Hiring appetite grows

159,000 workers added in October, raising optimism about job market thaw

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WASHINGTON — The jobs crisis eased a bit in October as companies stepped up hiring, suggesting further gains ahead.

Still, hiring remains far too weak to drive down unemployment, now stuck at 9.6 percent. And the newly elected Congress will come under pressure to take action to accelerate job growth.

The burst of hiring — 159,000 net jobs added by private employers — nevertheless raised hopes that companies are finally emerging from the hiring stall seen during much of the summer.

The previous big spurt of job growth — a healthy 241,000 — came in April. Private companies have now added jobs for 10 straight months. That shows that recession-battered companies have regained some appetite to hire after slashing jobs for nearly two straight years.

While saying he was pleased with the improvement, President Barack Obama conceded the economy still isn't creating enough jobs for the nearly 15 million people out of work.

When government job cuts — which totaled 8,000 last month — are factored in, the economy added 151,000 jobs in October, the Labor Department's report showed Friday.

"Companies are starting to deploy their cash stash and increase hiring, as consumers are opening their wallets a little wider," said Sal Guatieri, economist at BMO Capital Markets Inc.