

Unemployment Rate Drops To 5.5 Percent

BY CHRISTOPHER S. RUGABER
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — Unemployment in the U.S. has dropped to a seven-year low of 5.5 percent — the level normally considered the mark of a healthy job market. Yet that number isn't as encouraging as it might sound.

The jobless rate fell in February from 5.7 percent mainly because many people gave up looking for work and were no longer officially counted among the unemployed, the government reported Friday. What's more, wage gains remained sluggish last month.

Those trends suggest that the job

market, while improving rapidly, isn't quite as healthy as it looks.

That complicates the Federal Reserve's task of figuring out when the economy has strengthened enough to withstand higher interest rates. The Fed is considering a rate increase as early as June.

Employers are certainly hiring freely: They added a solid 295,000 jobs last month, the 12th straight monthly gain above 200,000, the government said. It's the longest such stretch since 1994-95.

With employers hiring and the economy growing steadily, the U.S. is easily outshining most other major nations. For example, the unemployment rate in the 19 countries that

share the euro is 11.2 percent, or twice the U.S. rate.

The robust U.S. job gains appear to have convinced many investors that the Fed will soon raise the short-term interest rate it controls. Investors on Friday sold ultra-safe U.S. Treasuries, a sign that many anticipate a rate increase. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note rose to 2.24 percent from 2.11 percent.

And they dumped stocks. The Dow Jones industrial average plummeted 276 points in afternoon trading.

A 5.5 percent unemployment rate is typically consistent with what economists call "full employment" — when the proportion of unemployed people has fallen so low that employers must

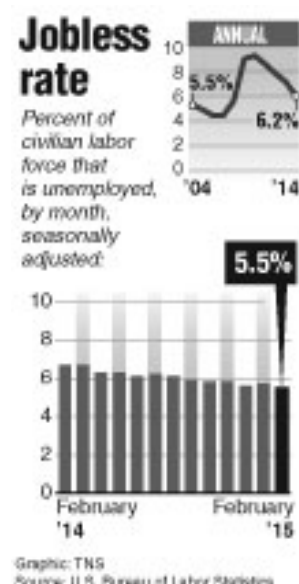
raise pay to find enough qualified workers.

Companies then raise prices to pay for the higher wages. And the Fed usually follows suit by raising its benchmark short-term rate to cool growth and ward off inflation.

But the scars of the Great Recession have made the process hazier and more complicated.

"5.5 percent doesn't mean what it once did," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at Mesirow Financial. Full employment "is always a moving target, and it has moved down."

Since the recession ended in June 2009, the percentage of adults working or looking for work has fallen to a 37-year low of 62.8 percent.



US Senator Amid Federal Investigation

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez, under federal investigation for his relationship with a Florida doctor and political donor, is expected to face criminal charges in the coming weeks, a person familiar with the matter said Friday.

But Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, defiantly told reporters that he had always behaved appropriately while in office.

"Let me be very clear, I have always conducted myself appropriately and in accordance with the law," he said at a press conference in his home state. "Every action that I and my office have taken for the last 23 years that I have been privileged to be in the United States Congress has been based on pursuing the best policies for the people of New Jersey and this entire country."

The person who discussed the expected filing of charges against Menendez did so on the condition of anonymity because the investigation is pending. Attorney General Eric Holder, in South Carolina with President Barack Obama on Friday, declined to say whether he has authorized criminal charges against the senator.

Menendez, who served for more than a decade in the House of Representatives before joining the Senate in 2006, is the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He has been critical of the Obama administration's negotiations with Iran on its nuclear program and outspoken in opposition to normalizing relations with Cuba.

Is Ferguson A Broken Justice System?

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Racial discrimination from police in Ferguson, Missouri, was "oppressive and abusive," President Barack Obama said Friday as he called for criminal justice reform as part of the modern struggle for civil rights.

"It turns out they weren't just making it up. This was happening," Obama said during a town hall at South Carolina's Benedict College, the day before he prepared to commemorate a half-century since the historic civil rights marches in Selma, Alabama.

In his most expansive comments yet about the Justice Department's report on bias against blacks in Ferguson, Obama said it was striking that investigators merely had to look at email sent by police officials to find evidence. He said the City of Ferguson now must make a decision about how to move forward.

"Are they going to enter into some sort of agreement with the Justice Department to fix what is clearly a broken and racially biased system?" Obama said.

Doctor Shocked To Find Ford In Crash

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Dr. Sanjay Khurana was close to finishing a golf game when a vintage plane clipped a tree and "dropped like a rock" onto the next hole's green. He rushed to the crash, finding a pilot bleeding from a deep gash in his head.

When the surgeon got a closer look, he was stunned to see the pilot was Harrison Ford, the actor he grew up watching in the "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones" movie franchises. "I'm a child of the '80s," Khurana said Friday. "I'm a big fan."

One of Hollywood's pre-eminent stars, who is also an experienced pilot, crash-landed his World War II-era plane Thursday, but he was conscious and able to talk when witnesses pulled him from the wreckage.

Soon after Ford took off from Santa Monica Municipal Airport near Los Angeles, he radioed that the single engine of his 1942 Ryan Aeronautical ST3KR stopped working and he was going to make an immediate return.

Ferguson Police Chief Stays On The Job

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Ferguson Police Chief Tom Jackson was still on the job Friday, two days after a government report blasted his beleaguered department for years of racial profiling, and the mayor refused to speculate about the chief's future, saying his role was not to "just chop heads."

Meanwhile, three Ferguson employees implicated in racist emails exposed by that report are now gone from their jobs, the mayor said. One was identified as a city court clerk.

Calls for Jackson's removal were renewed again this week after the Justice Department cleared Darren Wilson, the white former Ferguson officer who shot Michael Brown, of federal civil rights charges in the death of the 18-year-old, who was black and unarmed.

A second report released simultaneously found patterns of racial profiling, bigotry and profit-driven law enforcement and court practices in the St. Louis suburb that has come to represent the tension between minorities and American police nationwide.

Attorney General Eric Holder told reporters Friday that the federal government will "use all the power that we have to change the situation" in Ferguson, including possibly dismantling the police force.

India Celebrates Holi, A Colorful Festival

NEW DELHI (AP) — Holi, India's joyful and colorful celebration of the arrival of spring combined with several religious legends, has long ceased to be only a Hindu festival.

The streets and lanes across most of India on Friday turned into a large playground where people of all faiths threw colored powder and water at each other.

Children are free to toss water balloons at unsuspecting passers-by.

The celebration begins the night before Holi, when large bonfires are lit, to mark the victory of good over evil.

Then it's time for the fun with colors to begin. The cautious may smear themselves with mustard oil or Vaseline so the colors don't damage their skin too much. Then it's time for the fun with colors to begin. The cautious may smear themselves with mustard oil or Vaseline so the colors don't damage their skin too much.



AL SEIB / LOS ANGELES TIMES

Los Angeles city fire personnel look into the vintage plane that crashed on the Penmar golf course not far from Santa Monica Municipal Airport Friday, March 6, 2015 in Venice, Calif. Harrison Ford was piloting the plane Thursday when it clipped a tree at the Penmar Golf Course, then landed on a fairway, just blocks from the runway. Ford was hospitalized with moderate injuries.

Harrison Ford Survives Crash-Landing On Golf Course

BY LYNN ELBER AND TAMI ABDOLLAH
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — When a man battles Darth Vader, Nazis and other evil-doers for work, what does he do for fun? Harrison Ford's answer is found in a pilot's license and the freedom to take to the skies at will.

But with adventure comes risk, just as Han Solo, Indiana Jones and other daring movie characters brought to life by Ford realized. On Thursday, one of Hollywood's preeminent stars added a plane crash to an aviation record that includes both mishaps and public service.

Ford, 72, who as dashing archaeologist Jones battled Hitler's henchmen in the World War II-set "Raiders of the Lost Ark," was flying a vintage plane of that era when it lost engine power shortly after takeoff from Santa Monica Municipal Airport.

The plane crash-landed on a golf course near the airport where Ford houses the craft.

He was pulled from the plane and given initial help by doctors who happened to be playing golf on the course that is right next to Santa Monica Municipal Airport, Los Angeles fire officials said. He was then taken by ambulance to a hospital in a condition described as fair-to-moderate.

"He had no other choice but to make an emergency landing, which he did safely," Ford spokeswoman Ina Tre-

ciokas said. "He was banged up and is in the hospital receiving medical care."

The injuries are not life-threatening and he is expected to make a full recovery, she said in a statement Friday night. No one on the ground was hurt.

Ford, who is known to shun attention to his private life, has been publicly effusive about his love of flying. After arriving in his own plane at a 2001 fundraising gala for Seattle's Museum of Flight, Ford said he was glad to help "engage kids in the romance and the mystery and the adventure of flying. ... I know what it means."

Ford took off from the LA area airport at 2 p.m. Friday. About 20 minutes later, he told the tower that he had engine failure and was making an immediate return, according to a recording posted by the website LiveATC.net.

The plane had been flying at about 3,000 feet and hit a tree on the way down, according to witnesses and officials.

Ford had a cut to his forehead and scraped arms, but it wasn't clear what internal injuries he may have had, Los Angeles Assistant Fire Chief Patrick Butler said. "He wasn't a bloody mess. He was alert. He had good vitals," Butler said.

The bystanders pulled him from the plane because they were afraid it might explode or catch fire, Butler said.

The plane, a yellow 1942 Ryan Aeronautical ST3KR with stars on its wings, was

upright and with damage mostly confined to the front. No one on the ground was hurt.

"I would say that this is an absolutely beautifully executed — what we would call — a forced or emergency landing, by an unbelievably well-trained pilot," said Christian Fry of the Santa Monica Airport Association.

The airport's single runway sits amid residential neighborhoods in the city of more than 90,000 on the Pacific Ocean. City leaders and many residents advocate closing the airport, citing noise and safety concerns. Other airplanes taking off or landing there have crashed into homes, and in September 2013 four people died when their small jet veered into a hangar and caught fire.

He came down on a fairway of Penmar golf course.

"Immediately you could see the engine started to sputter and just cut out, and he banked sharply to the left," said Jeff Kuprycz, who was golfing when he saw the plane taking off. "He ended up crashing around the eighth hole."

Kuprycz estimated the plane was about 200 feet overhead when it plunged to the ground.

"There was no explosion or anything. It just sounded like a car hitting the ground or a tree or something. Like that one little bang, and that was it," Kuprycz said.

Charlie Thomson, a flight instructor at the airport who saw Ford take off, said engine failure like Ford's does not make the plane harder to maneuver. "It just means you have to go down," he said.

Global Outrage Over IS Group Attack On Ancient Site

BY VIVIAN SALAMA AND SAMEER N. YACCOUB
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq's most revered Shiite cleric joined UNESCO Friday in decrying the Islamic State group's attack on the renowned archaeological site of Nimrud, a nearly-3,000-year-old city in present-day Iraq whose treasures were one of the 20th century's most significant discoveries.

The destruction is part of the Sunni extremist group's campaign to enforce its violent interpretation of Islamic law by purging ancient relics they say promote idolatry. Last week, the group released video of its fighters smashing artifacts in the Mosul museum, and many fear that Hatra, another ancient site near Mosul, could be next.

Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani said in his Friday sermon that such destruction "demonstrates their barbarism and savagery and antagonism against the Iraqi people, not only in the present but also to its history and ancient civilizations."

In Paris, the head of the U.N.'s cultural agency called it a war crime.

Iraqi authorities were still trying to assess Friday exactly how much of the ancient site was destroyed when the militants bulldozed Nimrud on Thursday, since the area remains in militant hands.

"The destruction of Nimrud is a big loss to Iraq's history," Qais Mohammed Rasheed, the deputy tourism and antiquities minister, told The Associated Press on Friday. "The loss is irreplaceable."

A farmer from a nearby village told the AP Friday that militants began carrying tablets and artifacts away from the site two days before the attack, which began Thursday afternoon. The militants told the villagers that the artifacts are idols, which are forbidden by Islam, so it was necessary to destroy them, the farmer said, speaking anonymously for fear of reprisals.

UNESCO, however, has previously warned that the group was selling ancient artifacts on the black market for profit. Rasheed said authorities have not ruled out the possibility that the militants removed some of the artifacts to preserve them for sale before bulldozing the site.

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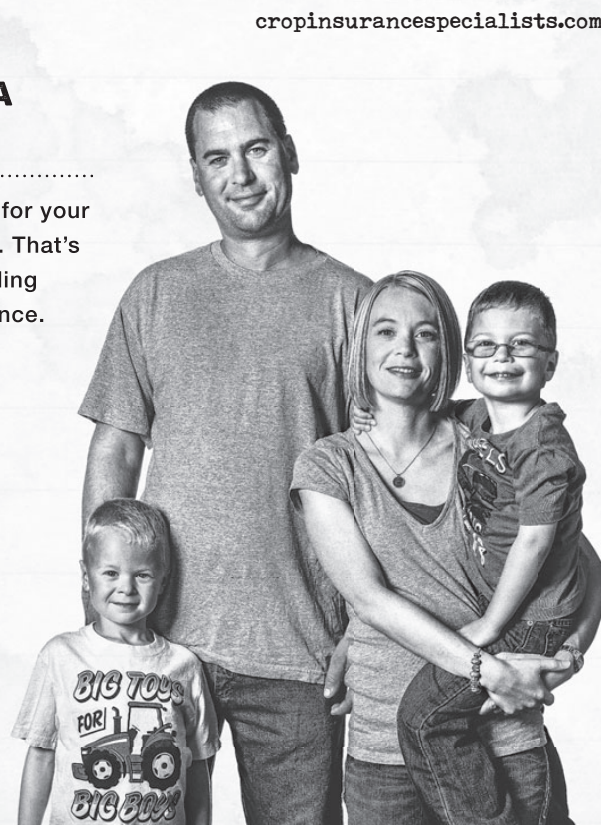
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