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The Honorable Hilda L. Solis
Secretary of Labor
U.S. Department of Labor
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dr. Peter R. Orszag
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Washington, D.C. 20503

March 12, 2010

Dear Secretary Solis and Dr. Orszag:

We recently learned of the proposal to eliminate the International Labor Comparisons (ILC) office at the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). We believe this office provides indispensable data and analysis that are vital to our understanding of the competitive landscape that faces American manufacturers. We request that this office remain open and continue its important contributions to our understanding of global economic trends.

As the U.S. economy confronts the reality of competition from an ever-growing number of industrialized and emerging market nations, both the opportunities and stresses presented by globalization will increasingly impact Americans in their daily lives. And the strains presented by old and new economic competitors will be felt all the more as the U.S. struggles to emerge from the deepest economic and labor market slump since the 1930s. The obvious complexity of this essential, international component of policy making speaks clearly to the benefits of quality economic research, which in turn depends on quality data. The development of a strategy to meet the President's ambitious goal of doubling exports in the next five years will be much enhanced by the insights afforded by professionally developed statistics and analysis.

The many economists, in both the public and private sectors, who study international economic dynamics have had an invaluable ally—since the 1960s—in the International Labor Comparisons unit of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The ILC group is one of many that have contributed to the impeccable reputation that BLS continues to enjoy as a producer of vital economic intelligence.

Other agencies do produce international data. But none has had the mission and decades of experience in producing scientifically comparable data across key countries on such critical metrics as productivity, labor costs, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, unemployment, wages, and inflation. The effectiveness of policy making would be greatly diminished in the absence of such meticulously developed international comparability that can only be found within this very specialized unit of the BLS. Private sector companies, too, benefit greatly from the insight into competitive dynamics that flow from the accurate data and fine analysis of the ILC staff.

We fully recognize and are deeply concerned by the fiscal pressures that the United States faces in the coming years. No doubt difficult decisions need to be made. But to eliminate a highly professional group with a very small budget whose output has become a necessary guide to the U.S. standing in a challenging world economy is a misguided decision. We respectfully urge you to reconsider and look forward to providing any guidance that we can at this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Duesterberg
President and CEO
Manufacturers Alliance/MAPI

John Engler
President and CEO
National Association
of Manufacturers

Emily Stover DeRocco
President
The Manufacturing Institute