

Employers chopped 80,000 jobs in March

WASHINGTON (AP) — Employers buffeted by talk of recession slashed 80,000 jobs in March, the most in five years and the third straight month of losses.

At the same time, the national unemployment rate rose from 4.8 percent to 5.1 percent, the clearest signal yet that the economy might already be shrinking.

The new snapshot of the job market, released by the Labor Department today, underscored the damage that a trio of crises — in the housing, credit and financial sectors — has inflicted on companies, jobseekers and the economy as a whole.

“The labor market has indeed turned south,” said Joel Naroff, president of Naroff Economic Advisors. “That was the one last bastion of hope to stay out of a recession. Now the question is how deep and how long will it last?”

The unemployment rate was the highest since September, 2005, when significant job losses followed the devastating blows of Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Job losses were widespread in March. Construction, manufacturing, retailing, financial services and various business services all racked up losses. That overwhelmed gains elsewhere, including in education and health care, leisure and hospitality as well as in government.

On Wall Street, stocks fell, with the Dow Jones industrials down more than 80 points in morning trading.

The new employment figures were much weaker than economists were expecting. They were anticipating a drop of 50,000 payroll jobs and the unemployment rate to rise to 5 percent.



Commuters climb the stairs Thursday from a train station as they head to jobs in New York's financial district.

The 5.1 percent rate, while relatively modest by historical standards, was the highest in 2½ years.

Job cuts in both January and February turned out to be even deeper. Employers got rid of 76,000 in each month. The elimination of 80,000 jobs in March was the most since March 2003, when the labor market was still struggling to recover from the 2001 recession.

The economy is suffering the effects of a housing collapse, a credit crunch and a financial system in turmoil. That's causing people and businesses to hunker down, crimping spending, capital investment and hiring. Those things in turn further weaken the economy in what has become a vicious cycle.

For the first time, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke acknowledged Wednesday that the country could be heading toward a recession, saying federal policymakers are “fighting against the wind” in combating it. Many other economists and the public believe

the recession already has arrived.

Bernanke wouldn't tip his hand about the Fed's next move. However, many economists believe the central bank will lower interest rates again when they meet later this month, and they said Friday's employment report would justify another reduction perhaps by half a point.

The Fed has taken a number of extraordinary actions recently — slashing interest rates, providing financial backing to JP Morgan's takeover of troubled Bear Stearns and opening an emergency lending program for big investment houses. All the actions are ultimately aimed at limiting damage to the national economy.

With a public on edge, Congress, the White House and presidential contenders are scrambling to come up with their own relief plans even as they engage in a political blame game.

In March, construction companies cut 51,000 jobs, factories eliminated 48,000

positions, retailers cut payrolls by more than 12,000. Professional and business services lost 35,000 jobs and temporary help firms cut nearly 22,000 jobs. Financial firms chopped 5,000 jobs.

When government hiring was removed, the numbers looked even worse. Private employers shed 98,000 jobs in March.

With the pace of hiring slowing down, the number of unemployed people increased to 7.8 million in March; workers with jobs saw only modest wage gains at the same time.

Average hourly earnings for jobholders rose to \$17.86 in March, a 0.3 percent increase from the previous month. That matched economists' forecasts. Over the past 12 months, wages grew 3.6 percent. With lofty energy and food prices, workers may feel like their paychecks are shrinking.

Many analysts believe the economy shrank in the first three months of this year and could still be ebbing now. The government will release its estimate of first-quarter economic growth later this month. Under one rough rule, if the economy contracts for six straight months it is considered in a recession.

Bernanke, however, has said he is hopeful the economy will improve in the second half of this year, helped by the government's \$168 billion stimulus package of tax rebates for people and tax breaks for businesses, as well as the Fed's rate reductions.

Still, even Bernanke predicted this week that the unemployment rate would rise in the months ahead. Some analysts say it could climb to 5.5 percent or higher by

Deaths

Deborah Gregory

Sept. 4, 1944-April 2, 2008

Deborah Gregory, age 63 years, of Lambertville, MI died Wednesday, April 2, 2008, at The Toledo Hospital.

Born Sept. 4, 1944, in West Frankfort, IL, she was the daughter of Perry and Dolores (Russell) Newton.

A 1962 graduate of West Frankfort High School, she married Philip Gregory on Aug. 28, 1965.

Deborah was Building/Grounds Secretary for the Bedford Public Schools for over 20 years, retiring in 2007.

She was a member of Lambertville United Methodist Church and past officer of the Bedford Athletic Boosters and the Football Moms.

She also enjoyed basket making, knitting and spending time with her grandchildren.

Surviving are her loving husband, Philip; children, Brandon Gregory of San Diego, CA, Laura Gregory of Toledo, OH and Matt (Kara) Gregory of Timpson, TX; Mother, Dolores Newton of Oregon, OH and grandchildren, Chaston and Grant Gregory.

Visitation will be held Saturday from 2-7 pm at the Michael W. Pawlak Funeral Home, 1640 Smith Rd. (at Jackman) Temperance, MI, where funeral services will follow at 7:00 pm. Rev. Thomas Zimmerman, pastor of Lambertville United Methodist Church, officiating.

Memorials may be made to the Lions of Michigan Service Foundation.

www.pawlakfuneralhome.com



DEBORAH GREGORY

Sonya Kay Brett

Aug. 18, 1942 - April 2, 2008

Sonya Kay Brett, 65 of Sterling Heights, formerly of Monroe died at 11:05 a.m. Wednesday at Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak. She had been in poor health for a year and a half.

Friends may call from 10 a.m. Saturday at the Rupp Funeral Home where services will be held a 2 p.m. Rev. Timothy Lentner, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Maybee, will officiate and burial will follow at Northside Cemetery, Maybee.

Born August 18, 1942 in Carleton, she was the daughter of Herman and Alice (Zink) Brett. She was a 1964 graduate of Monroe High School, earned a bachelor degree from Eastern Michigan University and a masters of business administration from Michigan State University.

She was a professor of business administration at Macomb County Community College, for forty years.

Surviving are brothers Herman C. (Dora) Brett of Monroe and Harold A. (Phyllis) Brett of Newbern, NC; sister Donna J. Brett of Monroe.

She was preceded in death by her parents, sister Virginia Held and brother Emil Brett.

In lieu of flowers memorials may be made to the charity of the donor's choice.

Online condolences may be sent through www.ruppfuneralhomeinc.com.

www.pawlakfuneralhome.com



SONYA KAY BRETT

Michigan Democrats abandon primary do-over plan

LANSING (AP) — Michigan Democrats were expected to decide today against holding a do-over presidential primary election, The Associated Press has learned.

The state party's executive committee is expected to hold a meeting by phone to vote on a statement saying any kind of election to replace the results of the January 15 primary no longer is possible, according to Democratic leaders who spoke on condition of anonymity because the discussions so far have been private.

Michigan and Florida were stripped of their Democratic National Convention delegates for moving up their primaries.

Presidential hopeful Hillary Rodham Clinton supported holding a second election so the delegates could be seated, but rival Barack Obama feared problems.

State Democrats now hope the two campaigns can agree on a way to split Michigan's 128 pledged delegates so they can be seated at the Aug. 25-28 convention in Denver, Colo. Michigan also has 28 superdelegates, elected officials and other top Democrats who don't have to commit to any candidate before the convention.

Clinton won Michigan's primary, but Obama and several other candidates had withdrawn their names months before the election. Many Obama supporters voted for Uncommitted.

The state Democratic Party already has pushed back the date for choosing national convention delegates to April 19, hoping the matter can be resolved before delegates are chosen.

Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean and four top Michigan Democrats who have been

trying to work out a way to get the delegates seated are expected to put out a statement Friday after the executive committee vote.

In the statement, they're expected to say the DNC is committed to seating Michigan's delegates at this summer's convention as long as any agreement is supported by the party's two presidential contenders.

DNC member Debbie Dingell, U.S. Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, U.S. Sen. Carl Levin and United Auto Workers President Ron Gettelfinger have been working on the statement with Dean.

The national party chairman issued a similar statement earlier this week after meeting with Florida Democratic leaders. He said then that he was “optimistic” that Michigan's delegates would be seated.

Friday's vote will cap weeks of frenzied negotiations to find a way to hold a do-over Michigan election. There was talk last month of holding a June 3 primary run by the state and paid for by private Democratic donors.

But Michigan lawmakers declined to take up a bill setting up that election.

Party officials then considered holding a party-run primary or mail-in election, which would have cost the party millions of dollars. But time is running out to hold the election before a June 10 deadline.

So now the decision on how to divide up the pledged delegates will move to the Clinton and Obama campaigns. The Obama campaign has called for splitting the delegates 50-50, regardless of Clinton's Jan. 15 win. The Clinton campaign so far has rejected that idea.

From Page 1A

IHM (cont.)

and they're going to be building... across the street from where they are now,” she said. “They had these wonderful grapevines, 30-year-old grapevines and they asked if we wanted them since they were just going to dig them up. We took them and we enjoyed them for the first time in the fall.”

The tour of the garden started out virtually, through a computer presentation, before heading outside. The photos of the garden at its height helped those in the seminar envision what it would be like a few months from now.

Ms. McNeil explained that in 2001, the garden went to a community-supported agriculture system, where people can buy shares in the garden and reap the benefits with weekly baskets of fruits and vegetables.

Last year, the garden sold 25 shares, which covered about 50 members.

The garden is not just to produce food, though. The motto — “Caring for the land, building community”

FROM FARM TO TABLE

From Farm to Table: Building a Better Food System in Southeast Michigan

Thursday was the third annual better foods conference organized by the Food System Economic Partnership, a nonprofit organization based in Ann Arbor. The conference is part of the group's effort to join different facets — rural and urban — of food production together.

The aim was to provide an

— falls in line with the sustainability mission of the IHM.

Ms. McNeil said the garden is a natural bridge to the community, acting as a teaching tool for kids as well as adults and showing other communities what they can do.

This year, garden organizers are considering adding a hoop greenhouse to extend the growing season on some plants.

Mary Halfpenny from Leonard, a small town in Oakland County, took the tour Thursday because she has a personal interest in

understanding of the local food system and explore opportunities for growth in production, processing, distribution, sales, and consumption of local foods.

In addition to the garden tour, there were informational sessions scheduled all day. Topics covered a variety of subjects from a special project called the Greening of Detroit to the use of cartoons and marketing on children and the link to obesity.

the topics.

“I never knew this place existed,” she said of the garden and the IHM overall. “This is so cool. I've been picking up a lot of information that I hopefully will be able to use.”

Also missing during the tour were the Canada geese population, which can sometimes overwhelm the fields.

“We're looking into geese management,” Ms. McNeil told the group with a laugh. “I'm a little surprised they didn't make an appearance today. We don't need all of their manure.”

Jobs (cont.)

colleges after the holiday break helped reduce unemployment.

Jobs in Michigan's private sector declined slightly in February by 5,000, with seasonal reductions in trade, transportation and utilities and construction. Those declines were partly offset by hiring in private education.

Although the county's unemployment rate dropped in February, it still was far above the 6.4 percent a year earlier.

The February figures left Monroe County with the 20th lowest unemployment rate among Michigan's 83 counties, an improvement from 29th in January.

The Detroit area's unemployment rate fell to 7.7 percent from 8.2 percent in January. Michigan's rate was unchanged at 7.8 percent.

The national unemployment rate in February essentially was unchanged from January at 4.8 percent. In March, it rose to 5.1 percent

Funerals

Anna M. Mata

Anna M. Mata, 73, of Monroe who died at 3:24 a.m. Wednesday at Mercy Memorial Hospital is survived by a brother, Frank (Millie) Elmer of Monroe.

Mrs. Elmer's first name was incorrect in Thursday's Evening News.

Bernitta H. Szoff

Friends of Bernitta H. Szoff, 84, of Monroe, who died Tuesday, may call until services at 2 today at Rupp Funeral Home.

The funeral home name was omitted from Thursday's Evening News.

Online condolences may be left for the family at www.wheelanpressly.com.

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