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The U S Job Market: Improving or Still a Slump?

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- ◆ Are employers hiring more employees?
- ◆ What's the big controversy with mold?
- ◆ Why would I need Mexican insurance?
- ◆ Are we allowed to have photoless driver licenses?

A top Federal Reserve Official recently announced that it is yet unclear whether the job market has begun to recover, even though in the month of March there is a big employment jump reported. The results may be overwhelming one month, but downturn the next month. There is evidence that employers in the private sector are hiring, but at the same time offering less benefits and overtime pay for current employees. They are even going as far as cutting hours for many of their employees in order to hire one or two new employees. This is not a true indication that the economy is recovering.

As it stands, in the month of March employment stands at about 500,000 below the level of Novem-

ber, 2001, when the recession ended. Clearly, our economic condition is slowly improving. Employment levels will improve, but whether they are improving at the speed that the government wants them to is a different question. The Labor Department reported last week that state unemployment insurance benefits, on the average, across the United States, have slowly declined, and they are the lowest since January of 2001.

There are 2 different aspects to consider when it comes to the current job market. The first is household income, and the second is the number of job increases, overall, across the nation. If all individuals in a household are working less

hours or less overtime, their overall income is less, and therefore buying power is less. Is this less important than the overall increase in the number of jobs in the United States? The answer is, probably not. The economy is not going to improve if companies cut the hours or benefits of current employees in order to gain a few new employees.

Besides the national economy, many states are also experiencing poor economic conditions with no quick recovery anywhere in sight. The state of California is struggling to raise the funds necessary to establish a full economic recovery. There is no money to hire new state employees. Almost all

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WHICH STATES RANK THE HIGHEST IN TAX RATES?

MOLD'S BEEN AROUND FOREVER, OF COURSE, BUT IT WAS NOT A BIG ISSUE FOR HOMEOWNERS UNTIL FIVE YEARS AGO.

How States Rank in Taxes

Many states are closing their budget gaps by raising taxes, which is an important factor to consider when calculating where one lives, especially after retirement. A recent survey has taken into account sales taxes, income taxes, and property taxes into account to provide the Commerce Department a view of the highest ranking and lowest ranking states.

Of course, most people don't base their decision on where to live on taxes alone. They take into account work, climate, and many other factors. But every year approximately one in seven Americans changes residences, according to the US Census Bureau, and should consider taxes as an important matter when moving, especially from one state to another. Here is a list of some of the states and their rankings, from heaviest to lowest tax burdens. Research has been conducted by the Tax Foundation, in

Washington DC. The list goes from highest tax rates to lowest tax rates.

- New York 12.9%
- Maine 12.3%
- Ohio 11.3%
- Hawaii 11.3%
- Wisconsin 11.1%
- Utah 10.8%
- Connecticut 10.6%
- Minnesota 10.5%
- Michigan 10.2%
- New Jersey 10.1%
- Georgia 10.0%
- Arizona 10.0%
- Washington 9.9%
- Louisiana 9.9%
- Maryland 9.9%
- California 9.8%
- New Mexico 9.7%
- Nevada 9.7%
- Illinois 9.7%
- Oregon 9.5%
- Pennsylvania 9.4%
- Massachusetts 9.4%
- Virginia 9.3%
- Oklahoma 9.2%
- Colorado 9.1%
- South Carolina 9.0%
- Florida 8.8%
- Texas 8.7%
- Tennessee 8.5%
- New Hampshire 7.5%
- Alaska 6.3%

Why is Outsourcing Such a Problem?

If you've listened to the news lately, then you are probably familiar with the term outsourcing. Companies are finding outsourcing to be a much preferred low cost alternative to hiring new employees or paying their employees higher salaries. An employer in California, for instance, must pay its employees a minimum of \$6.75 per hour, allow for at least a half hour lunch, and not to mention breaks every 2 hours, etcetera. The employer will need to pay for the employees' workers compensation insurance coverage, state disability insurance, social security, and other taxes. In most cases, there are job benefits involved which cost extra money, on top of all the legal fees and taxes.

Outsourcing takes jobs from the United States to countries outside, where the rules and wages are much lower. Countries in Asia and Latin America may not have the same rules and laws for employees as one would expect to have within the United States. Of course, not all types of jobs are going to be transported abroad. But those in the engineering, telephone servicing, customer servicing, do seem to go abroad in large numbers. Most of the jobs are in the industry of Information Technology and computers.

The actual number of jobs lost to outsourcing in the United States and its impacts are a lot less clear than the politicians and the media might think. It is true that

Jobs are going abroad, but yet companies from abroad are bringing jobs to the United States. A Japanese investor wanting to open up a banking branch within the United States will need to hire accountants, bank tellers, and other employees who will need to work inside that branch. There are many benefits to outsourcing. Companies may be able to offer lower prices if their costs are reduced by having to pay less for producing goods and services. This will ultimately benefit all consumers.

Overall, outsourcing doesn't seem to be the driving force behind falling employment. Some jobs may be moving abroad, others may be automated. But the bottom line is that some industries lose and others gain. The construction industry is booming in certain parts of the state, and therefore hiring new employees and creating new jobs. Other industries are not doing so well and finding that it is becoming more and more necessary to get involved in outsourcing or automating jobs in order to stay afloat and not go bankrupt altogether. This is the reason why it is important to always keep in mind that no job is to be seen as extremely stable and permanent. The more skills one has, the more and better his chances of finding another place of employment if a company decides to go out of business, decide to have lots of layoffs, or move to a different location.



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Why Do We Need a Notary Public?

A notary public is oftentimes used when signing loan documents to purchase or refinance a home. But have you ever considered why? The answer is that a notary public is a witness to your signature. A signature is your written identification. It puts your identity on paper, and states that you have personally seen what is being offered to you and you agree to comply with what is required. The notary public witnesses your signature and identifies you as the right person who must sign the forms. When you go to something notarized, the first item that is asked to be seen is your driver license or Identification Card. This has vital information on it, like who you are, where you live, and your date of birth. This is how the notary public identifies you as the authenticator of the signature. You sign on the form, as requested, while the notary public is your witness. You must also sign in the notary journal, and often include a fingerprint. If there is ever a dispute, the journal will show that you are the person who signed, and if further proof is necessary, your fingerprint is available. Much has changed over the years, and notarized signatures are no exception.

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Government fees are higher, including college & university tuitions, recording fees, registration fees, and many others. The state will borrow money from the Federal government in order to avoid increasing fees and taxes even more. However, there is talk that certain taxes may have to be increased to increase the pace of the economy.

For those who are struggling to find employment in the tight market, there is hope in the near future. The financial and construction industries seem to be experiencing the highest levels of job recovery. In California, the Inland Empire is experiencing the most recovery.

Photoless Driver Licenses

In the past, the Department of Motor Vehicles has been known to legally issue driver licenses without a photo on them. However, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a number of states are reversing their prior rulings and requiring driver licenses to include a photo.

Driver licenses are the most common form of identification. Some religions prohibit graven images on any forms, applications, or even family portraits. Other religions require women to have their entire face covered, and taking a driver license photo in this manner would be of no benefit since the face is not shown. Such was the case in Florida, when a Muslim woman could not obtain a driver license without a full-face photograph of herself on the ID. The Court ruled against her favor.

Times have changed. Some may say that we used to live in a much safer society before, but that's certainly not the case anymore. We live with the day to day fear of being attached by terrorist groups of many kinds. Even though we do not like sharing all of our personal information with too many sources, in order for the government to track down suspected terrorists, it is necessary for everyone to follow the laws, and thereby hopefully make our community a safe place to live.