**Technology companies urge limits on US spying**

News services: Published: February 12, 2014 3:00 a.m. Briefs

A coalition of the nation’s leading technology companies joined an international protest Tuesday against the U.S. government’s spying programs, urging more limits on collections of Americans’ electronic data and greater oversight and transparency about the secret operations.

Top executives from Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, Facebook, AOL, LinkedIn and Twitter published a joint statement and sent a letter Tuesday to President Barack Obama and members of Congress.

The coalition of tech companies, known as Reform Government Surveillance, urged changes that would include a government agreement not to collect bulk data from Internet communications.

The stance taken by the technology companies provided a public boost to “The Day We Fight Back,” a day of protest against the government’s spying operations organized by civil liberties and privacy advocates.

Activists urged Americans to write and call members of Congress in protest. By midafternoon Tuesday, “The Day We Fight Back” claimed backers had sent 104,000 emails and made nearly 50,000 calls to Congress.

Barclays critics assail bonus pool increase

Barclays PLC faced widespread criticism Tuesday after the scandal-plagued bank announced plans to slash up to 12,000 jobs this year while setting aside more money to pay bonuses.

The bonus pool rose by $345 million in 2013 – a move Chief Executive Antony Jenkins defended despite his mission to improve trust in the institution following a string of scandals, including its involvement in the rigging of the London interbank lending rate, or LIBOR.

“At Barclays, we believe in paying for performance and paying competitively,” he said.

Roger Barker, director of corporate governance at the Institute of Directors, was among those voicing concern over the increase in the bonus pool.

In 2013, Barker noted that Barclays paid $1.4 billion in dividends but had $3.9 billion in its staff bonus pool.

Job openings fall from 5-year high

U.S. employers posted fewer job openings in December and hiring slowed, adding to evidence that the job market weakened that month.

Still, the number of available jobs remained near a 5 1/2 -year high. The Labor Department said Tuesday that openings slipped 1 percent to 3.99 million in December, from 4.03 million in the previous month.

November was the first time that employers had posted more than 4 million open jobs since March 2008.

Total hiring fell to 4.4 million from 4.5 million in November, according to Tuesday’s report. While job openings are mostly back to prerecession levels, hiring is below the roughly 5 million a month that’s typical for a healthy market.

Wholesale stockpiles rise 0.3 percent

U.S. wholesale businesses increased their stockpiles in December at the slowest pace since last summer, another sign that the economy lost some momentum at the end of 2013.

Wholesalers boosted stockpiles by 0.3 percent in December from November, the smallest gain since July, the Commerce Department reported Tuesday.

Sales growth slowed to 0.5 percent in December after healthy gains of 1 percent in November and 1.1 percent in October.