

US job openings fell in November to still-strong 6.9 million

By Christopher Rugaber
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. job openings fell in November from the previous month, but the number of available positions remained healthy.

Job openings slipped 3.4 percent to a seasonally adjusted 6.9 million, the Labor Department said Tuesday. That is the fewest openings in five months, but still 16 percent higher than a year ago.

The job market remains strong despite sharp stock market declines last month, interest rate

increases by the Federal Reserve and a slowing global economy that is also bedeviled by trade fights. Last week's blockbuster jobs report helped assuage concerns about the economy, as it showed that hiring reached a 10-month high in December.

The number of open jobs is still higher than the number of unemployed, a switch that occurred in March for the first time in the nearly 20 years that the government has tracked job openings. There were 6 million people were out of work in November.

That suggests employers are desperate to hire, a trend that appears to be finally pushing up wages. Average hourly pay rose 3.2 percent in December from a year earlier, Friday's jobs report showed, matching the best yearly gain since the recession.

The number of people quitting fell in November, the report showed, but the total also stayed at a solid level. Quits are typically seen as a positive sign, because most people quit for another job, usually for higher pay.

More quits can also raise pres-

sure on employers to pay more in order to keep their workers. Quits dropped 3.2 percent in November to 3.4 million. That is still 6.6 percent higher than a year ago.

Overall hiring slid to 5.7 million from 5.9 million, slightly disappointing to some economists. That is a gross figure, while December's hiring announced on Friday — 312,000 jobs — is a net figure.

"There are some signs of a modest deceleration amid a very strong labor market," Steven Wood, senior economic adviser at Contingent Macro Research, said in a research

note.

The biggest declines in openings were in construction and professional and business services, a category that includes higher-paying occupations such as engineers, accountants and architects. Retailers also posted fewer open jobs in November than the previous month, likely reflecting that many stores started hiring for the holidays earlier than in the past.

Government job openings were mostly unchanged. The November report pre-dates the government shutdown.

TAXES

Continued from Page 1B employees to work on tax returns. The agency also announced the Jan. 28 date to start processing returns. That's within the normal timeframe.

"We are committed to ensuring that taxpayers receive their refunds notwithstanding the government shutdown," IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig said in a statement. "I appreciate the hard work of the employees and their commitment to the taxpayers during this period."

If the shutdown weren't enough to contend with, taxpayers and the IRS have to grapple with the most sweeping overhaul of the U.S. tax code in three decades. Enacted by Republicans in December 2017, the changes provided for \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts mainly financed by government deficits. The package was signed into law by Trump as his signature legislative achievement.

The new law, which took effect Jan. 1, 2018, gave generous tax cuts to corpo-

rations and the wealthiest Americans and more modest reductions to middle- and low-income households.

Nonpartisan tax experts have projected that the law will bring lower taxes for the great majority of Americans, though not all. According to the Tax Policy Center, a middle-income household should on average get a \$930 tax cut for 2018, lifting its after-tax income by 1.6 percent.

The IRS' challenges come as the agency is hobbled by what is widely viewed as a skimpy budget. Republicans controlling the congressional purse strings for years accused the IRS of having a liberal bias and unfairly targeting conservative tax-exempt groups. Last year, with the new tax law looming, Congress was more willing to open its wallet for the IRS and rejected to an extent the Trump administration's proposed cuts. But it ended up cutting in other areas, with the result that the agency budget is about the same — \$11.4 billion — as in recent years.

BRIEFS

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The Los Angeles Times reports price increases in recent years haven't thinned the throngs at Disneyland and nearby California Adventure Park.

A one-day, one-park ticket is now \$104 for low-demand days, such as May weekdays. Tickets for regular- and

peak-demand days are more.

More visitors are expected for this summer's opening of "Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge."

Spokeswoman Liz Jaeger says the resort offers a variety of tickets while helping manage demand and spread visitation.

The least expensive one-day ticket to Disney World in Florida is \$109.

DIRECTOR

Continued from Page 1B byways and bikeways.

"My experience as executive director of EOVA has been intimate in allowing me to pursue not only a career in the tourism industry but to be an integral part of developing the visitor experiences that are representative of our region's and state's values and helping to share the stories of who we are, while maintaining what we hold dear as citizens of Oregon," Trindle wrote.

Although she is proud of

her long career with EOVA, Trindle said she is looking forward to having more free time to dedicate to T&T Horsemanship, a home-based business in which she teaches riders "the art of developing a willing partnership with your horse" and offers riding opportunities. She said she also plans to continue assisting the Grande Ronde Symphony Association and teaching a few more ski lessons at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

Contact Francisca Benitez at frankiebenitez4@gmail.com.

FSA

Continued from Page 1B moved on a non-workday (same as a weekend or federal holiday). Producers with farm-stored loans may move loan collateral to non-designated structures during this period without prior written approval, provided the producer requests a CCC-681-1 Marketing Authorization on the next business day either by phone or in person.

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Sears gets another reprieve from liquidation

By Anne D'Innocenzio
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Sears received another possible lifeline Tuesday when the company's chairman and largest shareholder promised to line up the necessary financing to keep the struggling department store chain afloat.

The reprieve came after what Sears lawyers described to a bankruptcy judge in New York as "round-the-clock" negotiations following the company board's initial rejection of Eddie Lampert's proposal, which sought to preserve 425 stores and 50,000 workers.

According to lawyers close to the matter, one of the main sticking points was that the bid didn't include cash. The revised version now requires Lampert to deposit \$120 million by 4 p.m. Wednesday through his ESL hedge fund.

The fate of Sears remains to be determined. Lampert's bid will go to an auction set for Jan. 14 and will compete with other bids from

liquidators looking to shut down the company. A committee of unsecured creditors has been pushing for straight liquidation and believes there are litigation claims against ESL for prior transactions.

In a statement emailed to The Associated Press, ESL said it "appreciates the encouragement from the court and the constructive engagement of the debtors as we work to formalize our going concern proposal so that it can be evaluated at the upcoming auction."

"We believe in Sears and will continue to do everything we can to ensure that it has a profitable future," ESL added.

It's unclear who will be the winner of the auction process, which could take a few days. A bankruptcy judge will then weigh different scenarios including the value of retaining 50,000 jobs, according to David Wander, an attorney at Davidoff Hutcher & Citron, which represents two of Sears vendors.

"You always want a competitive

bidding process. You never get the best value if you have only one party," Wander said.

The 11th hour negotiation is yet another twist in the rocky journey of Sears whose fate has been hanging in the wind, particularly since it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on Oct. 15. As of the filing, the company had just under 700 stores and 68,000 workers.

Sears, which began as mail order watch business 132 years ago and grew to be the largest retailer in the world, has been in a slow death spiral, hobbled by the Great Recession and outmatched by competitors like Amazon and Walmart.

Under Lampert, Sears has bought time over the years by spinning off stores and putting on the block the brands that had grown synonymous with the company, such as Craftsman. Lampert loaned out his own money and put together deals to keep the company going, turning whatever profit he could for his hedge fund.

TRAVEL

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earn between \$26,000 and \$35,000 a year, according to TSA. That is far less than many other government employees, making them more vulnerable if they don't get paid.

TSA spokesman Jim Gregory said officials are managing. "If we don't have appropriations by midweek or so, (officers) will miss their first paycheck. That's obviously where it becomes more difficult," he said.

Gregory said the agency has a team of officers who can go to airports facing a shortage, a tactic developed in case natural disasters prevented screeners from getting to work.

WHAT ABOUT TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS?

About 1,900 air traffic controllers — nearly one in every five — are eligible to retire right now.

"I don't know how long they're going to stay on the job if they are not getting a paycheck," said Paul Rinaldi, president of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association.

There is an even larger group of recently hired trainees and apprentices, and Rinaldi said a long shutdown could cause some of them to take other jobs.

WILL THE SHUTDOWN LEAD TO FLIGHT DELAYS?

Rinaldi said safety is not being compromised but that capacity to manage traffic could be reduced if the shutdown worsens an existing shortage of

controllers. That could lead to flight delays, he said. Others are not so sure.

"It would have to get pretty bad before the government said (to airlines), 'Hey, start scaling back your plans for service,'" said Richard Aboulafia, an aviation analyst. "You could see that in a worst-case scenario."

An early test of the air traffic system could come around the Feb. 3 Super Bowl in Atlanta, when an influx of corporate jets and private planes will further crowd the sky above the nation's busiest airport. Planning for handling that traffic has been put on hold, Rinaldi said.

WHAT ABOUT SAFETY?

The largest pilots' union wrote to President Donald Trump last week urging a quick end to the shutdown, which it said was threatening the safety of the nation's airspace.

On Tuesday, the new Democratic chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, said the Trump administration hasn't answered questions about how the shutdown is affecting the Department of Homeland Security's ability to screen passengers heading to the U.S. and to assess security at foreign airports.

Patrick O'Carroll, executive director of the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, said there has been no deterioration of safety, no reductions in coverage, and no reports of

air marshals — armed, undercover officers on flights — calling in sick.

WHO IS INSPECTING PLANES?

Federal aviation safety inspectors are not deemed essential government employees; they have been furloughed.

FAA spokesman Gregory Martin said the agency is recalling inspectors for certain jobs including assignments at the airlines, as in previous shutdowns.

"We're going to continue to prioritize with the resources that we have," Martin said. "Our focus is on the commercial air carriers and volumes of people they carry."

Martin did not say how many inspectors are working or how the number of inspections being done compared with pre-shutdown levels.

Chuck Banks, one of those furloughed inspectors, said colleagues are being called in when an airline needs something, like a plane certified for flight. The routine, normal oversight of operations at airlines and repair shops is not being done, leaving companies to regulate

themselves, he said.

"Do you like the fox watching the hen house?" he said. "Every day the government stays shut down, it gets less safe to fly."

WHAT OTHER GOVERNMENT SERVICES ARE AFFECTED?

The National Transportation Safety Board is delaying accident investigations and hearings. While there have not been any fatal airline crashes, the board has delayed other investigations, including an examination of a Florida highway accident that killed five children on their way to Walt Disney World.

NTSB representatives did not answer phone calls or reply to emails Monday. A recorded message for the public affairs office said nobody would respond until the shutdown ends.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection has closed many centers where people apply for Global Entry, a program that lets travelers get expedited clearance into the U.S. It is not clear if any applications are being processed; spokespeople at the agency did not respond for comment.



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