

Job Openings Plunged By One-Quarter Last Year

WASHINGTON (AP) — Finding a job got much tougher last year, as the number of available openings fell by nearly one quarter.

At the same time, the unemployed population soared by more than one-third, leaving more laid-off workers competing for fewer jobs.

All told, there were 6.1 unemployed workers in December, on average, for every available position, according to Labor Department data released Tuesday.

That's a sharp increase from 3.4 jobless workers per opening in December of 2008, and much worse than the 1.7 unemployed people per opening in December 2007, when the recession began.

The economy grew in the second half of last year and gross domestic product, the broadest measure of output, rose by a healthy 5.7 percent in the fourth quarter.

That should lead to more hiring, but employers are reluctant to add jobs. Many companies are unsure about whether the recovery will continue, economists say, and how health care reform and other government policies will affect them.

"No business hires into uncertainty and right now there's too much uncertainty in the markets," said Harry Griendling, CEO of DoubleStar Inc., a consulting firm specializing in recruitment.

Much of the economy's recent growth stems from government stimulus and one-time factors such as restocking of inventories. As those supports evaporate, many analysts expect the economy to grow at a slower pace.

"Businesses can't look forward a quarter or two and say, 'I'm definitely going to be growing,'" Griendling said.

There were 2.5 million jobs available at the end of December, according to the Labor Department's Job Openings and Labor Turnover survey. That includes all jobs publicly listed by companies and government agencies.

That may seem like a lot given the severity of the recession, but that's down from 3.2 million in December 2008, a drop of 22.5

percent. And it's way below the 4.8 million openings that existed in June 2007, the peak reached before the recession.

The drop is a slight improvement from the 26.4 percent annual decline experienced in 2008.

The picture eased slightly in December from the previous month, as available jobs increased by about 60,000 from November. December's ratio of 6.1 unemployed workers per job was better than November's 6.3, the highest on records dating from 2001.

As a result of the uncertainty, many companies are hiring temporary workers rather than creating permanent jobs, Griendling said.

But the Labor Department's survey on job openings doesn't include temporary agency jobs. Temp jobs have been one of the job markets' few bright spots recently, adding about 250,000 jobs in the past four months.

Small businesses, which create most of the new jobs in the United States, are still reluctant to hire, according to a survey released Tuesday by the National Federation of Independent Business.

More small companies plan to cut workers in the next three months than add them, the NFIB's report said. Only 10 percent of small firms had jobs available last month, the same as December, but far below the 21 percent with open jobs in December 2007, when the recession began.

SNOW

From Page 1

staff," he said. "We have 18 bus routes out there where we are driving on county and township roads. So, we look at weather conditions, what is the forecast — wind, ice, heavy snow or a combination of everything: We visit with local law enforcement and county road supervisors, and then make the call based on all the information present."

All of the administrators contacted agreed that making the call is not an easy decision. "I would simply say that one of the toughest decisions to make is to not have school or start it late," said Gayville-Volin Superintendent Jason Selchert. "Most school administrators are not interested in forecasting weather or trying to guess what will happen to roads in remote country areas."

Selchert added that it is very difficult to have school when small schools around Gayville-Volin have called off, and it is impossible if Yankton or Vermillion or both have called off.

"I would also go on record as saying that in my 11 years as superintendent, it has gotten easier to make the decision (to call off school) because more and more area schools are calling off more often because of severe weather," he said. "I feel that we are forced to do this because of the public scrutiny associated with all the bad things that can happen that are out of our control. No school wants to be the one that has a

Area School Days Lost To Weather	
Andes Central.....	4
Avon.....	4
Bloomfield.....	9.75
Bon Homme.....	4
Centerville.....	9
Elk Point-Jefferson.....	7
Freeman.....	8
Gayville-Volin.....	6
Hurley.....	7
Irene-Wakonda.....	6
Menno.....	5
Parkston.....	5
Sacred Heart.....	5
Scotland.....	4
Vermillion.....	6
Viborg.....	6
Wagner.....	4
Wausa.....	11.25
Yankton.....	5

(As of Monday Feb. 8)

bus slide off the road or an accident that harms or kills one of our students. Using this criteria, it is impossible to outthink the weather and road conditions."

Every district has its own policy regarding making up snow days. For YSD, the days missed have been tacked onto the end of the school calendar. This has moved the last day of school from May 18 back to May 25, with the last possible day to hold school being June 2. Several districts, including Bloomfield, Wausa and Scotland, will be using previously scheduled vacation days to make up the missed time.

"We have built in days off for all of the state tournament Fridays, Presidents Day and Easter," said Scotland Superintendent Damon Alvey. "As we began to lose days due to weather we amended our calendar to return some of those days back to instructional days. For example we have missed four complete days so far. Last month, we amended our calendar to return to school on Feb.

15 (Presidents Day), Feb. 26 (state westling) and March 12 (state girls basketball). We have missed a day since our last board meeting, so we will discuss this month adding March 18 back to the instructional calendar which is our next scheduled day off."

Bloomfield and Wausa schools, which have missed more than 10 days each, have gone a step further adding an additional 15 minutes of instructional time per day to help meet the hours required in Nebraska.

"Beginning Monday (Feb. 8), Bloomfield and Wausa schools will be lengthening the school day 15 minutes for the months of February-April," said Robert Marks, superintendent of both schools. "This will give us approximately three days back. Beyond that, we will lengthen the end of the year for staff mainly. It does us little to no good academically to do that for students. If we really got strapped, we would consider some Saturday school makeup

time, but only as a last resort."

Nebraska law requires elementary schools to be in session for a minimum of 1,032 hours. Middle and high schools must offer 1,080 hours per school year.

Current South Dakota law says that schools must make up any snow days missed up to 10 days, and that all students must attend at least 962.5 hours of instructional time per year.

However, Gov. Mike Rounds, on Tuesday signed House Bill 1023 into law, amending the existing statute. According to the new law, schools don't need to make up any days as long as they've completed 962.5 hours of classroom time, which most schools easily do.

Gayville-Volin has already made up one missed day by converting teacher in-service time to a school day and has added two days to the end of their year.

However, Selchert said that unless his school misses several more days, the district will probably not make them up because it has extra time built into the school calendar, with an extra 103.5 hours already scheduled.

"I was once told by an experienced administrator that, when deciding to have school, you should think like your worst 14-year-old driver. I find if I did that, we wouldn't ever have school," Selchert said. "The underlying factor that we always try to get across to our patrons is: If we have school and you don't feel comfortable sending your child, keep them home."

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KYNT
AM 1450
MORNING COFFEE
WEEKDAYS 7:35 AM
MONDAY-FRIDAY
 Thursday, February 11
 Yankton Chamber,
 Carmen Schramm/
 8:15 C.V.B. Lisa Scheve
 Friday, February 12
 SD Magazine, Bernie Hunhoff/
 8:20 Mike Freeman

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"TO BE WELL" FORUM
SLEEP DISORDERS
Thursday, February 25
12-1 p.m.
 Avera Professional Office
 Pavilion Amphitheatre

If you suffer from high blood pressure or diabetes, have heart disease or history of a stroke, you are at increased risk for sleep apnea. Or if tiredness lasts through the day or snoring begins to affect your sleep, they could be symptoms of a larger problem: sleep apnea.

Please join us Thursday, Feb. 25, to learn from Yankton's foremost experts on sleep disorders and learn if you or someone you know could benefit from a sleep study.

This event is free and open to the public, but space is limited. Please make reservations by calling **605-668-8080**. A light meal will be served.

Michael Pietila, MD
 Board Certified Pulmonologist
 Yankton Medical Clinic, P.C.

Lindy Mahoney, RPSGT
 Sleep Lab Coordinator
 Avera Sacred Heart Hospital

Avera
 Sacred Heart Hospital
 For reservations, call
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