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# Signaling Jobs Recovery, Payrolls Surged in March

By CATHERINE RAMPELL and JAVIER C. HERNANDEZ

The clouds have parted.

After losing eight million jobs since the [recession](#) began in December 2007, payrolls finally surged in March, the [Labor Department reported](#) on Friday. Employers added 162,000 nonfarm jobs last month. Nationwide, the unemployment rate held steady at 9.7 percent.

“We are beginning to turn the corner,” said [President Obama](#), speaking in Charlotte, N.C., calling it “the best news we’ve seen on the job front in more than two years.”

Though everything seems to be moving in the right direction, he was careful not to raise expectations too high.

“It will take time to achieve the strong and sustained job growth that we need,” [President Obama](#) said.

The economy needs to add more than 100,000 jobs a month just to absorb new entrants into the labor market, let alone provide a livelihood for the 15 million Americans already looking for work. Without constant, robust growth, the unemployment rate won’t budge. Indeed, the [Congressional Budget Office](#) has projected that the rate will hover around 10 percent for the rest of the year.

Still, economists saw signs in the latest report that the economy was poised to make steady, if slow, progress.

“Every major industry, except financial services and information, showed gains in employment,” John Ryding,

chief economist at RDQ Economics, said. "From manufacturing, to construction, to retail, it really didn't matter. They're all hiring now."

**Private-sector job growth** was again strongest in temporary help services and health care. The nation added 40,000 temporary service jobs last month, indicating that many employers were testing the waters before taking the plunge with a permanent hire. The health care industry, which grew steadily even during the depths of the recession, expanded by 27,000 jobs in March.

The March report may have been inflated, though, by a rebound from February when many people could not work because of snowstorms. Additionally, nearly a third of the hiring in March was temporary work on the 2010 census.

Though they know their new jobs are fleeting, many of the 48,000 new census workers are counting their blessings. To them, a job is a job, a closed hole in their résumés and maybe even a bridge to permanent employment elsewhere.

Gregory A. Butler, a 41-year-old union carpenter in West Harlem, had been unable to find work since November. Then last month, he got a call from the **Census Bureau** asking him to work as a supervisor. Unlike most of the department's new hires, who are part-time employees, he expects to work 40-hour weeks for about two months, at \$20 an hour.

"This is a very good transition opportunity for me, since I'm trying to start a new career as a freelance writer," Mr. Butler said. "I don't mind that it's temporary. It's important work, and it gets me off unemployment."

The temporary hiring of thousands of census workers will continue through the end of the summer, economists noted, making it more difficult to gauge the underlying strength of the labor market.

Many of the jobs created last month were part time for people who really wanted full-time work. That caused the broader measure of unemployment along with those who are underemployed to tick up, to 16.9 percent, from 16.8 percent in February.

The situation looks worse for the long-term unemployed. The average length of time the jobless have been out of work has reached 31.2 weeks, the longest period since the government began keeping records in 1948.

Friday's report revised employment upward for the previous two months, and was otherwise largely in line with the expectations of forecasters.

While the stock market was closed for Good Friday, the bond market reacted favorably to the report.

Treasury prices fell, sending their yields higher. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note rose to 3.94 percent, from 3.87 percent late Thursday, its highest level since last June. Many types of consumer loans are pegged to the yield on the 10-year note, so an increase could raise the cost of borrowing to buy homes and other goods.

The economy has shown signs of renewal in recent months with the help of significant government spending. Analysts generally say they believe the recovery will endure even in the absence of stimulus programs.

"Strength effectively feeds itself," said James F. O'Sullivan, chief economist for MF Global. "What happens to the labor market is key to perceptions about the sustainability of the recovery."

But substantial worries persist. Consumer spending remains tepid, though it has improved modestly in recent months. Real estate markets are still severely depressed, holding back hiring in critical industries like construction. And many state and local governments, facing ballooning deficits, are poised to make severe cutbacks. Last month, they cut 9,000 jobs.

The long-term unemployed find little comfort in one month of good news, especially with many nearing the end of their government assistance.

In Roseville, Mich., a suburb of Detroit, Mark R. Hamlin, is nearing his fourth year without work. Mr. Hamlin, 49, was laid off from his position as a sales manager for a copper wire distributor just as the auto industry began to collapse. Though his wife has a job, the Hamlins struggle to keep up with a \$900 monthly mortgage payment and \$5,000 in credit card debt. To cut costs, they keep the heat at 55 degrees.

With his latest round of unemployment benefits expiring this week, Mr. Hamlin said he worries that he may not be able to give his 4-year-old daughter Kara a stable upbringing.

"I'm hoping, I'm praying, I have my fingers crossed," Mr. Hamlin said. "I've got to find something this year. I've got to find something this year."

*Liz Robbins and Peter Baker contributed reporting.*

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