

Many Jobless Unemployed More Than A Year

WASHINGTON (AP) — For more Americans, being out of work has become a semi-permanent condition. Nearly one-third of the unemployed — nearly 4.5 million people — have had no job for a year or more. That's a record high. Many are older workers who have found it especially hard to find jobs. And economists say their prospects won't brighten much even after the economy starts to strengthen and hiring picks up. Even if they can find a job, it will likely pay far less than their old ones did. The outlook is unlikely to improve on Friday, when the government issues its monthly jobs report. Economists predict it will show that employers added a net 56,000 jobs in September. That's far fewer than needed to reduce unemployment. The unemployment rate is expected to remain 9.1 percent for a third straight month.

Medical Pot Shops Threatened With Closures

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Federal prosecutors have launched a crackdown on pot dispensaries in California, warning the stores that they must shut down in 45 days or face criminal charges and confiscation of their property even if they are operating legally under the state's 15-year-old medical marijuana law. In an escalation of the ongoing conflict between the U.S. government and the nation's burgeoning medical marijuana industry, at least 16 pot shops or their landlords received letters this week stating they are violating federal drug laws, even though medical marijuana is legal in California. The state's four U.S. attorneys are scheduled to announce a broader coordinated crackdown at a Friday news conference.

Their offices refused to confirm the closure orders. The Associated Press obtained copies of the letters that a prosecutor sent to at least 12 San Diego dispensaries. They state that federal law "takes precedence over state law and applies regardless of the particular uses for which a dispensary is selling and distributing marijuana." "Under United States law, a dispensary's operations involving sales and distribution of marijuana are illegal and subject to criminal prosecution and civil enforcement actions," letters signed by U.S. Attorney Laura Duffy in San Diego read. "Real and personal property involved in such operations are subject to seizure by and forfeiture to the United States ... regardless of the purported purpose of the dispensary." The move comes a little more than two months after the Obama administration toughened its stand on medical marijuana following a two-year period during which federal officials had indicated they would not move aggressively against dispensaries in compliance with laws in the 16 states where pot is legal for people with doctors' recommendations.

Obama Questions GOP Stance On Jobs Bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — In challenging Republicans to get behind his jobs bill Thursday, President Barack Obama argued Republicans have supported his proposals before, demanded that they explain themselves if they oppose him, and challenged others to come up with a plan of their own. The rhetoric in the president's quick-moving press conference dodged some facts and left some evidence in the dust.

OBAMA: "If it turns out that there are Republicans who are opposed to this bill, they need to explain to me, but more importantly to their constituencies and the American people, why they're opposed, and what would they do."

THE FACTS: While Republicans might not be campaigning on their opposition to Obama's plan, they've hardly kept their objections a secret.

In a memorandum to House Republicans Sept. 16, House Speaker John Boehner and members of the GOP leadership said they could find common ground with Obama on the extension of certain business tax breaks, waiving a payment withholding provision for federal contractors, incentives for hiring veterans, and job training measures in connection with unemployment insurance.

They objected to new spending on public works programs, suggesting instead that Congress and the president work out those priorities in a highway spending bill. And they raised concerns about Obama's payroll tax cuts for workers and small businesses, arguing that the benefits of a one-year tax cut would be short-lived. The memo also pointed out that reducing payroll taxes, which pay for Social Security, temporarily forces Social Security to tap the government's general fund. And it opposed additional spending to prevent layoffs of teachers, police officers and other public workers.

CDC: Children's Trips To ERs On The Rise

ATLANTA (AP) — The number of athletic children going to hospitals with concussions is up 60 percent in the past decade, a finding that is likely due to parents and coaches being more careful about treating head injuries, according to a new federal study.

"It's a good increase, if that makes any sense," said Steve Marshall, interim director of the University of North Carolina's Injury Prevention and Research Center.

"These injuries were always there. It's not that there are more injuries now. It's just that now people are getting treatment that they weren't getting before," said Marshall, who was not involved in the new research.

Bicycling and football were the leading reasons for the kids' brain injuries, but health officials said that could be at least partly related to the popularity of those activities. For example, it's possible many more kids bike, so a larger number of bike-related injuries would be expected.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study is based on a survey of 66 hospital emergency departments that was designed to be nationally representative. The CDC looked at non-fatal data for the years 2001 through 2009 for kids and teens ages 19 and younger.

Protesters Fed Up With Both Parties

BY BETH FOUHY AND VERENA DOBNIK
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Their chief target is Wall Street, but many of the demonstrators in New York and across the U.S. also are thoroughly disgusted with Washington, blaming politicians of both major parties for policies they say protect corporate America at the expense of the middle class.

"At this point I don't see any difference between George Bush and Obama. The middle class is a lot worse than when Obama was elected," said John Penley, an unemployed legal worker from Brooklyn.

The Occupy Wall Street movement, which began last month with a small number of young people pitching a tent in front of the New York Stock Exchange, has expanded nationally and drawn a wide variety of activists, including union members and laid-off workers. Demonstrators marched Thursday in Philadelphia, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles and Anchorage, Alaska, carrying signs with slogans such as "Get money out of politics" and "I can't afford a lobbyist."

The protests are in some ways the liberal flip side of the tea party movement, which was launched in 2009 in a populist reaction against the bank and auto bailouts and the \$787 billion economic stimulus plan.

But while tea party activists eventually became a crucial part of the Republican coalition, the Occupy Wall Street protesters are

cutting President Barack Obama little slack. They say Obama failed to crack down on the banks after the 2008 mortgage meltdown and financial crisis.

"He could have taken a much more populist, aggressive stance at the beginning against Wall Street bonuses, and exacting certain change from bailing out the banks," said Michael Kazin, a Georgetown University history professor and author of "American Dreamers," a history of the left. "But ultimately, the economy has not gotten much better, and that's underscored the frustration on both the right and the left."

Obama on Thursday acknowledged the economic insecurities fueling the nearly 3-week-old Wall Street protests. But he pinned responsibility on the financial industry and on congressional Republicans he says have blocked his efforts to kick-start job growth.

"I think people are frustrated and the protesters are giving voice to a more broad-based frustration about how our financial system works," he said at a nationally televised news conference. "The American people understand that not everybody has been following the rules, that Wall Street is an example of that ... and that's going to express itself politically in 2012 and beyond."

The president has been pushing for a \$443 billion jobs plan to be paid for in part through a tax on the wealthy. Republicans have resisted such tax increases.

GOP presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Herman Cain have criticized the anti-Wall Street protests. All the Republican contenders have also pushed back against the demonization of Wall Street. They accuse the Obama administration of setting regulatory policies that have stifled job creation and say his health care overhaul will prevent many businesses from hiring new workers.

In Zuccotti Park, the center of the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York, activists expressed deep frustration with the political gridlock in Washington. While some blamed Republicans for blocking reform, others singled out Obama.

"His message is that he's sticking to the party line, which is 'we are taking care of the situation.' But he's not proposing any solutions," said Thorin Caristo, an antiques store owner from Plainfield, Conn.

But Robert Arnow, a retired real estate worker, said the Republicans need to tell their congressional leaders, "You're standing in the way of change."

Quayzy Cayusso, a Web designer, didn't watch Obama's news conference even though it was broadcast on TV monitors at the protest site in New York.

"He's a cool president, but he was given a hard task," Cayusso said. "He should get some gratitude for what he's done so far, but he's been overlooking jobs and not putting much effort into that until now."

Senate Postpones Final Vote On China Currency

BY JIM ABRAMS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Senate vote to impose sanctions on China for its unfair currency practices was put off Thursday, delayed by the partisan divisions that have come to characterize this Congress.

The bill, which makes it easier to raise tariffs against Chinese goods if China keeps its currency undervalued, is now set for a likely vote Tuesday, when it is expected to pass with bipartisan support.

But partisanship ruled the day Thursday when Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Republican leader Mitch McConnell couldn't agree on what amendments would be allowed, and Democrats used their majority powers to push through a rule change that restricts the offering of non-relevant amendments to legislation.

The China currency legislation, years in the making, reflects frustration at the failures by the

Obama administrations and past presidents to change Chinese policy through diplomacy, and the Chinese economic onslaught that saw the trade deficit with China hit \$273 billion last year.

It is aimed at the practice of keeping the yuan, the Chinese currency, undervalued against the dollar, making Chinese exports cheaper and U.S. products sold in China more expensive. Economists say the yuan is 25 percent to 30 percent undervalued, with some putting the figure as high as 40 percent, giving Chinese producers a significant advantage against American competitors.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., cited estimates that China has cost the U.S. some 2 million manufacturing jobs in the past decade and that the advantage Chinese producers have because of the undervalued currency could prove devastating as China prepares to enter world markets in commercial aircraft and automobiles.

"We cannot continue to let China flaunt the rules," Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said. If action isn't taken, "we may never recover as a country. This is serious stuff."

The legislation, even if it passes the Senate, is still a long way from becoming law. House supporters of a similar bill say they have 225 co-sponsors, enough to pass it, but Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, doesn't like it and could prevent it from reaching the floor for a vote. He said this week that it was "pretty dangerous" to tell another country how to set its monetary policy.

The White House has remained noncommittal, but has emphasized the importance of working through diplomatic and international channels rather than challenging the Chinese with unilateral action that could result in retaliation from the Chinese.

President Barack Obama said at a news conference Thursday that it was "indisputable" that the

Chinese "intervene heavily in the currency markets." He said China "has been very aggressive in gaming the trading system to its advantage and to the disadvantage of other countries, particularly the United States."

He said the Senate bill was an effort to get at these practices, but he stressed that whatever tools are put in place must adhere to international treaties and obligations.

But the legislation has bipartisan backing from senators responding to popular resentment to the way China has come to dominate U.S. markets and driven American manufacturers out of business.

The Alliance for American Manufacturing, a labor-management partnership that supports the bill, cites figures that a 28.5 percent appreciation of the yuan would create up to 2.25 million American jobs and reduce the annual trade deficit by \$190.5 billion.

Court Considers Ga. Ban On Guns In Churches

BY GREG BLUESTEIN
Associated Press

ATLANTA — There's a legal battle brewing in Georgia over whether licensed gun owners should be allowed to carry firearms to churches, synagogues, mosques and other places of worship after state lawmakers banned them from doing so last year.

The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta heard arguments Thursday on a lawsuit brought by the central Georgia church and gun rights group GeorgiaCarry.org claiming that the law violates their constitutionally protected religious freedoms. State lawyers said it was a small price to pay to allow other worshippers to pray without fearing for the safety. The panel of judges roundly criticized the suit after hearing oral arguments but didn't immediately make a ruling.

Georgia is one of a handful of states with the restrictions — court papers say Arkansas, Mississippi and North Dakota have also adopted similar laws — and court observers, religious leaders and Second Amendment groups are closely watching the outcome of this case.

If Thursday's arguments are

any indication, the challengers are facing a tough fight. All three judges on the panel raised technical legal concerns about the lawsuit targeting the 2010 law that banned people from carrying weapons into houses of worship.

It seemed the biggest stumbling block was the group's decision to target the state but not the local prosecutors and authorities who would actually enforce the law. Judges pounced on GeorgiaCarry.org attorney John Monroe as soon as he began making his arguments.

"We're not asking you to put in more defendants," said Circuit Judge Gerald Bard Tjoflat. "What we're saying to you is there's nothing we can do for you."

The lawsuit was brought on behalf of the Baptist Tabernacle of Thomaston, where the Rev. Jonathan Wilkins said he wanted to have a gun for protection while working in the church office. The judge also questioned how banning firearms in a place of worship violates religious freedoms.

At one point, Circuit Judge Ed Carnes questioned whether there's any passage in the Bible that allows guns in churches. Did

any challenger, he wondered, argue: "Thou shalt have the right to bring a gun to church?"

GeorgiaCarry.org attorney John Monroe said his client quoted scripture that underpinned his beliefs on firearms, but he wasn't able to offer any of the quotes at the hearing.

State attorney Laura Lones, meanwhile, countered that the law only minimally restricts gun rights in churches. She argued the law can be interpreted to allow gun owners to bring their weapons into houses of worship as long as they have permission and keep the weapons secured. Carnes, though, called it a "creative" interpretation of the statute.

The lawsuit revolves around a long-standing fight between gun owners and state lawmakers over where they're allowed to bring their firearms. Most gun rights advocates cheered when Georgia lawmakers lifted restrictions in 2010 that had long banned them from bringing their weapons into

public gatherings.

But the overhaul left intact restrictions that banned guns from being carried into government buildings, courthouses, jails and prisons, state mental health facilities, nuclear plants and houses of worship. It also restricted owners from bringing weapons into bars without permission from the owner.

Critics of the law argue that churches shouldn't be included in the restrictions, which mostly involve public buildings.

"We're not trying to force churches to allow guns in their sanctuary," said Kelly Kennett, a gun owner who is president of GeorgiaCarry.org. "Churches should be treated like any other private property owner. Why are you treating people at churches differently than how you'd be treated at a store, at a bank, at a club?"

But some religious leaders say the ban is needed to keep violence out of places of worship.

OBITUARIES

Gordon Campbell

SANTEE, Neb. — Gordon Campbell, 45, of Santee, Neb., died Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2011, at Avera Creighton Hospital. Funeral services for are pending at Brockhaus Funeral Home, Niobrara, Neb.

Erna Cook

Erna E. Cook, 95, of Yankton died Thursday, Oct. 6, 2011, at Avera Yankton Care Center, Yankton. Arrangements are pending with Wintz & Ray Funeral Home and Cremation Service, Yankton.

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