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Technician Shawn Cable repairs a video game console Thursday at the Laptops Plus computer store in Winter Park, Fla. A burst of hiring in December pushed the unemployment rate to its lowest level in nearly three years, giving the economy a boost at the end of 2011.

# Real growth ... maybe

## Nation adds 200,000 jobs in December

BY PAUL WISEMAN  
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WASHINGTON — Four painful years after the Great Recession struck and wiped out 8.7 million jobs, the United States may finally be at the start of a virtuous cycle — an escalating loop of robust job growth, healthier spending and higher demand.

The nation added 200,000 jobs in December in a burst of hiring that drove the unemployment rate down two ticks to 8.5 percent, its lowest in almost three years, and led economists to conclude that the

improvement in the job market might just last.

"There is more horsepower to this economy than most believe," said Sung Won Sohn, an economics professor at California State University, Channel Islands. "The stars are aligned right for a meaningful economic recovery."

It was the sixth month in a row that the economy added at least 100,000 jobs, the longest streak since 2006. The economy added jobs every month last year, the first time that has happened since 2005.

And the unemployment rate, which peaked at 10.1 percent in October 2009 and stood at

9.1 percent at the start of last year, has fallen four months straight.

If economics textbooks and the best hopes of millions of unemployed Americans are confirmed, the virtuous cycle may be under way, which would suggest the job market will get stronger yet.

When more Americans are hired, they have more money to spend. When more money courses through the economy, businesses can justify hiring more people. That means more jobs, more spending and more demand for businesses, which leads to still more hiring, spending and demand.