

UNEMPLOYMENT

Claims Lowest Since April '08

BY DANIEL WAGNER
AND MARTIN CRUTSINGER
AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON — In the latest sign that the economy is surging at year's end, unemployment claims have dropped to the lowest level since April 2008, long before anyone realized that the nation was in a recession.

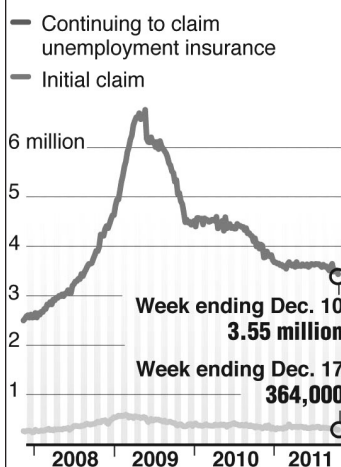
Claims fell by 4,000 last week to 364,000, the Labor Department said Thursday. It was the third straight weekly drop. The four-week average of claims, a less volatile gauge, fell for the 11th time in 13 weeks and stands at the lowest since June 2008.

While the economy remains vulnerable to threats, particularly a recession in Europe, the steady improvement in the job market is unquestionable.

"The underlying trend is undeniably positive," said Jennifer Lee, senior economist with BMO Capital Markets. "I think everyone is starting to come around to the view that, yes, there is a re-

Out of work

New claims for unemployment insurance dropped last week to their lowest level since mid-2008.



NOTE: Report on continuing claims lags initial claims by one week
Source: U.S. Department of Labor © 2011 MCT

covery going on."

Unemployment claims are a sort of week-to-week EKG for the job market. Except for a spike

this spring, after the earthquake and tsunami in Japan hurt U.S. manufacturing, they have fallen steadily for a year and a half.

Claims peaked at 659,000 in March 2009. In the four years before the Great Recession, they mostly stayed between 300,000 and 350,000. That claims are edging closer to that range is a sign that the layoffs of the past three years have all but stopped.

"We haven't yet really seen substantial numbers of new jobs, but this is definitely an encouraging sign of what lies down the road," said Sam Bullard, an economist at Wells Fargo.

The steady decline may also herald a further decline in the unemployment rate, which fell in November to 8.6 percent from 9 percent the month before. The December rate will be announced Jan. 6.

If unemployment claims keep declining, the unemployment rate might fall as low as 8 percent before the November elections, said Dan Greenhaus, chief global

strategist at BTIG LLC, a boutique brokerage.

The presidential election will turn on the economy. Ronald Reagan holds the post-World War II record for winning a second term with the highest unemployment rate. He won in 1984 with unemployment at 7.2 percent.

Economists will also watch closely on Jan. 6 to find out how many jobs were added this month. It added at least 100,000 each month from July through November, the best five-month streak since 2006.

"When you fire fewer people, hiring unquestionably follows," Greenhaus said. He expects employers to create as many as 200,000 jobs per month if the trend continues.

In another encouraging report Thursday, the Conference Board's index of leading economic indicators rose strongly in November for the second straight month, suggesting that the risks of another recession are receding.

Bombs Rock Baghdad, Raising Fears Of War

BY REBECCA SANTANA
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A terrifying wave of bombs tore through mostly Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad on Thursday, killing at least 69 people and evoking fears that Iraq could dissolve into a new round of sectarian violence now that American troops have left.

The attacks appeared to be a well-coordinated assault by Sunni militants linked to al-Qaida and targeted markets, grocery stores, cafes and government buildings in a dozen neighborhoods. They coincided with a government crisis that has already strained ties between the two sects to the breaking point.

For many Iraqis, this could be the beginning of a nightmare scenario: The fragile alliance in the governing coalition is collapsing, large-scale violence bearing the hallmarks of al-Qaida insurgents has returned and Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki may be moving to grab the already limited power of the minority Sunnis.

"The conditions that perpetuate civil wars are making a hasty comeback," said Ramzy Mardini, an analyst at the Insti-

tute for the Study of War in Washington.

The bombings may be linked more to the withdrawal of the last U.S. troops Sunday than the political crisis, but all together the developments raise the specter of a return to the Shiite-Sunni sectarian bloodshed that pushed Iraq to the brink of civil war in 2006 and 2007.

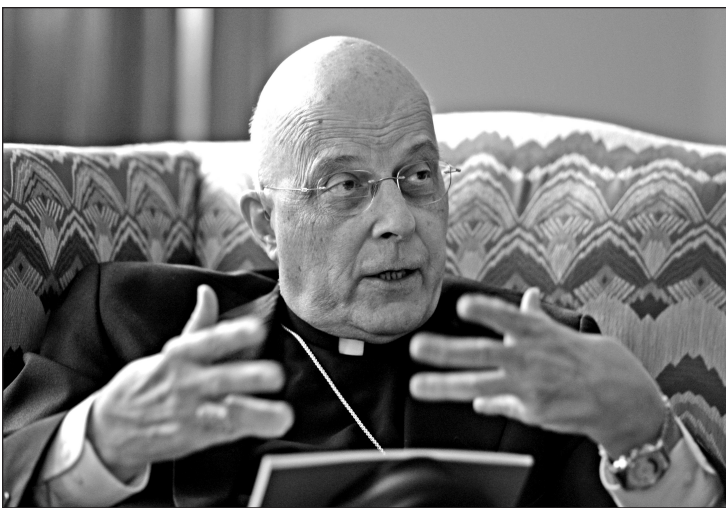
Al-Maliki is engaged in a showdown with the top Sunni political leader in the country. His government has issued an arrest warrant for Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi for what al-Hashemi says are trumped-up charges that he ran hit squads against government officials.

That has thrown Iraq's political community into a crisis, with Sunnis suspicious that al-Maliki is making a power grab in the wake of the American military departure.

Thrown into this already heated mixture was some of the worst violence Iraq has seen this year.

At least 16 blasts went off across Baghdad, killing 69 people and wounding nearly 200 more.

Most exploded in the morning but at least two struck Thursday evening.



BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT
Cardinal Francis George is seen in this 2011 file photo in Chicago, Illinois. Gay rights groups say the Chicago archbishop crossed the line when he compared the gay rights movement to the Ku Klux Klan.

Cardinal George Compares Gay Rights Groups To KKK

CHICAGO (AP) — Chicago Cardinal Francis George is drawing criticism after comparing the gay rights movement to the Ku Klux Klan.

George was asked during an interview on WFLD-TV what he thought about a local priest's concerns that the city's annual gay pride parade might interrupt morning Mass at his church.

George replied that he was concerned the gay rights movement might "morph into something like the Ku Klux Klan,

demonstrating in the streets against Catholicism."

He says the rhetoric of the KKK and some in the gay rights movement involving the Catholic Church was similar.

On Thursday, a coalition of Catholic groups that work for LGBT rights called George's comments "crude" and "demagogic."

Organizers of the June parade agreed Wednesday to start later to avoid disrupting church services.

Wal-Mart Pulls Formula After Baby Dies In Missouri

BY ALAN SCHER ZAGIER
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Wal-Mart and health officials awaited tests Thursday on a batch of powdered infant formula that was removed from more than 3,000 stores nationwide after a Missouri newborn who consumed it apparently died from a rare infection.

The source of the bacteria that caused the infection has not been determined, but it occurs naturally in the environment and in plants such as wheat and rice. The most worrisome appearances have been in dried milk and powdered formula, which is why manufacturers routinely test for the germs.

Wal-Mart pulled the Enfamil Newborn formula from shelves as a precaution following the death of little Avery Cornett in the southern Missouri town of Lebanon.

The formula has not been recalled, and the manufacturer said tests showed the batch was negative for the bacteria before it was shipped. Additional tests were under way.

"We decided it was best to remove the product until we learn more," Wal-Mart spokeswoman Dianna Gee said. "It could be returned to the shelves."

Customers who bought formula in 12.5-ounce cans with the lot number ZP1K7G have the op-

tion of returning them for a refund or exchange, Gee said.

The product is not exclusive to Wal-Mart. The manufacturer, Mead Johnson Nutrition, declined to answer questions about whether formula from that batch was distributed to other stores.

"We're highly confident in the safety and quality of our products," said Christopher Perille, a spokesman for the company based in the Chicago suburb of Glenview.

A second infant fell ill late last month after consuming several different types of powdered baby formula, but that child recovered, health officials said.

Powdered infant formula is not

sterile, and experts have said there are not adequate methods to completely remove or kill all bacteria that might creep into formula before or during production.

Preliminary hospital tests indicated that Avery died of a rare infection caused by bacteria known as Cronobacter sakazakii. The infection can be treated with antibiotics, but it's deemed extremely dangerous to babies less than 1 month old and those born premature.

The bacteria are "pervasive in the environment," Perille said. "There's a whole range of potential sources on how this infection may have got started."

John Edwards Seeks Delay For Trial

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Former presidential candidate John Edwards says he has been diagnosed with a medical condition that would make it difficult for him to attend his approaching criminal trial over campaign finances and is asking for it to be delayed.

In a motion filed Thursday, Edwards' lawyers asked a federal judge to delay the start of the Jan. 30 trial for at least two months. They did not disclose his illness and filed sealed records with the court.

"The Defendant has a medical issue ... that will prevent a trial of this matter during the January 2012 Criminal Term," the motion says. "The failure to grant a continuance would be likely to result in a miscarriage of justice."

Members of the defense team could not immediately be reached for comment.

Federal prosecutors filed a separate motion opposing the delay, saying they are ready to try Edwards on six felony and misdemeanor counts related to nearly \$1 million from wealthy donors used to help hide his pregnant mistress during his 2008 run for the White House.

Paul's Quirky Campaign Draws Crowds In Iowa

MAQUOKETA, Iowa (AP) — It's usually a low-key, even quiet affair.

Ron Paul enters a room almost furtively, his narrow shoulders hunched as he takes the stage. For 30 minutes, he delivers something close to an academic lecture on monetary policy, the dangers of overseas military entanglements, the power of the free market and, of course, the importance of freedom.

"You have a right to your life, a right to your liberty and the right to the fruits of you labor so you can keep what you earn," he says to cheers.

The crowd — large by Iowa standards in a Republican presidential race — listens, rapt. The Texas congressman takes questions and poses for a few photos, then disappears behind a door.

A Paul campaign rally is a decidedly stripped-down affair, with few signs, no theme song and a candidate more comfortable discussing a return to the gold standard than glad-handing. His libertarian message, given little attention nationally for most of his long political career, has struck a chord this year with voters angry over bank bailouts, government dysfunction and the burgeoning federal debt.

Judge Hears Arguments In Racial Profiling Suit

PHOENIX (AP) — A judge heard arguments Thursday in a lawsuit that alleges racial profiling in Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio's immigration patrols, a week after federal authorities accused the sheriff's office of a wide range of civil rights violations.

The lawsuit was filed by a handful of Latinos who claim officers based some traffic stops on the race of Hispanics in vehicles, pulling them over without probable cause to inquire about their immigration status.

U.S. District Judge Murray Snow will decide whether he will let the case go to trial or settle the dispute himself by throwing out the case or declaring that the sheriff uses racial profiling in his immigration enforcement.

The suit is among a mounting number of legal challenges against the embattled department, which faced a scathing U.S. Department of Justice report last week, then lost its federal credentials to verify the immigration status of inmates.

A lawsuit filed this week alleges county employees violated a female inmate's rights and ignored her complaints when they kept her shackled before and after her 2009 cesarean section. Meanwhile, a family said they're exploring a possible lawsuit after an inmate found unresponsive following a jail cell fight with deputies was taken off life support and died days later.

Arlington Markers May Need Replacement

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — Thousands of grave markers at Arlington National Cemetery may need to be replaced or added to accurately account for the dead, following a meticulous Army review of each of the nearly 260,000 headstones and niche covers on the grounds.

In a report to Congress on Thursday, the Army found potential discrepancies between headstones and cemetery paperwork on about 64,000 grave markers — about one in four.

Congress ordered the review last year following reports of misidentified and misplaced graves that led to the ouster of the cemetery's top executives.

The report found no further evidence of misplaced graves, though it cautioned that its review is not complete and that some errors could have gone undetected.

There are potentially thousands of minor errors, including misspelled names, or incorrect military ranks and dates of birth and death.

The Army compared information on every headstone to its internal records, scouring handwritten logs of the dead from the Civil War and a hodgepodge of other records to verify accuracy.

In an interview, the cemetery's executive director, Kathryn Condon, said reviews are ongoing and it's premature to try to estimate exactly how many headstones may need replacement.

To be sure, many of the 64,000 discrepancies will turn up no problem with a headstone — it may be as simple as a typo on an internal record. And in many cases, the discrepancies are not errors at all but reflect past practices at the cemetery that are now considered outdated.

One of the biggest surprises uncovered by the review was that in most of the early 20th century, the cemetery did not include the name of a wife on a headstone when she was buried next to her husband.

OBITUARIES

Buzz Mann

Buzz Mann, 83, of Yankton died Wednesday, Dec. 21, 2011, at the Dougherty House, Sioux Falls.

Memorial services are at 11 a.m. Wednesday, Dec. 28, at the United Church of Christ (Congregational), Yankton, with the Rev. Paul Opsahl officiating, with military rites by the Ernest-Bowyer VFW Post #791, Yankton and the SDARNG, Sioux Falls. A private family burial will take place. Visitations are 4-7 p.m. Tues-

day at Opsahl-Kostel Funeral Home and Crematory, Yankton, with a 7 p.m. prayer service and a Masonic Lodge Service. Visitations will resume one hour prior to the service at the church.

Kevin Naber

PHILIPPINES — Kevin D. Naber, 50, formerly of Yankton, died suddenly at his home in the Philippines on Dec. 13, 2011.

Memorial services are pending with the family.

Private nonsectarian cemetery offering earth burial plots, mausoleum crypts and niches.

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Fill the puzzle so that every row, every column, and every section contain the numbers 1-9 without repeating a number.

	6	8		9	3			
7			2					
	5						7	
		3			9			4
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INTERMEDIATE INT BOOK 27 #8

Yesterday's Solution

8	7	3	5	2	1	6	4	9
5	6	4	7	3	9	1	2	8
2	1	9	8	6	4	7	3	5
9	5	2	1	4	7	8	6	3
4	3	1	2	8	6	5	9	7
7	8	6	3	9	5	4	1	2
3	4	5	9	1	8	2	7	6
1	2	8	6	7	3	9	5	4
6	9	7	4	5	2	3	8	1

EA BOOK 27 #8

su|do|ku

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Check tomorrow's paper for the solution to today's puzzle.



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