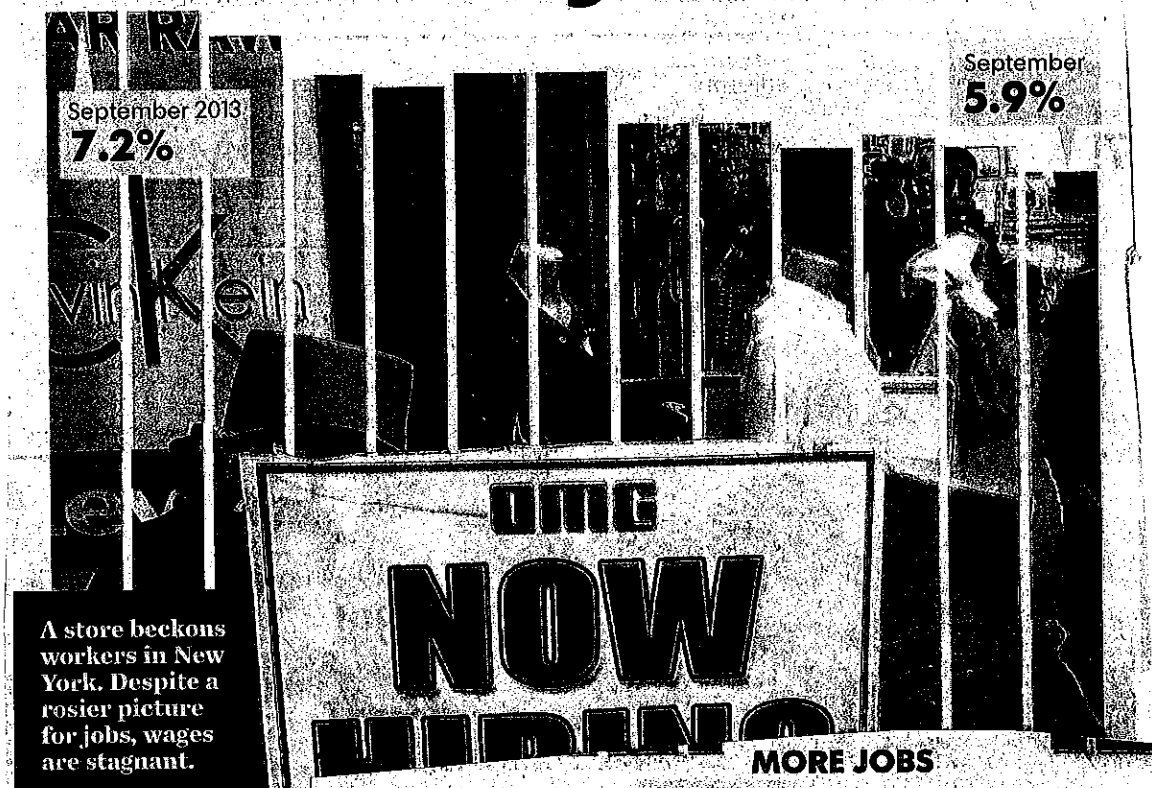
Economy gains 248,000 jobs

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FALLS TO ITS LOWEST LEVEL SINCE JULY 2008



A store beckons workers in New York. Despite a rosier picture for jobs, wages are stagnant.

SPENCER PLATT, GETTY IMAGES

Paul Davidson
@PDavidsonusat
USA TODAY

The nation's unemployment rate fell below 6% in September for the first time since 2008 as a sharp recovery in job growth painted a brightening picture of the economy.

Employers added 248,000 jobs last month in a broad range of industries, including professional and business services, finance, retail and health care, the Labor Department said Friday.

The jobless rate, which is calculated from a separate survey of households, dropped from 6.1% to 5.9%, the lowest since July 2008 and closer to the roughly 5.5% level the Federal Reserve considers normal.

The decline resulted mostly from a substantial increase in employment. Fewer Americans looking for work — because they retired or grew discouraged, for example — also played a role.

Economist Bernard Baumohl of The Economic Outlook, says the solid job growth is more evidence the economy and labor market are poised to accelerate after August's weaker payroll gains raised concerns about a slowdown.

Labor revised August's gains to 180,000 from its initial estimate of 142,000 and July's to 243,000 from 212,000, boosting additions for the two summer months by 69,000.

A surge in business capital spending "should fuel even greater hiring in the coming months and years," Baumohl said in a note to clients.

Monthly employment gains have averaged 227,000 this year, up from 194,000 for all of 2013.

The biggest blemish in the report: stagnant wages. Hourly earnings fell 1 cent to $24.53 and are up just 2% over the past year, in line with modest increases so far in the five-year-old recovery.

"The labor market is clearly tightening, but there's still no wage pressures," says economist Joel Naroff of Naroff Economic Advisors. "When do businesses start dealing with labor shortages by raising wages?"

He added, "The only way we're going to get stronger economic growth is if people have money to spend."

Like many other economists, Naroff still expects wage growth to pick up later this year.

MORE JOBS

Industries with the largest percentage change in jobs since September 2013:

Residential building	9.7%
Temporary help services	8.6%
Employment services	8.4%
Performing arts, spectator sports	8.1%
Support for mining	8.0%
Couriers and messengers	7.0%
Oil and gas extraction	6.9%
Building construction	6.2%
Non-store retailers	6.1%
Motor vehicles and parts	5.4%

SOURCE: BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS