance.

This healthcare sector added over 400,000 jobs in 2008. So that is one - one of the bright spots in our economy.

At the occupational level, a number of occupations are also declining. Production occupations, which are heavily concentrated in manufacturing, are declining, because manufacturing is declining.

Other occupations that are losing employment are those in transportation and material moving, construction, farming, forestry, fishing, retail and office and administrative support occupations and some professional and related occupations. And these have all lost jobs in the last 12 months.

However, again, that bright spot is healthcare. And within the healthcare industry, registered nurses and personal and home care aides continue to add jobs.

Now the BLS releases the nation’s monthly unemployment rate. And that current rate overall is 7.2%. But this…unemployment rates vary by educational attainment, by occupation, by sex, by age. In some cases the variation is quite large.

For example, in December 2008, the unemployment rate for construction occupations was 16%. This is more than double the national [overall
unemployment] rate. On the other hand, the rate for healthcare practitioners and technical occupations was less than 2%.

There are several other occupations that have very low unemployment rates that fall into groups that are generally known as professional specialty occupations. That includes life, physical and social sciences; education; training; library occupations; community and social services; engineering; computer and mathematical occupations. Protective service occupations has a very low unemployment rate, as do legal occupations and healthcare support.

They are all below the current rate of 7.2 and they’re also below traditional non-recession rates.

Unemployment rates by educational attainment also show a pretty clear picture. The current rate for workers with less than a high school diploma is 11%. It’s better for high school graduates at 7.7%, but that’s still higher than the average of 7.2.

Those with some college or an Associate Degree have a 5.6% rate and Bachelor’s Degree holders or higher have a very low unemployment rate of 3.7%.

So what we see is that the unemployment rate drops as education increases or educational attainment increases. And that’s likely because those with more education are better positioned to enter many of those occupations that have those low unemployment rates, such as the doctors, the teachers, the legal workers, the engineers and scientists, and the computer workers.

Now before I switch gears and talk about employment projections, I’d like to mention one final current statistic that the audience might find useful. And that is that during this recession, the average duration of unemployment has
been nearly five months. So if you’re looking for a job, you should keep that in mind. It might take some time.

Now regardless of the current employment situation, everybody should keep their eyes on the longer term. As the nation recovers from this recession -- and I’m not saying it’s in recovery or even close to it, but it will go into recovery at some point -- workers are going to be needed in a variety of occupations, both to fill new jobs and also to replace people who will be retiring.

So it’s really important to be prepared for both the current job market and the future job market.

And one thing that everybody can do is to make sure that they take advantage of resources that contain information on where the job growth is expected long-term and what kind of education or training is needed for those jobs, because many education and training programs take several years.

And it’s also good to know what the earnings potential is for the jobs that are in demand or expected to be in demand.

So BLS develops a set of long-term employment projections every two years. And the most recent set is for the 2006-2016 timeframe.

That…those projections are available on our Web site. But I just want to hit some highlights really briefly.

We do expect the largest growth to be in the healthcare and social assistance industry. This industry is…it includes hospitals and doctors’ and dentists’ offices, home healthcare, nursing and residential care facilities, and child day care.
One of the things that is driving the growth or is expected to drive the growth in this industry is the increase in the elderly population.

The elderly are healthier, they’re living longer, and they’re going to need healthcare and nursing home care and residential facility care over the long term.

And we also expect to see strong growth in the professional and business services industry. And that includes legal services, accounting and bookkeeping, architecture and engineering, computer systems design, management and consulting services.

Now at the occupational level we know that occupations usually gain or lose employment for a couple of reasons. And one of the most important reasons is when they’re concentrated in industries that are growing or declining.

So to use the health care sector as an example again, I would just say that it’s been growing. It’s expected to continue to grow. Likewise, most of the occupations in that industry that are also gaining employment are expected to continue to grow.

A lot of the jobs in the BLS top 10 fastest growing list are related either to healthcare or are computer related. And many of those same occupations pay higher than median wages.

But fast growth doesn’t necessarily translate into a lot of jobs, because many of those fast growth occupations have relatively small employment.
So occupations with large employment in the base year of our projections usually add a lot more jobs to the economy, even if their growth rate is just average or even less than average.

Two good examples of this are registered nurses and post-secondary teachers. Both of these professional occupations is among our fastest growing list, but they’re both expected to add hundreds of thousands of jobs between 2006 and 2016.

These two occupations also require some education and training. They also pay relatively well.

There are other occupations that are expected to add a lot of jobs that do not pay well and do not require education and training. And these would include retail salespersons, food preparation and serving workers, janitors, nursing aides and orderlies, and some others like that.

One thing that I’d like to point out is that even if an occupation isn’t adding new jobs because of the economy, it doesn’t mean that there are not job opportunities [in that occupation].

BLS doesn’t project cashiers’ employment to grow between now and 2016. But we still expect many, many job openings due to the need to replace those workers who leave that occupation. There’s a lot of turnover there.

Remember too that retirements in all occupations will produce replacement openings across nearly all occupations.

So if you’re in college and you’re trying to decide what to study or if you already have a major and you need to decide what occupation to go into, I
would recommend that you access several of those good resources on the BLS
Web site.

The first resource--and I think the most important and most useful--is the
Occupational Outlook Handbook. And this describes the characteristics and
the job duties of nearly 300 occupations, talks about the education and
training requirements, the median wages, the size of the occupation, and the
long term job outlook.

Another publication we have on the Web site is the Career Guide to
Industries. And this contains information similar to the Handbook, but it’s
from the industry perspective.

Both of these publications are very much like reference books.

And we do have another publication called the Occupational Outlook
Quarterly. And this is a magazine that’s published four times a year. And it
covers a lot of topics about occupations and the labor force and education and
training.

It also provides tips on how to find internships and scholarships and other
useful job search information.

And all of these publications are on our Web site. And I can give you that
link if you’d like it. And both the Handbook and the Occupational Outlook
Quarterly are also available in a print version.

So people who have finished school or a training program and are already
employed but would like to consider a new career, these publications can help
you as well.
Retraining might be necessary for anybody who’s lost a job or somebody who wants to move into a job that pays better or has better security.

Remember the connection that I mentioned earlier--that the occupations with higher educational attainment are the ones that have higher wages and lower unemployment, which means better job security.

So knowing which of these occupations are expected to be in demand over the long term means that people can get that appropriate education and training and maximize their chances of it becoming that secure and well-paying job.

And in today’s economic climate I think these characteristics look extremely important. Thank you. That’s the end of my comments today.

Jane Walstedt: Thank you very much Kristina. That was a lot of ground you covered. And I just want to remind our listeners, we are taping the call. So if it was hard to follow all of that, it will be on the WiSeUp Web site at some point, hopefully in not-too-distant future, after the call.

And I just want to observe, I went, Kristina, on the BLS Web site today, and I was looking at the index of the Occupational Outlook Quarterly. And there really…for the benefit of our listeners, I want to say there really are a lot of interesting articles on there.

For example, I found one—“Getting back to work: Returning to the labor force after an absence” from the Winter 2004-05 Occupational Outlook Quarterly.

And then there was one on “Second job entrepreneurs” from the Fall 1999 Occupational Outlook Quarterly and one on “Flexible work” from the
Summer 2007 issue, and finally one on “New and emerging occupations” from Fall of 2002.

So I was really surprised -- I myself had not gone on there -- at what relevant articles there were even going back to 1999. So thank you again.

Kristina Bartsch:  You’re welcome. This - the OOQ-- is a wealth. It’s a secret. It’s not meant to be, but a lot of people aren’t aware that it’s there. And I appreciate your highlighting that, Jane.

Jane Walstedt:  Sure. Well I appreciate your doing so too.