

## NATION/WORLD DIGEST

## Unemployment High Despite Some Hiring

WASHINGTON (AP) — Unemployment is stuck at high levels even though some companies are hiring. The problem, government data show, is that too few jobs are being created for the growing number of people looking for work.

Private employers added a net total of 67,000 jobs in August. But the unemployment rate rose to 9.6 percent from 9.5 percent, the Labor Department said Friday, because the number of job-seekers overwhelmed the number of openings.

The unemployment rate has exceeded 9 percent for 16 straight months and is all but sure to extend that streak into next year. If it does, it would break a record of 19 straight months above 9 percent, set from 1982-83, after a severe recession.

Nearly 15 million people are unemployed this Labor Day week-end, and the sluggish economy is putting pressure on President Barack Obama and the Democrats ahead of the November midterm elections. Obama said Friday that he intends to unveil a new package of proposals that will likely include tax cuts and spending to spark job growth.

On top of the jobs that companies created last month, both July and June's private-sector job figures were upwardly revised. Overall, the economy lost 54,000 jobs last month as 114,000 temporary census positions ended.

## Pakistani Taliban Claim Suicide Bombings

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — A suicide bombing claimed by the Pakistani Taliban killed at least 43 Shiite Muslims at a procession in southwest Pakistan on Friday. The assault sharply drove up the toll of sectarian assaults in a country battered by massive flooding.

To the northwest in Pakistan's restive tribal regions, two suspected U.S. missile strikes killed at least seven people in an area controlled by one of the main groups battling Americans in neighboring Afghanistan, Pakistani intelligence officials said.

Two other militant bombings left at least two people dead and several wounded on a day convulsed by the violence that threatens the stability of Pakistan's weak civilian government — an essential but problematic Western ally in the fight against Islamist militants.

The first attack of the day was a roadside bombing in the northwestern city of Peshawar that killed one police officer and wounded three others, officials said.

Hours later, a suicide attack on a mosque belonging to the minority Ahmadi sect killed at least one person and wounded several others in the nearby town of Mardan.

## Authorities: Fire At Tenn. Mosque Was Arson

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. (AP) — Federal investigators have decided a suspicious fire that damaged construction equipment at the site of a future mosque in Tennessee was arson.

U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives agent Steven Gerido said Friday that lab tests confirmed an accelerant was used in the fire early Saturday in Murfreesboro.

The fire engulfed the cab of a dump truck, and authorities found fresh fuel pooled under a second dump truck and some fingerprints near the fuel tank.

The site is the location for a new Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, which has drawn increasingly vehement opposition, including protest marches and some vandalism. One opponent said she received death threats after appearing on "The Daily Show."

A \$20,000 reward is being offered to anyone with information leading to an arrest.

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## Powerful 7.1 Quake Hits New Zealand's South Island

BY RAY LILLEY  
Associated Press Writer

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — A powerful 7.1-magnitude earthquake struck much of New Zealand's South Island early Saturday and caused widespread damage, but there were just two reports of serious injuries.

Looters broke into some damaged shops in Christchurch, police said.

The quake, which hit 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of the southern city of Christchurch according to the state geological agency GNS Science, shook a wide area, with some residents saying buildings had collapsed and power was severed. No tsunami alert was issued.

GNS Science initially reported the quake as magnitude 7.4, but later downgraded it after re-examining quake records. The U.S. Geological Survey, in America, measured the quake at 7.0.

Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker declared a state of emergency four hours after the quake rocked the region, warning people that continuing aftershocks could cause masonry to fall from damaged buildings.

The emergency meant parts of the city would be closed off and some buildings closed as unsafe, he said.

Minister of Civil Defense John Carter said a state of civil emergency was declared as the quake was "a significant disaster," and army troops were on standby to assist.

Parker said the "sharp, vicious earthquake has caused significant damage in parts of the city ... with walls collapsed that have fallen into the streets."

Chimneys and walls had fallen from older buildings, with roads blocked, traffic lights out and power, gas and water supplies disrupted, he said.

The fronts of at least five buildings in the central city have collapsed and rubble is strewn across many roads, Christchurch resident Angela Morgan told The Associated Press.

"Roads have subsided where water mains have broken and a lot of people evacuated in panic from seaside areas for fear of a tsunami," she said, adding that "there is quite significant damage, really, with reports that some people were trapped in damaged houses."

## Obama Plans New Economic Aid Package

BY ERICA WERNER  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Eager to jumpstart the economy ahead of crucial midterm elections, President Barack Obama said Friday he intends to unveil a new package of proposals, likely including tax cuts and targeted spending, to spark job growth.

Obama spoke in the Rose Garden after the August jobs report came out better than expected, showing the private sector adding 67,000 new jobs last month and revising upward the numbers from June and July. But unemployment ticked upward to 9.6 percent as more people entered the job market, and the president said it wasn't good enough.

"That's why we need to take further steps to create jobs and keep the economy growing, including extending tax cuts for the middle class and investing in the areas of our economy where the potential for job growth is greatest," Obama said.

"We are confident that we are moving in the right direction, but we want to keep this recovery moving stronger and accelerate the job growth that's needed so desperately."

Administration officials say a big new stimulus bill like last year's \$814 billion measure is not in the offing — nervous lawmakers looking to November's balloting would not be expected to approve an expensive new measure. But Obama said he'd be proposing a new set of ideas next week. He's likely to detail them during a speech on the economy Wednesday in Cleveland, midway through an economy-focused week capped by a rare White House news conference.

Obama's package could include a number of provisions that have lan-



President Barack Obama speaks on a report on jobs and unemployment as Secretary of the Treasury Tim Geithner looks on in the Rose Garden at the White House on Friday, September 3, 2010, in Washington, DC.

OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT

guished in Congress for much of the year, including infrastructure bonds for municipalities and extensions for a series of tax breaks for businesses and individuals that expired at the end of 2009. Democratic leaders are considering making one of the tax breaks permanent, for businesses that invest in research and development.

They are also considering extending a law passed in March that exempts companies that hire unemployed workers from paying Social Security taxes on those workers through December. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., has proposed extending the exemption an

additional six months.

Obama is continuing to prod the Senate to pass a bill that calls for about \$12 billion in tax breaks for small businesses and a \$30 billion fund to help unfreeze small business lending. Republicans have likened the bill to the unpopular bailout of the financial industry. And the president wants to make permanent the portion of George W. Bush's tax cuts affecting the middle class.

The House has already passed many of the provisions, but they have stalled in the Senate

because Republicans and Democrats could not agree on how to pay for them.

Jim Manley, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Reid hoped to be able to get the small business measure through once the Senate goes back in session later this month but the prospect for other ideas was cloudier. Moreover, some of the ideas are relatively small bore, so even if they did pass in the next month or two it's unlikely they'd make a real dent in the economy before the elections.

## What Now? Fire Complicates Oil Drill Debate

BY MATTHEW DALY  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — What now for the Gulf?

News of another oil rig fire in the Gulf of Mexico, so soon after the BP oil spill, has set off a wave of anxiety along the Gulf Coast and prompted calls for the government to extend its six-month ban on deepwater drilling.

Just when it seemed the Obama administration might be ready to lift the unpopular ban, the fire raises new questions about the dangers of offshore drilling, leaving the industry wondering when it can get back to work.

"Anything that casts any kind of shadow on the industry right now certainly complicates lifting the moratorium," said Bruce Bullock, director of the Maguire

Energy Institute at Southern Methodist University in Texas. "It makes it difficult to continue to say that (the BP spill) is an aberration."

But while initial reports were frightening, Bullock and other experts said Thursday's platform fire is unlikely to have a lasting effect.

Unlike the April explosion of the Deepwater Horizon rig — which killed 11 people and led to the largest offshore oil spill in the nation's history — the fire at the Mariner Energy Inc. platform 100 miles south of Louisiana killed no one and sent no crude gushing into the water.

"There's over 100 fires in the Gulf in a given year. Were it not for the BP incident this would receive very little coverage," Bullock said. "This could have

happened in a meat factory or a paint factory or anywhere else."

Even so, environmental groups and some Democratic lawmakers rushed to denounce offshore drilling and urged the Obama administration to extend the six-month deepwater ban to shallow water as well. The current ban has shut down drilling at 33 ocean wells, but there still are more than 7,300 active leases in the Gulf of Mexico, 58 percent of them in deep waters, according to the American Petroleum Institute.

There are about 3,400 platforms operating in the Gulf, pumping about a third of America's domestic oil.

The latest fire "is another reminder that drilling accidents happen all too frequently. We cannot afford to lose any more human lives, nor can we tolerate further damage to the Gulf and its irre-

placeable ocean ecosystems," said Jacqueline Savitz of the environmental group Oceana.

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., a leading critic of BP, said the fire highlights the risks associated with offshore drilling. Lawmakers "have a duty to ... all oil workers to make sure the oil industry's drilling practices are safe and sound," Markey said.

The Interior Department has said it is considering lifting the ban for certain categories of rigs before the scheduled Nov. 30 expiration. But after Thursday's accident the department may hesitate to act.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said he didn't think the incident would affect the drilling moratorium. Gibbs resisted any effort to link the platform fire to the BP spill.

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