

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2021

Mr. Rob Fairweather
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. Al Stewart
Acting Secretary
Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Acting Director Fairweather and Acting Secretary Stewart:

The severe economic harm caused by the coronavirus pandemic has not been evenly distributed. Historic job losses, housing and food insecurity, and other economic hardships have disproportionately harmed vulnerable populations who were also hit hard by the virus, including low-wage workers, people of color, and women. Regrettably, the previous Administration failed to protect these communities, even burying crucial employment data that showed the extent of the hardship. As we work together to build a stronger post-pandemic economy, these Americans must not be left behind again. I applaud the actions of the Biden-Harris Administration thus far to lift up the hardest hit communities, and I urge you to closely track unemployment data for vulnerable groups to inform efforts to foster a thriving and inclusive American economy.

President Biden expressed a commitment to equity on his first day in office, signing an executive order announcing that his Administration would “pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.”¹ The President and Democrats in Congress made good on that promise by enacting the American Rescue Plan to provide swift aid to families and communities that are still struggling due to the pandemic. The nonpartisan Urban Institute found that this law will reduce poverty by one-third and reduce racial disparities in poverty nationwide.²

As the Biden-Harris Administration implements this law and works with Congress to make further investments in our economy, the unemployment rates of economically vulnerable groups, such as low-wage workers, people of color, and women, must be among the key economic indicators driving these efforts. These figures should also be included in the

¹ Executive Order 13985, 86 F.R. 7009.

² Urban Institute, *2021 Poverty Projections: Assessing Four American Rescue Plan Policies* (Mar. 11, 2021) (online at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/2021-poverty-projections-assessing-four-american-rescue-plan-policies>).

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Administration's upcoming Budget and Mid-Session Review, which provide key economic data and projections to Congress.

Last year, the Trump Administration broke with four decades of bipartisan precedent when it refused to provide economic forecasts or unemployment projections in the Mid-Session Review. The Trump Administration refused to comply with a request from the Select Subcommittee to produce this data “so Congress can seek effective solutions to help struggling Americans and prevent further economic damage.”³ Instead, the Trump Administration claimed it would be a “disservice to policymakers and the public to calculate and release” this information given the “unprecedented economic volatility” during the pandemic.⁴ At the same time, Trump Administration officials made rosy and misleading predictions about the economy that were directly contradicted by economists.⁵

Today, our economy is improving but still has nearly 10 million fewer jobs than at the start of the pandemic. These job losses have disproportionately been suffered by vulnerable populations. Since the start of the pandemic, the unemployment rate for Black Americans has increased by 3.6 percentage points (from 6.3 percent to 9.9 percent), and the unemployment rate for Latinos has increased by 3.7 percentage points (from 4.8 percent to 8.5 percent), while the unemployment rate for white Americans has increased by just 2.2 percentage points (from 3.4 percent to 5.6 percent).⁶ Total employment for Black women is 9.7 percent lower than it was in February 2020, and employment for Latina women is 8.6 percent lower.⁷ Lower-wage workers

³ Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, et al. (June 18, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/documents/2020-06-18.Clyburn%20to%20OMB%20WH%20Treasury%20re%20Economic%20Projections.pdf>); *see also* Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, et al. (July 1, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-07-01.Clyburn%20to%20Mnuchin%20Goodspeed%20Vought%20re%20Economic%20Projections.pdf>).

⁴ Letter from Jason Yaworske, Associate Director for Legislative Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, to Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis (June 26, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/documents/OMB.062620%20Response%20to%20Clyburn%20re%20Economic%20Forecasts.pdf>).

⁵ Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, et al. (July 1, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-07-01.Clyburn%20to%20Mnuchin%20Goodspeed%20Vought%20re%20Economic%20Projections.pdf>).

⁶ Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Race, Sex, and Age* (Mar. 5, 2021) (online at www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm); Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Status of the Hispanic or Latino Population by Sex and Age* (Mar. 5, 2021) (online at www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t03.htm).

⁷ Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Employment Situation – February 2021* (Mar. 5, 2021) (online at www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf); *Black and Hispanic Women Aren't Sharing in the Job Market Recovery*, CNBC (Mar. 5, 2021) (online at www.cnbc.com/2021/03/05/black-and-hispanic-women-arent-sharing-in-the-job-market-recovery.html).

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(earning less than \$27,000 per year) have been particularly hard hit, with total employment 28 percent below the pre-pandemic level.⁸

Tracking these widening inequities is imperative if we are going to strengthen our economy as a whole and reach full employment. As a result, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has added new metrics to the Fed's dashboard of employment indicators. These data points include Black unemployment, wage growth for low-wage workers, and labor force participation for those lacking college degrees.⁹

I look forward to working closely with the Biden-Harris Administration to close the economic disparities suffered by disadvantaged communities by building and sustaining a robust and inclusive post-pandemic recovery. To that end, I respectfully request that you respond to the following questions by March 31, 2021:

1. What are the metrics being tracked by the Biden-Harris Administration to assess inequities in employment for low-wage workers, people of color, and women? How does the Administration plan to communicate these metrics to Congress and the public?
2. Does the Administration plan to include data on employment disparities in this year's Budget and Mid-Session Review?
3. What are the strategies being pursued by the Administration to reduce these disparities and strengthen the overall economy, and what congressional action does the Administration believe is needed to ensure success?

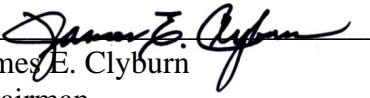
Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Select Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-4400.

⁸ Opportunity Insights, *Economic Tracker* (online at <https://tracktherecovery.org/>) (accessed Mar. 15, 2021).

⁹ *Powell's Dashboard Shows How Far U.S. Economy Has to Go on Jobs*, Bloomberg (Mar. 7, 2021) (online at www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-07/powell-s-dashboard-shows-how-far-u-s-economy-has-to-go-on-jobs?sref=EeII4Gct).

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Sincerely,


James E. Clyburn

Chairman

Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis

cc: The Honorable Steve Scalise, Ranking Member
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis