More movement in job market



Chanlor Culkin, left, a recruiter with Ingram Barge Co., visits with Jesse Wyatt of Girard, Ill., during a job fair Wednesday at Lincoln Land Community College in Litchfield, Ill. The Labor Department said Friday that job openings rose 1.8 percent to a seasonally adjusted 4 million in November. TED SCHURTER, THE (SPRINGFIELD, ILL.) STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER/AP

Employers post most openings in 5½ years

More American workers quit, too, another good sign for job hunters

By Christopher S. Rugaber
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. employers advertised more jobs in November and more Americans quit, positive signs for millions who are unemployed and looking for work.

The Labor Department said Friday that job openings rose 1.8 percent to a seasonally adjusted 4 million, the most in 5½ years. And the number of people quitting increased 1.9 percent to a seasonally adjusted 2.4 million, a five-year high.

Job openings haven't topped 4 million since March 2008, just a few months after the Great Recession began. Openings at that level are generally consistent with a healthy job market.

And more workers quitting can also be a positive signal, because people usually quit when they either have a new job — typically for more pay — or are confident they can find one.

The data suggest the competition for jobs is getting a bit easier. There were 2.7 unemployed workers for each available job in November, down from 6.7 just after the recession ended in July 2009. In a healthy economy, the ratio is roughly 2-to-1.

More job openings and quits suggest greater opportunities for the unemployed. But those positive trends haven't recently translated into additional hiring. Overall hiring ticked up just 0.2 percent in November to nearly 4.5 million.

The figures also follow a disappointing report on December job growth. The government last week said employers added just 74,000 jobs in December. That's the fewest in three years and below an average gain of 214,000 in the previous three months.

The unemployment rate fell to 6.7 percent, the lowest in more than five years. But the rate dropped mostly because more Americans gave up looking for work. The government counts people as unemployed only if they are actively hunting for jobs.

GAP BETWEEN OPENINGS, HIRINGS

In the past year, the number of job openings has increased 5.6 percent. But total hiring is only 1.7 percent higher.

» Economists point to several reasons for the gap. Employers may not be offering sufficient pay and benefits to persuade more workers to take the jobs. They may also be pickier, believing they can find top-notch candidates with the unemployment rate still elevated.

» Many employers say they can't find enough qualified workers, particularly in high-skilled industries such as manufacturing and information technology.