

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. U.S. News: BLS Pick Has Forged Partisan Path --- Nominee has praised Trump's policies but lacks the experience of his predecessors.....	1
2. BLS Fights to Stay Afloat in High Seas.....	3
3. Markets: OPEC Lifts Oil-Demand Outlook As It Continues to Boost Output.....	8
4. EXCHANGE --- Jaguar Land Rover Reaffirms Guidance.....	10
5. In U.S.-China Trade Rivalry, Apple's Bet on India Pays Off --- CEO Tim Cook looked beyond China to assemble iPhones.....	12
6. Autos Take \$12 Billion Hit From Trade War.....	16
7. Palantir's Bold Moves Pay Off In White House, on Wall Street --- Data-driven firm is power player in D.C. and most expensive stock in the S&P 500.....	20
8. Business & Finance.....	23
9. U.S. News: Hegseth's Latest Battle: Infighting Inside the Pentagon.....	25
10. U.S. News: Trump, Bessent Tout a New Tack on Debt --- Leaders said they would wait for rates to fall before issuing longer-term bonds.....	28
11. U.S. News: Trump's Tax Law Viewed Skeptically by Americans --- WSJ poll shows 52% oppose the package, seeing it as helping big firms and the rich.....	32
12. World News: Israel's 12-Day War Reveals Gap in U.S. Missile Stockpile.....	35
13. Smaller Cities Lure New Grads.....	37
14. U.S. News: Federal Job Cuts Permitted, But Many Have Left.....	40
15. U.S. News: Projects New and Old Make Trump's List.....	42
16. U.S. News -- Chicago Fed Chief: New Tariffs Cloud Inflation Picture.....	46
17. Wall Street Feels New Tariff Tension --- S&P 500 retreats from record level, while dollar, bond yields, oil prices rise.....	48
18. U.S. News: Trump's 'No Tax on Tips' Vow Contains Caveats.....	50
19. U.S. News: U.S. Watch.....	52
20. Trump's Megabill: Economic Fallout Will Be Muted at First --- Trump's policy law promises a modest economic tailwind, with long-term risks.....	54
21. Wall Street Worries About Crisis-Level Budget Deficits.....	57
22. U.S. News: Medicaid Cuts Affect More GOP Voters --- The party is drawing more lower-income people, complicating politics of policy bill.....	62
23. U.S. News: Senators Press Ahead With Spending Bill --- Marathon of votes highlights the tricky balancing act among Republican factions.....	65

TABLE OF CONTENTS

24. EXCHANGE --- Markets & Finance: Currency Rise Hits Taiwan Tech, Insurers --- Strength of country's dollar will eat into profits from foreign sales and assets.....	67
25. U.S. News: University Tax Hike Set to Lose Controversial Element.....	70
26. U.S. News: Senate Medicaid Cuts Dealt a Setback.....	71
27. U.S. News: Senate Weighs Mileage Standards' End.....	74
28. U.S. News: GOP Plan to Fold Audit Watchdog Into SEC Hits Snag.....	76
29. U.S. News: Blue States Reverse Course On Insuring Undocumented.....	79
30. New Medicaid Cuts Stir More Trouble For GOP Tax Plan.....	81
31. U.S. News: Trump Officials Weighed Broader China Tech Curbs.....	84
32. How Trump Blew Up Northwestern's Business Model --- White House froze its research funding without offering a way to get it back.....	86
33. Markets -- Thursday's Markets: Rate-Cut Optimism Buys Bonds; Stocks Close Modestly Higher.....	91
34. U.S. News: Economists Say Megabill Would Fall Short of Spurring a Boom.....	93
35. Kennedy Center Gets MAGA Makeover --- 'Common sense' programming and gold-tier fundraiser; ticket sales down.....	97
36. World News: Trump Surprises Europeans By Offering Kind Words.....	101
37. U.S. News: Congress's Budget Referee Pushes Back Against GOP Critics.....	102
38. U.S. News: Foreign-Student Crackdown Puts Innovation at Risk.....	105
39. Trade War Clouds Outlook for Maker Of Remy Martin.....	108
40. U.S. News: Bill Adds \$2.4 Trillion to Deficit --- CBO estimate over a decade comes as senators' demands could raise price tag.....	110
41. U.S. News: Senator Draws Red Line on Spending --- Johnson presses for more reductions, including Medicaid, citing growing debt.....	113
42. Markets -- Monday's Markets: Meta, Nvidia Lead Stock Indexes Higher.....	115
43. Indian Tycoon Adani Under New U.S. Scrutiny.....	118
44. U.S. News: The Items At Risk of Being Cut From GOP Megabill.....	121
45. Stocks Post Best Month Since 2023.....	123
46. EXCHANGE --- The Score / The Business Week in 6 Stocks: E.l.f. Beauty Levels Up, Tesla Gets a Boost.....	127
47. Markets: Bank of Montreal Raises Dividend After Earnings Rise.....	129
48. Markets: Japan's Bonds Draw Weak Demand.....	131
49. World News: Putin Pivots Economy to Focus on War --- Ukraine's neighbors fear they could be next; no unwinding seen for military.....	133
50. U.S. News: The Numbers Behind GOP Food Cuts.....	136
51. Fears on Outlook Mar Solid Earnings Season.....	139

TABLE OF CONTENTS

52. Trump Tax Bill Goes to Senate --- Multitrillion-dollar package of spending, tax cuts needs near GOP unity to pass.....	143
53. Treasurys Stabilize After Tax Bill Clears House.....	146
54. Markets: Sale of Schwab Stake Gives TD Bank's Earnings a Lift.....	147
55. U.S. News: How Higher SALT Cap Will Affect Taxpayers.....	150
56. President Tells GOP Dissenters To Drop Objections --- Trump signals waning patience with opposition over Medicaid, SALT cap.....	152
57. U.S. News: Trump Agenda Hangs on Tax Bill Success --- President pressures Republicans to pass legislation that is seen as a 'do or die'.....	155
58. S&P 500 Snaps Six-Day Winning Streak.....	157
59. U.S. News: Panel Advances Budget Bill That Won't Reduce Deficits.....	159
60. Fiscal Concerns Put Pressure On Dollar and Bond Market --- Yields on long-term Treasurys rise further after nation loses AAA rating.....	162
61. U.S. News: New York Fed President Says Levies Cloud Outlook.....	164
62. U.S. News: Panel Advances Budget Bill That Won't Reduce Deficits.....	166
63. U.S. News: Panel Advances Budget Bill That Won't Reduce Deficits.....	169
64. GOP Holdouts Stymie Bill --- Party's right presses more Medicaid cuts, faster wind-down of clean-energy breaks.....	171
65. Bags of Cash From Drug Cartels Flood U.S. Banks --- Chinese money launderers used Chase, Bank of America and Citibank branches.....	174
66. Business & Finance.....	181
67. U.S. News: Top, Middle Earners Get Most Benefits of GOP Bill --- Tax-cut extensions do little for lower incomes, as claiming credits gets tougher.....	182
68. Nissan Posts Big Loss, Doubles Job-Cut Target.....	185
69. U.S. News: Duties Cut On Small Shipments From China.....	188
70. U.S. News: GOP Unveils Tax Plan to Extend Cuts --- Initial version lifts standard deduction, but is silent on issues dividing party.....	189
71. U.S. News: Trump Revives 'Millionaires Tax' Idea.....	192
72. U.S. News: House Republican Puts Tax Bill at Risk --- Bacon objects to deep Medicaid cuts and doesn't buy leaders' assurances.....	194
73. U.S. News: Boston Homeowners Face a \$1 Billion Tax Bill.....	197
74. Lithium Miner Eyes Cost Cuts to Weather Drop in Prices.....	200

TABLE OF CONTENTS

75. World News: German Leader Vows Big EU Role --- Merz aims to forge rapport with Trump, end immigration crisis, boost economy.....	202
76. Temu and Shein Gird For End Of Tariff Loophole.....	204
77. World News: Japan Slashes Growth Forecast.....	207
78. U.S. News: These GOP Lawmakers Hold Key to Tax Bill.....	209
79. U.S. News: Trump Tightens Control of Federal Workforce.....	211
80. World News: German Business Sentiment Inches Up Despite Tariffs.....	214
81. World News: World Watch.....	216
82. U.S. News: IMF Sees Government-Debt Surge.....	218
83. Markets: Markets Defy Dollar's Haven Status as Risk Assets Plunge.....	220
84. U.S. Tries to Crush China's AI Ambitions With Chip Crackdown.....	222
85. U.S. News: Tariffs Aren't the Only Obstacles --- Trump's offensive also targets other nations' regulations, tax policies, licensing.....	226
86. U.S. News: Yields Fall As Worries Mount Over Slowdown.....	228
87. U.S. News: Republicans Push Ahead on Tax Cuts --- Senate GOP seeks to pass a budget framework, advance president's agenda.....	231
88. President Looks to the Past to Remake the Economy --- Trump dreams of new factories and towns revitalized by tariffs, but stocks plunged on fears of hit to growth.....	233
89. U.S. News: Senate GOP Budget Framework Pencils in \$5 Trillion for Tax Relief.....	238
90. Markets: Equities Selloff, Rupiah Slide Signal Broad Indonesia Worry.....	240
91. U.S. News: Senate Republicans Devise Two-Phase Budget Strategy.....	242
92. Elon Musk's Mission to Take Over NASA -- and Mars --- The billionaire is in position to speed up plans for a voyage to the planet, with a potentially huge impact on SpaceX.....	245
93. U.S. Trade Risks Global Fallout --- Foreign investors retreat as America's selloff this year reverses their gains.	249
94. U.S. News: Businesses Bristle at a GOP Tax Proposal.....	254
95. Technology & Business -- Cybersecurity: Cyberattack Response Shifts to States --- Executive order says preparation for hacks should be handled more locally.....	256
96. World News: German Spending Clears Hurdles --- Package for defense and infrastructure aims to jolt economy as U.S. steps away.....	258
97. U.S. News: Florida Looks at Scrapping Its Property Tax.....	261
98. World News: German Economic Sentiment Soars in March.....	264
99. World News: OECD Expects Slower Growth, Faster Inflation.....	266

TABLE OF CONTENTS

100. The Dollar Is Tested by Uncertainty --- Investors are more optimistic about Europe while tariffs cloud U.S. outlook.....	269
101. EXCHANGE --- The Score / The Business Week in 6 Stocks: Trump Boosts Tesla, Tariffs Hit Brown-Forman....	273
102. Hard-Landing Fears Grow on Wall Street.....	275
103. U.S. News: Republicans' Infighting Stalls Tax Bill --- Disagreements on spending cuts and other matters slow House-Senate pact.....	278
104. Kroger Moves to Guard Against Price Hikes.....	281
105. U.S. News: Migrants With No Criminal History Swept Up --- Immigration officers are under pressure to ramp up their arrest numbers.....	283
106. Markets & Finance: Exchange Operator HKEX's Earnings Hit Highs.....	286
107. The Trump 'Special' Staffers Who Get Paid by Private Clients.....	288
108. House Passes Plan Of Tax, Budget Cuts.....	293
109. Cross Country: Connecticut Asks Congress to 'Rethink the Jones Act'.....	296
110. U.S. News: Trump Looks Beyond Fed to Cut Borrowing Costs.....	298
111. U.S. News: House GOP Aims for Tax Cuts of \$4.5 Trillion --- Senate moves ahead with a narrower plan that focuses on border security.....	302
112. U.S. News: Officials in New York Face Lawsuit Over Immigration --- Hochul and James among the targets; \$80 million intended for migrants is pulled.....	305
113. U.S. News: Restraints Slow Work Of Education Staffers.....	308
114. U.S. News: White House Immigration Moves Chill Businesses in Latino Neighborhoods.....	310
115. U.S. News: For Its Budget Math, GOP Banks on Growth.....	312
116. U.S. News: President's Allies Want Quick Border-Bill Win.....	314
117. U.S. News: Tax-Cut Extension Splits Republicans --- House eyes keeping rates low for a while, but Senators view them as permanent.....	317
118. U.S. News: Musk-Targeted Agency Provides Aid Around the World.....	319
119. Wall Street Frets Over U.S. Debt Plan --- New Treasury head has criticized a tack seen as helping markets keep calm.....	321
120. U.S. News: Universities Retreat on DEI After Trump's Order.....	325
121. President Threatens To Widen Trade War --- Trump plans sector- based levies on eve of expected Mexico- Canada-China duties.....	329

TABLE OF CONTENTS

122. U.S. News: GOP Confronts Tough Choices On Spending --- Lawmakers wrestle with how to proceed given slim majority and internal disputes.....	332
123. A Letter From Economists to Trump.....	334
124. Trump and Congress Need to Attack the U.S. National Debt.....	337
125. U.S. News: GOP Tries to Hobble Consumer Agency --- CFPB was created by Democrats in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.....	340
126. U.S. News: White House Tries to Flip Budget Script --- Some advisers think they need to wrest parts of the process away from Congress.....	342
127. Judge Pauses Trump Freeze On Aid After It Sparks Chaos.....	345
128. Business News: Diversified Energy, Maverick Near Deal.....	349
129. D.R. Horton Tops Wall Street View Though Sales Fall.....	351
130. U.S. News: Bird Flu, Bad Weather Send Food Prices Rising Again.....	353
131. EXCHANGE --- TD Bank Accelerates Transition to New Chief Executive.....	357
132. U.S. News: Democrats Help GOP Advance Migrant Crackdown.....	359
133. China's Growth Hits Target for 2024.....	361
134. World News: German Economy Contracts --- Output fell for two years in a row for first time since 2003 ahead of elections.....	364
135. U.S. News: Deaths in the U.S. To Outpace Births By 2033, CBO Says.....	367
136. Investors Bet Profits Will Revive Rally --- With Fed unlikely to cut rates as quickly as hoped, earnings are even more critical.....	371
137. China Export Boom Raises Vulnerability To Trump Tariffs.....	375
138. U.S. News: Fed Official Says Further Cuts Can Wait --- Musalem suggests he favors greater caution in trimming interest rates more.....	377
139. Canada's Trudeau Plans to Step Down.....	380
140. U.S. News: House, Senate Vary on Pace of Legislation.....	382
141. U.S. News: Attack Puts Trump's Border Emphasis in a New Light.....	385
142. Year-End Review & Outlook: Markets & Finance --- How Five Pros Aim to Inflation-Proof Their Investments: Some on Wall Street think the fight to stabilize prices isn't over.....	387
143. U.S. News: Soda Titans Push to Stay Food-Stamp Eligible.....	391
144. Xi Sticks to His Guns As Economy Teeters.....	394
145. U.S. News: Spending Revolt Is Ominous for GOP --- Party tensions present challenges for tackling tax and spending priorities.....	398
146. U.S.'s Agricultural Downturn Hits Farmers, Company Profits.....	401

TABLE OF CONTENTS

147. Private Prisons Foresee A Border Bonanza --- Firms line up to aid Trump deportations, and some consider family detentions.....	405
148. World News: Brazil Weighs Spending Cuts As Currency Is in a Tailspin.....	408
149. EXCHANGE --- Friday's Markets: Stocks Rally on Hopes For More Fed Rate Cuts.....	410
150. U.S. News: In Indiana Town, Many Are Eager for Deportations --- Immigration has become a focal point for Seymour; 'kind of heartbreakin'.....	412
151. World News: Canada Unveils Border Plan to Avert Trump Tariff Threat.....	415
152. Congress Reaches Accord To Avert Shutdown --- Stopgap package has funding for disaster and farm relief, but some in GOP object.....	417
153. World News: Canada's Finance Minister Quits Over Policy Conflict.....	420
154. World News: Beijing Grasps for Ways to Halt Deflation --- Companies pump out goods as prices fall, creating a cycle that erodes confidence.....	422
155. OPEC Trims Its Forecast For Growth in Oil Demand --- Fifth consecutive month of reductions reflects bearish data for third quarter.....	426
156. U.S. News: House Approves \$900 Billion Defense Bill --- Measure would authorize a 14.5% pay raise for some service members.....	428
157. U.S. News: Senate Passes Delayed Disaster Tax Breaks.....	430
158. U.S. News: Congressional Republicans At Odds Over 2025 Strategy.....	432
159. Business News: Scandal Shows Risks of India's Bets on Big Firms.....	435
160. World News: China Studies How Russia Skirts Sanctions --- Officials report back with lessons it could use to prepare for a Taiwan conflict.....	437
161. U.S. News: Blue States Are Gearing Up for New Legal Fights.....	440
162. World News: ECB VP Warns of 'Lose-Lose' Trade War.....	443
163. U.S. News: Bessent's To-Do List: Taxes, Tariffs, Spending.....	445
164. U.S. News: GOP to Pack Goals Into One Bill.....	449
165. Markets Shine Spotlight on Deficits --- Stocks keep hitting records, but the past includes episodes of market unrest.....	451
166. Trump Selects Bessent To Lead Treasury --- Hedge-fund manager has been an economic adviser to campaign team.....	455
167. Irresistible March of Energy Realism.....	458
168. Walmart Is Upbeat About Holiday Sales --- Retailer lifts outlook for year as demand for toys, other goods fuels strong quarter.....	460
169. Biden's Approach to Inflation Left a Big Opening for Trump.....	464

TABLE OF CONTENTS

170. World News: Milei Looks for Trump's Assistance To 'Make Argentina Great Again'.....	467
171. U.S. News: Trump's Plans Complicate Outlook for Trade.....	469
172. World News: Latin American Trade Is Dominated by China.....	472
173. U.S. News: Republicans Eye Deficit Amid Tax-Cut Plans.....	476
174. The Election Results And Your Money.....	479
175. EXCHANGE --- Markets & Finance -- Friday's Markets: Stocks Hit Records in Best Week of Year --- Dow Jones Industrial Average touches 44000 for the first time.....	481
176. World News: China Holds Off on New Stimulus Package --- Investors are disappointed there wasn't a big push to revive the economy.....	485
177. TRUMP TRIUMPHS AGAIN --- Republican former president is first in more than a century to reclaim the White House after losing it.....	487
178. Starbucks CEO Scouted Its Cafes Before Taking Over.....	491
179. U.S. News: Migrant Divide In Miami Fuels Rightward Tilt --- Poorer new arrivals aren't embraced by Venezuelans who arrived years ago.....	495
180. Investing Monthly (A Special Report) --- For These Collectors, It's All About the Cash: Rare banknotes can yield big bucks, if you know what to look for.....	498
181. World News: U.K. Tories Tap Culture Warrior as Leader --- Badenoch takes the reins in the wake of a disastrous election for Conservatives.....	501
182. U.S. News: Meet the Headhunter-in-Chief for Trump --- Howard Lutnick is tasked with finding recruits for possible new administration.....	503
183. AXA Investment Managers Sees Interest in Europe Credit.....	506
184. Deficit Worries Drive Bond Yields Higher.....	508
185. World News: Yellen Warns of West Bank Economic Collapse --- In a letter, several finance ministers urge Israel not to cut Palestinian bank ties.....	511
186. Economists Warn of Potential For Inflation Following Election.....	514
187. World News: Japanese Vote Costs Ruling LDP Absolute Majority in Lower House.....	519
188. MANSION --- Mansion Taxes --- Real-estate pros love to hate them, while local governments embrace them as a new source of funding. How much does the rise of 'mansion taxes' actually affect the housing market?.....	521
189. Mixed Earnings Extend Stocks' Pullback.....	525
190. Chinese Illicitly Move Billions Overseas as Economy Struggles.....	528
191. U.S. News: Election 2024.....	532
192. U.S. Oil Boom Fuels Bust Fears.....	534
193. U.S. News: Election 2024.....	537
194. World News: New U.S. Pacific Strategy Is to Spread Out --- China challenge has America upgrading far-flung runways, reviving '40s airfields.....	540

TABLE OF CONTENTS

195. Xi Pivots on Economy, Scoffs at Full U-Turn.....	544
196. World News: IMF Warns Government Debt to Spike --- Large increases in borrowing will boost the number to \$100 trillion this year.....	548
197. Oval Office Hopefuls: You Get a Tax Break! You Get a Tax Break!.....	550
198. U.S. News: Taxes Ride on Next President, Congress.....	553
199. U.S. News --- THE OUTLOOK: Economists See Higher Inflation With Trump.....	556
200. Deficit Pegged At \$1.8 Trillion For Latest Year --- CBO data show that U.S. red ink persists as tax intake trails entitlement outlays.....	560
201. U.S. News: Vice President's Economic Plan Puts Focus on Consumers.....	563
202. One Year After Oct. 7 Attack, Israel Preps for a Future at War.....	566
203. U.S. News: Deficits Would Rise More Under Trump Than Harris.....	570
204. U.S. News: How Candidates' Stances Have Changed Over Time.....	572
205. U.S. News --- THE OUTLOOK: Migrants' Fiscal Effect Good, but Uneven.....	575
206. U.S. News: U.S. Senate Race In Blue Maryland Is Most Unusual.....	578
207. China Threatens To Blacklist Calvin Klein Owner.....	580
208. Argentine Capital Sees Housing Boom After President Scraps Rent Controls.....	583
209. World News: China Unveils Measures To Aid Its Ailing Economy.....	587
210. U.S. News: Voters, Economists Diverge on Policy.....	590
211. Harris and Trump Proposals Add to Soaring Federal Debt.....	593
212. Ahead of Election, the Wealthy Look for Fail-Safe Estate Plans --- Trusts and lifetime gifts are used as ways to protect assets from potential estate-tax changes.....	599
213. U.S. News: Tax-Cut Proposal Shakes Up Debate On Social Security.....	601
214. U.S. News: Rules Proposed for the 15% Minimum Corporate Tax.....	603
215. World News: Draghi Proposes 'Radical Changes' For EU Economy.....	606
216. Political Economics: An Economic October Surprise Could Roil the 2024 Election.....	608
217. U.S. News: Tax Law Flub Gives Some Firms A Big Break.....	610
218. Harris's Tax Cuts, Increases Take Shape.....	612
219. GOP Rebukes Record as Governor.....	615
220. U.S. News: Trump's Threat of Steep Tariffs Hangs Over Markets.....	618
221. U.S. News -- Capital Account: Trump Risks Misfire in Inflation Rhetoric.....	622
222. U.S. News: Trump Goes on the Attack, Makes His Case for Economy.....	624
Bibliography.....	628

U.S. News: BLS Pick Has Forged Partisan Path --- Nominee has praised Trump's policies but lacks the experience of his predecessors

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FULL TEXT

Conservative economist Erwin John "E.J." Antoni sometimes jokes on social media that the "L" in BLS is silent. President Trump this week tapped Antoni to run the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the agency whose data and methodologies he has long criticized, especially when it produces numbers that Trump doesn't like. Antoni recently proposed suspending the monthly jobs report, one of the most important data releases for the economy and markets. On Tuesday, a White House official noted that Antoni made the comment before he knew he was going to be chosen and that his comments don't reflect official BLS policy.

If confirmed by the Senate, Antoni would run a 141-year-old agency staffed by around 2,000 economists, statisticians and other officials. The BLS has a long record of independence and nonpartisanship that economists and investors say is critical to the credibility of U.S. economic data.

According to a commencement program from Northern Illinois University, Antoni earned a master's and Ph.D. in economics from that school in 2018 and 2020, respectively, and a bachelor of arts from St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. Antoni's LinkedIn profile says he attended Lansdale Catholic High School outside Philadelphia from 2002 to 2006.

According to the profile, Antoni went to work in 2021 as an economist at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative think tank in Austin that has sued the federal government to overturn climate-change regulations. The following year, he joined the conservative Heritage Foundation as a research fellow studying regional economics. He is now the foundation's chief economist and an adviser to the Committee to Unleash Prosperity, a group of conservative economic commentators.

Past BLS commissioners have had extensive research experience, and many have climbed the agency's ranks. Antoni doesn't fit that profile. He doesn't appear to have published any formal academic research since his dissertation, according to queries of National Bureau of Economic Research working papers and Google Scholar. Much of his commentary on the Heritage website praises Trump's policies and economic record. He frequently posts on X and appears on right-wing podcasts such as former Trump adviser Steve Bannon's "War Room," where he criticized the economy under President Joe Biden and lauds Trump's economy.

The Heritage Foundation declined to make Antoni available for an interview and didn't respond to questions about his background.

While Antoni's LinkedIn profile says his Ph.D. concentration was in fiscal policy and labor economics, the dissertation on file at Northern Illinois principally analyzes fiscal policy: the "crowding out" effect of deficit spending, the effect of state taxes on domestic migration, and what he called the irrelevance of credit ratings on municipal debt yields.

According to Google Scholar, Antoni's paper has earned one citation, by the Texas Public Policy Foundation in 2021, while he worked there. Publications by Erika McEntarfer -- the BLS commissioner whom Trump ousted on Aug. 1, midway through her term -- have been cited 1,327 times.

Trump fired McEntarfer after a report showing significant downward revisions to prior months' job growth.

"It's not a matter of making the numbers look good, it's a matter of them being accurate," Antoni said on Bannon's Aug. 1 show after McEntarfer's dismissal. "The models and the methodologies need to be revised."

Antoni told Fox News Digital in an interview on Aug. 4 that "BLS should suspend issuing the monthly job reports" until it changed methodologies. Such a move would be unprecedented, leaving the public and markets without a vital source of information on the economy's health.

His commentary on the data has been partisan. During Biden's final year in office, Antoni argued the consumer-price index was understating inflation. In July 2024, he said its monthly rent data was "stale" and the real costs wouldn't show up until after the election. In fact, while BLS data showed rents rising more slowly than private data in 2021-22, by 2024 the reverse was true: It showed rents up 5.2% that June from a year earlier, compared with 3.2% for Zillow. On Bannon's Aug. 1 show, he wrongly said that Biden had removed McEntarfer's predecessor, Bill Beach, whom Trump appointed in 2019. In fact, Beach remained in the job until his four-year term expired in 2023, something Beach has said he was "very grateful" for.

Conservatives praised Trump's choice. "EJ Antoni is one of the sharpest economic minds in the nation -- a fearless truth-teller who grasps that sound economics must serve the interests of American families, not globalist elites," Heritage Foundation President Kevin Roberts said in a statement.

But several independent economists said he is unqualified. "There are a lot of competent conservative economists that could do this job," said Kyle Pomerleau, a senior fellow at the right-of-center American Enterprise Institute, in a social-media post. "E.J. is not one of them."

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R., La.), chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions said in a statement, "We need a BLS Commissioner committed to producing accurate, unbiased economic information to the American people. Chairman Cassidy looks forward to meeting with Dr. Antoni to discuss how he will accomplish this."

Move Could Backfire If Data Are Seen as Unreliable

Installing a partisan as the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics could prove counterproductive to President Trump, said Renaissance Macro Research economist Neil Dutta.

If E.J. Antoni prods the agency into producing statistics that flatter the administration, the data would either not be seen as credible or would likely delay interest-rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

"Neither of those scenarios actually works to the president's benefit," Dutta said.

Bill Beach, the BLS commissioner appointed during Trump's first term, said Antoni's suggestion of suspending publication of the monthly jobs report would be a bad idea for shoring up trust in the data.

"I think you fix these things while you're also publishing and make that extremely transparent," Beach said. Antoni, he said, "has to be the buffer between the White House and the agency."

By Paul Kiernan

DETAILS

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FULL TEXT

Erika McEntarfer, commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, was having a routine morning a couple of weeks ago at the new BLS headquarters in Suitland, Md.

The federal agency had just published the monthly jobs report, a release that business executives, Wall Street traders and Federal Reserve officials spend weeks anticipating. The figures showed that July hiring was below forecast. But the more striking news: BLS said it had overestimated May and June job creation by 258,000, revealing that the U.S. labor market was much weaker than previously thought.

McEntarfer went on with her day, Aug. 1, mingling with staff and complaining to one colleague that construction on Washington's Metrorail was going to disrupt her commute. She didn't know then that her trip home that evening would be the final leg of a two-decade career in the federal statistics system.

At the White House, Trump's economic advisers had briefed him the day before about the jobs report, disclosing the revisions that upended what the president and his team had previously promoted as political wins. The president wasn't happy.

Trump privately aired one of his longstanding complaints that the federal agency producing the data was dysfunctional, according to a senior administration official. A White House official said the president was upset about the revisions and alleged data inaccuracies but declined to comment on Trump's private discussions.

"President Trump believes businesses, households and policymakers deserve accurate data when making major policy decisions, and he will restore America's trust in this key data," White House spokeswoman Taylor Rogers said. After the BLS released the number, Trump's aides appeared on financial cable channels to voice a positive spin. The president wrote on social media that the agency's numbers had been rigged for years and people there were out to damage him politically. Trump demanded his staff fire McEntarfer.

At 1:36 p.m. that day, the agency leader became another labor statistic, one of the nation's unemployed. At 2:09 p.m., the president announced the firing on social media.

Trump offered no concrete evidence the BLS had manipulated the jobs numbers, either by mistake or design. The agency performs one of the government's least political tasks: collecting data and compiling statistics. The president and his aides said in interviews that the proof of wrongdoing was the significant change from previous jobs reports. Economists defended McEntarfer and said that revisions, even large ones, are evidence of the system's integrity.

Trump said on Monday he planned to nominate E.J. Antoni, the chief economist at the Heritage Foundation and a longtime critic of the agency's handling of jobs data, to lead BLS. The position requires Senate confirmation.

The BLS, part of the Labor Department, and its partner agencies in the Commerce Department operate largely out of public view. Yet the weekly and monthly cadence of reports is practically sanctified by business executives and investors who depend on government data that tracks inflation, hiring and other economic metrics to steer companies and capital through America's \$30 trillion economy.

Despite its importance, the agency has struggled to modernize a system that relies on phone calls and in-person visits. A federal hiring freeze has made it more difficult to keep pace with staff losses while collecting comprehensive economic statistics.

Dozens of well-known economists sent a letter to Congress on July 29, warning that the government's statistics system was approaching a breaking point. They said the responsible agencies needed a budget that supports new

data techniques in parallel with current practices.

"Without focused and funded efforts to modernize how these essential statistics are collected and produced, the quality and quantity of the system's output are at risk," the economists wrote.

During a budget squeeze last year, the BLS narrowly avoided cutting the number of households it calls for the survey that sets the unemployment rate. The agency this year struggled with its most labor-intensive survey -- gathering tens of thousands of prices each month to calculate its main inflation measure. Staff shortages forced the BLS to skip price checks in three of 75 cities.

BLS acting commissioner William Wiatrowski sent an email to the agency's staff, assuring them that the agency's mission was unchanged.

On Thursday evening, Trump met with Stephen Moore, an economist at the right-leaning Heritage Foundation, who presented his own, more upbeat economic statistics.

As Trump looked on, Moore flashed a set of charts in front of TV cameras and told reporters that he had used yet-to-be-published Census Bureau data to determine that household income had risen by more than \$1,000 during Trump's second term so far.

There isn't yet any official data on household income during Trump's second term because of the lengthy time it takes to collect surveys from 75,000 American households.

"I called the president up because I had some very good news from some new data that we've been able to put together that no one has ever seen before," said Moore, who didn't reveal how he obtained the unpublished data.

Trump had briefly nominated Moore to the Federal Reserve Board during his first term, before broad opposition led Moore to withdraw his name.

Those who have worked for the BLS in recent decades share a common memory. Early in their training, they were shown a video recounting how in 1971, former President Richard Nixon grew paranoid that a group of BLS employees sought to undermine him by presenting falsely unfavorable labor-market figures. Nixon ordered them demoted.

The message was that BLS employees must maintain unimpeachable integrity because elected officials unhappy with statistical findings might accuse the agency of malfeasance, said Andrew Cohen, a former BLS employee who saw the film in 2003. "It was, 'Watch your words, because people out there will sometimes try to twist your words and accuse you of fraud,'" Cohen said.

BLS operations have changed little over the past decades, relying on some of the world's largest surveys to ask people and businesses about their economic lives. The agency tabulates the unemployment rate, for example, by calling 60,000 households and asking job questions over the phone. The agency has looked into switching to an internet survey, but accuracy and reliability are seen as so critical that its stodgy workhorse of a system still appeals to many experts and data users more than a modern, untested replacement.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, a newcomer to politics after a career running a Wall Street brokerage, swept into Washington this year ready to shake up the statistics system. Two weeks after his confirmation, Lutnick mused publicly that the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis would remove government spending from the calculation of the size of the U.S. economy -- known as gross domestic product or GDP. Such a change to the nearly century-old measure of the nation's economic health would be about as drastic as taking sugar out of a cookie recipe.

Like many outside of government, Lutnick also expressed astonishment about the timeworn, analog fashion that BLS workers collect data. They "literally call to Lincoln, Nebraska, and ask what the price of cargo pants is," Lutnick said in a magazine interview last month.

The truth is, there isn't anyone checking prices in Lincoln anymore.

Lincoln is one of 75 locales in the U.S. where the BLS checks prices in person to calculate inflation, a job that until recently was chiefly handled by two local agency employees, Deborah LaPlante and LynnAnn Scharf.

The two women spent their days working independently, driving to auto dealers, medical offices and clothing stores around Lincoln, where they recorded the prices of various goods and services including SUVs, doctor's visits, shirts and pants. Over the years, Scharf befriended store managers on her rounds and taught one how to use published BLS

data to learn about the economy. She and LaPlante always tried to meet for lunch, she said, but it was hard to find time.

Scharf left the BLS in June last year, and now, in her 60s, works as a horticulturist for the local parks department, a lower-stress job. LaPlante died in September, Scharf said. The BLS would typically have hired replacements. But on the first day of his second term, Trump ordered a government hiring freeze. By June, price checks ground to a halt in Lincoln, Provo, Utah, and Buffalo, N.Y.

The BLS's other 72 price-checking zones also face staffing shortages. In those places, the agency is missing about 15% of the prices it would normally aim to collect, the agency said. The BLS is now getting only about 80% of the price data it used to, according to Omair Sharif, founder of analysis firm Inflation Insights.

Turnover is high among front-line agency price-checkers, who earn, on average, about \$45,000 a year. In the past, the BLS hired roughly the same number of price checkers as those who left, according to records reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. Yet between October of last year -- the start of the government's fiscal year -- and mid-June, the agency's inflation-data staff lost substantially more workers than it added.

The BLS recently said it planned to discontinue 350 data series from the producer-price index, eliminating data on wholesale prices for such items as leather goods, lawn furniture and candles.

The resource squeeze has been under way for more than a decade. In inflation-adjusted terms, the agency's spending power -- based on annual budgets of around \$650 million -- fell by about a fifth over the past 15 years, according to The Friends of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a BLS advocacy group.

For the coming fiscal year, the Trump administration asked Congress to reduce the BLS budget by about 10%, saying the cuts would be made up from cost savings in its plans to merge the BLS into the Commerce Department. The economists who wrote to Congress warning of a crisis -- who included former BLS commissioner Erica Groshen, former Federal Reserve Vice Chairman Alan Blinder and Nobel winner Paul Romer -- begged lawmakers to, at worst, keep funding unchanged.

While the number of workers shrinks, the task of asking individuals and businesses to volunteer their data has become a tough sell.

The response rate for the monthly survey used for unemployment statistics has dropped below 70% from nearly 90% a decade ago. When businesses are asked how many workers they employ, more are late to reply. That means the BLS's initial report on monthly job creation, on the first Friday of the following month, is more of a guess than ever, and big revisions are more likely as tardy data trickles in during the next weeks and months.

Last year, while McEntarfer was commissioner, the BLS published one batch of stats about a half-hour late and on another occasion published a set of figures a half-hour early -- high-stakes mistakes given that traders collectively bet billions on what they predict the reports will say.

Carson Markley joined the BLS in Dallas in 2022, shortly after finishing a master's degree in international relations. He was assigned to survey companies for the producer-price index, the key gauge of inflation for wholesale prices.

The job was sometimes frustrating because of a limited staff and a large workload, said Markley, who had to get company managers on the phone or catch them in person. Many businesses were reluctant to participate, worried about the time spent or that the government would leak or misuse private data, Markley said. Some he contacted thought it was a scam.

"From what my older colleagues told me, they used to be able to get data easily. They could get dozens of companies a week to sign up" to join surveys, Markley said. "Nowadays, everything's so politically divisive that we weren't able to."

Markley said he was glad when he landed a new job in Chicago outside the federal government.

At a news conference last month, before McEntarfer was fired, Fed Chair Jerome Powell said the central bank was still getting the data it needed to make sound decisions on interest rates but emphasized the need to keep the stats system healthy.

"People in the economy, they use this data a lot," Powell said. "It's very hard to accurately capture in real time the output of a 20-plus-trillion-dollar economy. And the United States has been a leader in that for 100 years, and we

really need to continue that."

On Tuesday, the BLS published its most closely followed inflation measure, the consumer-price index, for July.

By Matt Grossman, Brian Schwartz and Rachel Louise Ensign

DETAILS

Subject:	Government agencies; Hiring; Employees; Economic conditions; Social networks; Economic statistics; Prices; Presidents; Modernization; Gross Domestic Product--GDP; Inflation; Family income; Unemployment; Economists; Economic growth; Households
Business indexing term:	Subject: Hiring Employees Economic conditions Social networks Economic statistics Gross Domestic Produ ct--GDP Inflation Unemployment Economists Economic growth; Industry: 92111 : Executive Offices
Location:	United States--US
People:	Trump, Donald J; McEntarfer, Erika
Company / organization:	Name: Heritage Foundation-Washington DC; NAICS: 541720; Name: Bureau of Labor Statistics; NAICS: 921110, 923110
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Document 3 of 222

Markets: OPEC Lifts Oil-Demand Outlook As It Continues to Boost Output

Petroni, Giulia . Petroni, Giulia.

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FULL TEXT

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries raised its oil-demand forecast for next year after agreeing to another bumper production increase in a push for market share.

The Vienna-based cartel now expects global oil demand to grow by 1.38 million barrels a day in 2026, up from 1.28 million previously, driven by stronger economic activity across key regions. This year's demand growth is still seen at 1.29 million barrels a day.

Global economic growth estimates were also slightly lifted. While trade uncertainties persist and might contribute to inflationary pressures, fiscal-stimulus measures and monetary policy support are expected to offset some of these effects, OPEC said.

The global economy is now projected to grow 3% this year, up from a previous estimate of 2.9%, while next year's forecast remains unchanged at 3.1%.

U.S. economic growth is seen at 1.8% in 2025 and 2.1% in 2026, while the eurozone forecasts were raised to 1.2% for both years.

Oil prices have traded within a narrow range in recent months amid concerns over the impact of President Trump's tariffs on the global economic outlook and an anticipated supply glut in the coming months, when seasonal demand typically weakens.

In afternoon trade in Europe, Brent crude stood above \$66 a barrel, while the U.S. oil gauge West Texas Intermediate hovered around \$64 a barrel, following Trump's decision to extend a deadline for higher tariffs on China.

The move helped ease fears of an escalating trade war that could weigh on the economy and curb demand for crude. Traders are now awaiting Friday's meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, as any resolution for a peace deal in Ukraine would likely pave the way for looser sanctions and increased oil supply.

In July, overall OPEC crude-oil production rose by 263,000 barrels a day to 27.54 million barrels a day, while the total production of OPEC+ members increased by 335,000 barrels a day to 41.94 million barrels a day. Output from Kazakhstan -- which has repeatedly created tensions within the group -- fell by 36,000 barrels a day to 1.83 million, but remained above the country's quota of 1.5 million.

This month, OPEC+ members agreed to add 547,000 barrels a day in September, completing the reversal of 2.2 million barrels a day of voluntary cuts a full year ahead of schedule. Physical oil indicators suggest seasonal demand could absorb the additional supply, but traders remain wary that these extra barrels might flood a market already facing a sizable surplus.

The group's primary goal is to regain market share lost to U.S. shale producers during years of output cuts, according to market watchers. However, lower prices pose a challenge for producers' fiscal budgets, complicating OPEC's balancing act.

Eight key members of the OPEC+ alliance are now scheduled to meet on Sept. 7 to discuss their next steps, with investors expecting the group to hold production policy steady.

Meanwhile, supply from producers outside of the wider OPEC+ alliance is expected to rise by 810,000 barrels a day this year and 630,000 barrels a day the next, driven by the U.S., Canada, Brazil and Argentina, the cartel said in its latest report.

By Giulia Petroni

DETAILS

Subject:	Economic growth; Global economy; Market shares; Tariffs; Petroleum production
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Location:	United States--US
Company / organization:	Name: Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries--OPEC; NAICS: 813910
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Document 4 of 222

EXCHANGE --- Jaguar Land Rover Reaffirms Guidance

Chopping, Dominic . Chopping, Dominic.

[🔗 ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

Jaguar Land Rover backed guidance for the current fiscal year despite President Trump's trade policies and the transition of its Jaguar brand leading to a slump in revenue and earnings.

The British automaker, owned by India's Tata Motors, said revenue in its fiscal first quarter fell 9.2% to 6.6 billion pounds, equivalent to \$8.87 billion, while profit after tax fell 51% on year to GBP 248 million.

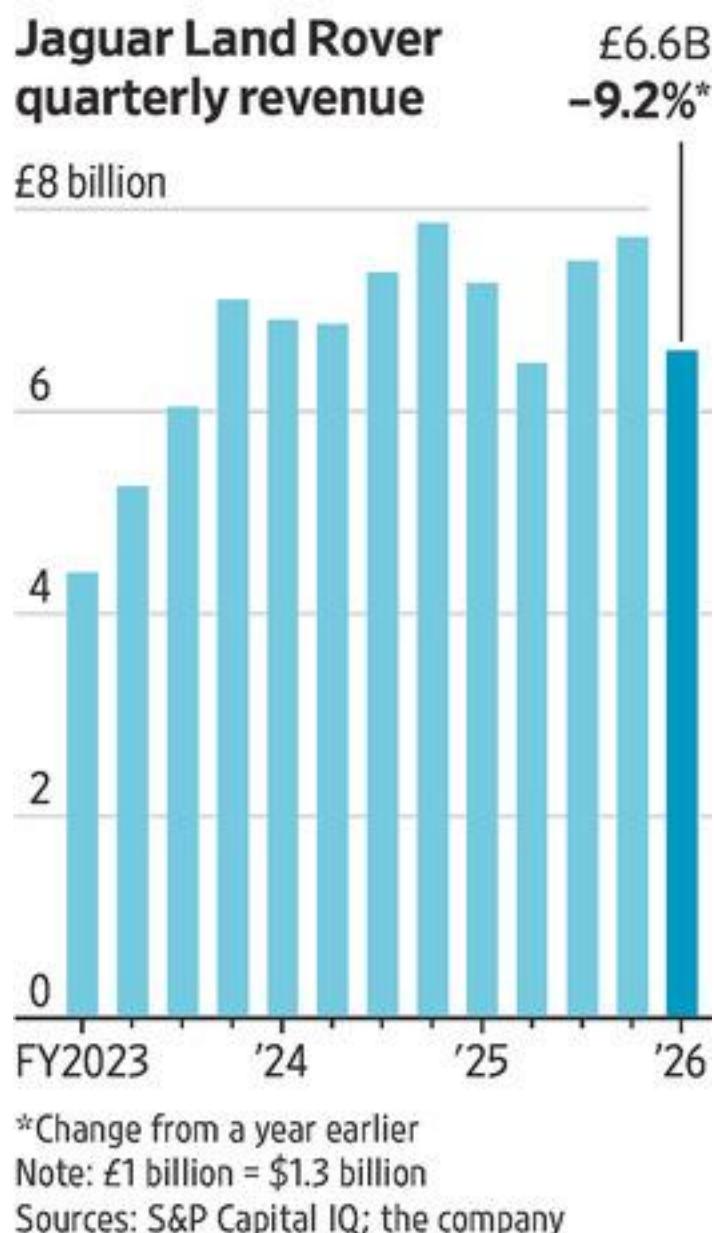
The results were hit by new U.S. trade tariffs, after Trump slapped a 25% tariff on top of an existing 2.5% duty on U.K. and EU-made vehicles exported to the U.S. in April.

The exact financial cost of tariffs wasn't disclosed, but JLR said they had a "direct and material impact." The U.S. accounts for around a quarter of global sales and JLR doesn't have any production in the country. It paused shipments to the U.S. during April after the initial tariffs were implemented. Most of its production is in the U.K., but it also manufactures its Land Rover Discovery and Land Rover Defender models in Slovakia.

The U.K. has since secured a deal that sees the tariff rate dropping to 10% for the first 100,000 British-made cars imported into the U.S., while the European Union has agreed a blanket 15% rate.

JLR has stopped selling Jaguar models as part of its move to transition the brand to an all-electric marque, which further dented earnings, while currency effects also weighed, it said.

Guidance for fiscal 2026 remains unchanged, with the company targeting an earnings before interest and taxes margin of 5% to 7%.



Enlarge this image.

By Dominic Chopping

DETAILS

Subject:	Tariffs; Financial performance
Business indexing term:	Subject: Tariffs Financial performance; Corporation: Jaguar Land Rover Automotive PLC
Location:	United States--US; United Kingdom--UK
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Document 5 of 222

In U.S.-China Trade Rivalry, Apple's Bet on India Pays Off --- CEO Tim Cook looked beyond China to assemble iPhones