

Job growth in March sails past predictions

Unemployment dips as average monthly gains beat pre-pandemic levels

BY LAUREN KAORI GURLEY, ABHA BHATTARAI AND RACHEL SIEGEL

Employers in the United States added 303,000 jobs in March, soaring past expectations and reflecting renewed strength in a labor market that continues to prop up the broader U.S. economy.

The unemployment rate ticked down to 3.8 percent last month, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Friday, extending the longest stretch of unemployment below 4 percent in five decades.

The jobs market is charging ahead in 2024, churning out more jobs per month on average than before the pandemic. Job growth in March was notably higher than the average monthly gain over the past year, which was around 231,000, according to the agency.

“This was a very strong jobs report across a variety of metrics,” said Nick Bunker, economic research director at the jobs site Indeed. “It gives really positive implications for the short-term health of the labor market and the labor market’s capacity to bounce back from the pandemic.”

President Biden has been making an election-year case that economic gains made during his administration help all voters, and he trumpeted Friday’s jobs report.

“Today’s report marks a milestone in America’s comeback,” Biden said in a statement about the job gains. “Three years ago, I inherited an economy on the brink. With today’s report of 303,000 new jobs in March, we have passed the milestone of 15 million jobs created since I

SEE JOBS ON A13



DEMETRIUS FREEMAN/THE WASHINGTON POST

With Maryland Gov. Wes Moore (D) at his left, President Biden speaks Friday against a backdrop of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge. Its deadly March 26 demise was caused by a container ship crash. Biden pledged to “move heaven and earth” to rebuild.

In Baltimore, Biden vows ‘nation has your back’

BY ERIN COX, JUSTIN JOUVENAL, MATT VISER AND TEO ARMUS

DUNDALK, MD. — President Biden flew over the scene of the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore on Friday, surveying the wreckage as the recovery enters a pivotal new phase, 10 days after a massive container ship plowed into the span and brought it down in a jumble of twisted steel and concrete.

Biden pledged federal support “every step of the way” in a speech afterward, promising “your nation has your back” and pressing Congress to fund the cost of rebuilding the 1.6-mile bridge, which could total more

Aid pledge comes as officials say port to fully reopen by end of May

than \$1 billion. Officials announced plans to fully reopen the crippled Port of Baltimore by the end of May, setting a hard target for the first time.

“We’re going to move heaven and earth to rebuild this bridge as rapidly as humanly possible,” Biden said, speaking on the bank of the Patapsco River with the fallen bridge as a backdrop. “We will do so with union labor and American steel.”

Biden, Maryland Gov. Wes

Moore (D) and other officials leading the cleanup did two loops around the disaster site in the Marine One helicopter on Friday, before the president met with first responders and with the families of the six construction workers who perished when the bridge plunged into the Patapsco on March 26.

In the days since, recovery efforts have ground forward amid pelting rain and icy winds, but the tentative timeline adds a fresh urgency and political peril for Biden and state officials to clean up what one analysis said could eventually be the most expensive disaster in maritime history. Some Republicans have already signaled they have qualms about Biden’s funding plan, say-

ing money should be recovered from the shipping companies involved before public dollars flow.

This week, two small channels opened to allow tugboat and barge traffic in and out of the port. Officials plan to open a larger one by the end of April that can accommodate some ships carrying cars and farm equipment that are key cargo at the port.

Aid has begun to flow to stem the economic pain caused by the port’s closure to shipping traffic. The U.S. Department of Transportation also announced Friday that a previously awarded \$8 million grant can be used to expand

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Local businesses chip in: Food donations flow amid cleanup. B1

IDF: Aid attack result of ‘errors’

SAYS TWO OFFICERS WILL BE DISMISSED

Report issued days after rare U.S. condemnation

BY KAREEM FAHIM, VICTORIA BISSET AND LIOR SOROKA

Israel’s military said Friday that a deadly attack on a World Central Kitchen humanitarian convoy that killed seven of the organization’s members was a “serious violation” of its policies after the airstrikes prompted global outrage and a rare rebuke from the Biden administration.

The findings of the Israel Defense Forces’ own investigation, presented in a seven-paragraph statement, were unusual for the speed with which they were released: four days after an IDF drone repeatedly struck the three-car convoy on a coastal road in Gaza used as a humanitarian corridor, and two days after President Biden said that he was “outraged and heartbroken” over the deaths and that the investigation should be “swift.”

The statement said the attack was the result of “errors” and was “contrary” to military procedures. It added that two officers would be dismissed and commanders reprimanded but made no mention of legal actions such as prosecutions.

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Today’s WorldView: Israel offers glimpse of terrors of military AI. A9

Relief groups had warned of dangers to workers

Process to coordinate with Israel was flawed long before deadly strike

BY CLAIRE PARKER, LOVEDAY MORRIS, KAREN DEYOUNG AND LOUISA LOVELUCK

CAIRO — For months, aid groups in Gaza warned that the system used to coordinate their deliveries with Israel’s military was broken, putting the lives of relief workers at risk.

Then, on Monday, Israeli forces killed seven employees of the nonprofit World Central Kitchen, six of whom were foreign nationals, as they traveled in their convoy in central Gaza — movements the organization had coordinated with Israel in advance.

The strike, which Israel said was a “serious violation” of its military procedures, stirred global outrage and prompted President Biden to tell Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the United States would reassess support for Israel if it didn’t take immediate steps to facilitate aid. It also highlighted what aid workers say is a faulty process for deconflicting humanitarian operations with the Israeli military in Gaza, one that has endangered staff, is rife with mistrust, and

SEE WORKERS ON A10

Algorithm impairs care, senior-home staffers say

Allows too few workers, claim some who quit or were fired after objecting

BY DOUGLAS MACMILLAN AND CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND

Two decades ago, a group of senior-housing executives came up with a way to raise revenue and reduce costs at assisted-living homes. Using stopwatches, they timed caregivers performing various tasks, from making beds to changing soiled briefs, and fed the information into a program they began using to determine staffing.

Brookdale Senior Living, the leading operator of senior homes with 652 facilities, acquired the algorithm-based system and used it to set staffing at its properties across the nation. But as Brookdale’s empire grew, employees complained the system, known as “Service Alignment,” failed to capture the nuances of caring for vulnerable seniors, documents and interviews show.

At a Brookdale facility in Chicago, tiny elevators prevented residents from being herded en masse to dinner, necessitating more trips and more time than Service Alignment allotted. At a facility in New Port Richey, Fla.,

the algorithm recommended fewer caregivers than buildings, making it impossible to monitor all residents at all times. And at a facility near Fort Worth, residents often could not undress, shower and get dressed again within the allotted 20 minutes — constantly putting caregivers behind in their tasks.

In emails and phone calls to Brookdale executives, building managers repeatedly complained that the company’s algorithm underestimated the amount of labor they needed to meet resident needs, according to court records, internal company documents reviewed by The Washington Post, and interviews with more than 35 current and former Brookdale employees. Several managers said they quit or were fired after objecting to the system, including Patricia McNeal, 53, who spent six years overseeing Brookdale facilities in Ohio and Florida.

“Brookdale is handing you this thing that says, ‘This is what it says you need, hire for that,’” McNeal said. “My eyes told me that we weren’t getting enough staff to care for residents.”

While assisted-living chains promote their properties like all-inclusive resorts with round-the-clock care, many operate more like assembly lines, where low-wage workers perform a series of

SEE BROOKDALE ON A12



SHELBY TAUBER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Students practice their setup to document the April 8 solar eclipse at Kemp High School in Texas on March 24. The five-student team will photograph the sun’s corona during the phenomenon.

Eclipse brings cutting-edge science to a small, but ‘excited,’ Texas town

BY CAROLYN Y. JOHNSON

There’s one spotlight in Kemp, Tex. About 1,200 people live in this city, roughly 45 miles southeast of Dallas. Asked what they do for fun, high school students shrug and mention the Dairy Queen.

But for four minutes and 17 seconds on Monday, Kemp will become a scientific hot spot as the city is engulfed in the moon’s shadow during the total solar eclipse. To prepare, five high school students

have given up their weekends and free periods for months to rehearse their roles in a grand, transcontinental, citizen-science project funded by NASA.

The Kemp team, like 34 others scattered across the eclipse’s path, will take rapid-fire images of the sun in polarized light. Scientists plan to stitch

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Countdown: How it will unfold, play by play. A5

IN THE NEWS

‘Finish What We Started’ Read an excerpt from a Post reporter’s book that examines Trump adviser Stephen K. Bannon’s role in the MAGA movement’s Jan. 6 rebound. A6  
Stumpy’s fans mourn Amid calls to replant the beloved cherry tree, the National Park Service said it is too damaged to survive. B1

THE NATION A nonprofit in Pennsylvania has lost its latest bid to open an overdose prevention site. A2  
A quake struck New Jersey, rattling the East Coast from Maryland to Massachusetts. A3

THE WORLD North Korea’s millennial defectors are looking to wield influence in the South. A8  
Botswana threatened to send 20,000 elephants to Germany over a conservation plan. A10

THE ECONOMY X shocked users by restoring blue checks to popular accounts, reversing Elon Musk’s decision to offer verification for a fee. A11  
China praises Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen’s chopstick skills, signaling Beijing’s hopes for better trade ties. A14

THE REGION Roughly 200 people gathered to protest Mayor Muriel E. Bowser’s proposed pay cuts for early-childhood educators. B1  
Two D.C. 14-year-olds were shot and killed in daytime attacks 33 hours apart, raising youth violence fears. B1

STYLE Becky Lynch, who as an eight-time world champion is one of the biggest stars in the history of the WWE, opens up in a new memoir, “The Man,” about eating disorders, postpartum depression, the loss of a parent and impostor syndrome. C1

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The Washington Post  
Year 147, No. 53813

