

Millions of Americans join unemployed ranks as coronavirus ravages economy

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A stunning 26.5 million Americans have sought unemployment benefits over the last five weeks, confirming that all the jobs gained during the longest employment boom in U.S. history have been wiped out as the novel coronavirus savages the economy.

The labor market slaughter added to collapsing oil prices, retail sales, manufacturing production, homebuilding and home sales in reinforcing economists' contention that the economy entered recession in March.

As the economic slump deepens protests have risen against nationwide lockdowns to control the spread of COVID-19, the potentially lethal respiratory illness caused by the virus. President Donald Trump, who is seeking a second term in the White House in November's general election, has been anxious to restart the paralyzed economy.

Trump on Wednesday applauded steps taken by a handful of Republican-led states to begin reopening their economies, despite warnings from health experts of a potential new surge in infections.

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"Today's report shows the labor market is almost certainly pushing into new territory, jolting the unemployment rate up above the Great Recession's 10% peak and wiping out more jobs than we've gained in the recovery," said Daniel Zhao, senior economist at Glassdoor, a website recruitment firm.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits dropped 810,000 to a seasonally adjusted 4.427 million for the week ended April 18, the government said. Data for the prior week was revised to show 8,000 fewer applications received than previously reported, reducing the count for that period to 5.237 million. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast claims falling to 4.2 million in the latest week.



FILE PHOTO: A woman looks for information on the application for unemployment support at the New Orleans Office of Workforce Development, as the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, in New Orleans, Louisiana U.S., April 13, 2020. REUTERS/Car-

All told, 26.453 million people have filed claims for jobless benefits since March 21, representing 16.2% of the labor force. The economy created 22 million jobs during the employment boom which started in September 2010 and abruptly ended in February this year.

The Labor Department said "the COVID-19 virus continues to impact the number of initial claims."

Last week's claims report covered the period during which the government surveyed business establishments for the nonfarm payrolls component of April's employment report. Economists are forecasting as many as 25 million jobs were lost in April after the economy purged 701,000 positions in March, which was the largest decline in 11 years.

The National Bureau of Economic Research, the private research institute regarded as the arbiter of U.S. recessions, does not define a recession as two

consecutive quarters of decline in real GDP, as is the rule of thumb in many countries. Instead, it looks for a drop in activity, spread across the economy and lasting more than a few months.

WORST OVER?

Though weekly jobless filings remain very high, last week's data marked the third straight weekly decline, raising hopes that the worst may be over. Weekly claims appeared to have peaked at a record 6.867 million in the week ended March 28.

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ing guidelines in their states, his tweets to "LIBERATE" heightened tensions between demonstrators and Democratic governors in Minnesota, Michigan and Virginia. Brett Samuels reports.

- Trump spent the morning picking a Twitter fight with New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) over additional federal assistance for states as they try to ramp up their respective COVID-19 testing in the hopes of restarting their economies. Marty Johnson has the story.

- The Trump administration has been moving quickly to distribute CARES Act funding to hospitals and doctors, but providers on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic are worried they will be shortchanged in the next round of funding. Nathaniel Weixel has more.

- Trump announced a \$19 billion program to help the struggling agriculture sector and distribute food to families. The move comes amid worries about the impact the coronavirus is having on the nation's food supply chain. Sylvan Lane has the story.

In Congress

- Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer (N.Y.) on Friday offered some cautious praise for President Trump's guidelines for reopening the country but said he thinks that more testing needs to be made available, reiterating Democrats' call for a national testing program. Read Alex Bolton for more.



- Tensions flared on Friday as Senate Democrats pressed Vice President Pence during a conference call for answers on coronavirus testing. Jordain Carney reports that lawmakers also questioned

Dollar Signs Versus Vital Signs?

Reopening The Economy

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Pence about Trump's tweets to "LIBERATE" states.

- A group of Senate Democrats want Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to exempt checks being issued as part of last month's \$2.2 trillion coronavirus relief bill from being subjected to garnishment by debt collectors. Get the full story from Jordain Carney.

- Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee want Trump to escalate his feud with the World Health Organization, and are calling on the administration to make the United States's voluntary contributions to the health body contingent on the resignation of WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Juliegrace Brufke has more.

In The States

- Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) said Friday that he plans to begin reopening different Texas businesses through a series of executive orders starting next week. But he also said schools will remain closed through the rest of the school year. Marty Johnson has more.

- The Republican mayor of Jacksonville, Fla., said that the city's beaches and parks will reopen at 5 p.m. today for essential activities only: walking, biking, hiking, fishing, running, swimming and surfing, as long as social distancing guidelines are followed. Despite intense criticism and pressure, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) never issued a statewide order to close the beaches. Get the full story.

- In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) asked the federal government to provide immediate financial assistance to states in their efforts to ramp up their testing capacities in the hope of being able to reopen their economies.

"The economic depression is directly correlated with the rise in transmission of the coronavirus," Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-Calif.), a physician, told Fox News

this week. "So, for us to focus on the public health and safety aspects is the right way to help get our economy back in order."



The ultimate decision about when and how to reopen the country's economy is largely in the hands of state and local officials, and governors in both parties have suggested they fear opening their state economies and relaxing social distancing policies too early could backfire.

At the same time, the issue also represents a minefield for political leaders in Washington, who are waging the debate on a national stage against the backdrop of high-stakes elections looming less than seven months away.

Both sides are claiming the high ground: the Republicans by appealing to the economic fears of workers and businesses concerned that the American dream is slipping away; the Democrats by allying themselves with the public health experts — including those on Trump's own coronavirus team — warning that a hasty lifting of social distancing guidelines would have deadly consequences.

And both sides come armed with their own statistics. Fueling the GOP's urgency, unemployment has skyrocketed in recent weeks and retail sales fell by historic numbers in March. Fanning the Democrats' argument, the United States now has more cases and deaths than any country on the globe.

The balance they're seeking is a delicate one — more nuanced than just a simple case of economic versus public health, since the two are intrinsically entwined. And perhaps no one is walking a finer

line than the president, who believes his best chance at reelection is a booming economy but is also wary that reopening the country prematurely could backfire if it spikes the number of coronavirus cases, spooks markets and drives the economy further downward.

"President Trump is pushing hard on the gas to get this done quickly sensing it would benefit him and help strengthen his position," Julian Zelizer, a political historian at Princeton University, said Wednesday. "But the science is so strong on this and the consequences so severe, Democrats will not cross over on this until it is absolutely safe."



Indeed, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) warned this week that Democrats, while supporting trillions of dollars in economic relief for businesses and workers ravaged by the pandemic, fully intend to heed the direction of the public health experts when it comes to reopening society.

"All of us want to resume the precious and beautiful lives that America's unique freedoms provide," Pelosi wrote Tuesday to Democrats. "We will overcome this moment, but success requires one fundamental from which all actions will follow: we need the truth."

In a shot at the president, Pelosi urged the public to "ignore lies and start to listen to scientists ... in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones." And some Republicans are also stressing the importance of conducting a much broader testing campaign before taking steps to reopen even the most rural parts of the country. (Courtesy <https://thehill.com/>)



- One day after Trump reportedly told governors they would "call the shots" in determining when to lift social distanc-

Editor's Choice



Steven Busulwa, an animal keeper, runs away from a charging rhino at the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Center (UWEC) amid the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), within Wakiso district, in Entebbe



Hospital staff do yoga stretches and breathing exercises in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the Hospital Clinic in Barcelona as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, Spain, April 23, 2020. REUTERS/Nacho Doce TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends a session at the lower house of parliament, Bundestag, as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, in Berlin, Germany, April 23, 2020. REUTERS/Annegret Hilse TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Medical personnel jump in the COVID-19 unit at the CHR Centre Hospitalier Regional de la Citadelle Hospital, during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Liege, Belgium, April 22, 2020. REUTERS/Yves Herman TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



The showcase of a souvenir-shop displays a protective gear at the famous red-light district "Reeperbahn" during the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Hamburg



A municipality worker prepares a new grave at a cemetery complex provided by the government for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) victims in Jakarta, Indonesia April, 22, 2020. REUTERS/Willy Kurniawan TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Stefania and Carlo wear protective face masks as they kiss after their civil wedding ceremony with only witnesses and no guests, as public meetings are prohibited as part of Italy's blocking measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Castiglione della Pescaia, Italy, April 22, 2020.



A man wearing a protective mask walks past a mural depicting a nurse in Shoreditch, amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in London, Britain April 21, 2020. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY

Texas Lab Leading The Way On Coronavirus Research



The Galveston National Laboratory on the University of Texas Medical Branch campus in Galveston, Texas.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

One of the best weapons on the fight against COVID-19 is right here in Texas — a high security biocontainment lab where some of the best minds in medicine are looking for answers. They're not only working on a vaccine for coronavirus, they think they might be close to a treatment. It's a nondescript building on the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston but, inside the Galveston National Laboratory are some of the scientists leading the offense against COVID-19. "We have the ability to safely work on the most dangerous pathogens," said executive director Dr. Jim Le Duc. His office has a view of the Gulf of Mexico — but the building itself is so sturdy, it withstood the fury of Hurricane Ike in 2008, even as Galveston Island suffered major damage.



It is a high security facility so locked down that very few images from inside are ever let out. "No photography" signs hang prominently in the halls, the first thing we saw when we walked out of the elevator. Somewhere inside, in a biocontainment lab, some of the scientists are leading the offense against COVID-19. "We're looking at a number of different drugs that are licensed, and those that are in the pipeline for licensure as research projects -- just to see if they react with this virus if they can somehow be used to control the virus and there are some very promising candidates," he said. Soon, an antiviral drug could be available. It could ease symptoms like pneumonia. Dr. Le Duc told me that researchers are testing both drugs that are already on the market, to see if they react to the novel coronavirus, and drugs that were already in human clinical testing. "So, I think for the near term in a few months this is probably a very promising area of investigation."



Researchers are also working on prevention — a vaccine that would stop people from getting COVID-19. "We have done a lot of work on two other coronaviruses that have been epidemic in the near past. SARS virus which was an outbreak in 2003 and MERS virus the Middle East respiratory syndrome virus which is another coronavirus -- we continue to see cases of that. So, we've been working for several years on a vaccine for those viruses and one of the candidates that we'd like to further develop is in fact this initial MERS/SARS vaccine," he said. Dr. Le Duc has led the GNL since 2006, and before that served at the Centers for Disease Control where he was the influenza coordinator and the director of Viral and Rickettsial Diseases. "This is the most significant outbreak I have ever worked on," he said somberly.



It's an opinion state leaders take very seriously. "We are not surprised by

cases like this. We anticipated cases like this arising," Governor Greg Abbott told reporters on Thursday, as cases in the Houston area were reported. "We continue to collaborate with local and federal partners to remain prepared to respond to any future cases of COVID-19."

While scientists are racing to find answers, Dr. Le Duc says people have hard decisions to make about events like Spring Break and SXSW, because social isolation works. "It's almost certain that we're going to have cases here and we're going to have some deaths."



Just two miles away, small waves break on the shore facing outward toward the Gulf of Mexico. This week, just a few people are wading into the water and digging in the sand. The Ferris wheel at the Pleasure Pier was still on the afternoon we were there. But that could change next week and the week after that, as Spring Break begins for universities and school districts across Texas. That could be the test of how willing people are to stay away from large public activities.

For now, hand washing, and social isolation are the best weapons we have against the virus. "We don't have a drug or anything, we're just trying the social distance, keep people away so that people who are infected aren't exposed to people that are susceptible," said Dr. Le Duc. (Courtesy <https://cbsaustin.com/>)

Related
Americans over 60 should stock up on food and medications and avoid venturing out as the coronavirus spreads
In a media briefing on Monday about

the novel coronavirus, Dr. Nancy Messonnier focused on making recommendations for people at a higher risk of getting ill from the virus. She also said that eventually "many people in the United States" will be exposed to the virus and that "there's a good chance many will become sick."



For now, she said, people over 60 should stock up on food, medication, and other necessities so they can avoid needing to venture out too much. Caretakers and family members should help older people prepare, and develop a plan for what they'll do if either they or the people they're caring for get sick. While people over 60 are at a greater risk of becoming ill than younger folks, it's important for people to understand that risk increases with age, making people in their 80s and 90s at the highest risk, especially if they have chronic health conditions too. (Courtesy <https://www.businessinsider.com/>)



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寻找贫穷的真相：女作家“卧底”低薪阶层

一位美国作家芭芭拉·艾伦瑞克本人就出身底层，父亲是矿工，前夫是卡车司机，因此她特别关注底层社会的生存现状。

在20世纪90年代，为了寻找贫穷的真相，芭芭拉决定亲自潜入底层社会，化身低收入劳工，体验这个群体如何挣扎求生。在这期间，她辗转美国三个州的多个城市，先后当过服务员、房务员、护工、女佣、售货员等等，还接触到了来自各种背景的同性和上司。

所有这些一手经历，让她对低薪阶层的生活有了更全面细致的了解。在这本书里，她向我们生动展现了底层劳工在收入、住房、医疗、雇佣关系等方面的生存状态、挑战与挣扎，同时探寻贫穷的深层原因。

1. 医保缺乏：比起生病，更担心丢了工作。有一句话怎么说来着：大病一场，一夜返贫。

对普通人来说，最怕的就是去医院。怕面对病情还是其次，最关键的还是怕花钱。那么如何解决这个问题呢？答案是社会保险。比如咱们国家，就强制要求企业给员工上医疗保险，费用双方按一定比例分摊，企业出大头，员工出小头。

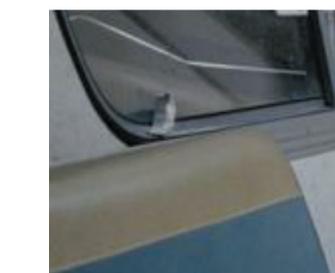
然而，在20世纪末那会儿，美国人似乎没有意识到医保的好处。至少在芭芭拉打工期间，她接触到的底层人士大多数都没有医保。正规一点的公司，也就象征性地问一下员工要不要参保，可很多人一看，个人需要缴纳的比例这么高，本来工资就低，哪里还有钱交这个？

没有保险，医疗成本就大了许多。咱们前面说到的芭芭拉的同乡盖儿，就因为一个偏头痛，要自己掏9美元来买药。虽然偏头痛不算大病，9美元也不算特别贵，但要知道，这可是慢性病，需要长期吃药，对于本已经生活拮据、居无定所的盖儿来说，花了这笔钱，日子就更加捉襟见肘了。

芭芭拉原来觉得，自己靠多年的保养，身体还算不错。谁知道，她在体验底层生活的第二站——缅因州，就亲身经了一把带病员工有多难。

在缅因州，芭芭拉找了一份女佣的工作，说白了就是帮人家里做清洁。一次清洁工作过后，芭芭拉发现自己过敏了，浑身上下全起了疹子，痒得不行。身体出了问题，大家第一反应肯定是去看医生对不对？但没想到的是，当芭芭拉带着一身的红点去请病假的时候，老板泰德直接塞给她一口毒鸡汤，他说，“工作能帮你把病撵过去。”

你可能觉得，这老板也太冷酷无情



了吧，但当时整个美国的大环境就是如此。大家都默认，只要你生病，老板就有权把你开掉。那会儿有个非常流行的止痛药广告，广告语是这么说的：“今天用了我，你就不用担心会被老板炒鱿鱼。”当然了，也有善良一点的老板，允许你休病假，还不解雇你，但不不好意思，休假期间的工资就没了。

所以，种种原因夹杂在一起，导致很多人为了不丢工作、不减少收入，生了病强撑着。而芭芭拉呢，既然选择融入底层人的角色，她也不好说什么，只能继续上班。不过，芭芭拉在现实生活中是有医保、有相熟的医生的，她可不想拿自己的健康开玩笑，于是去见了医生用了药，病很快就好了。

芭芭拉有其他办法解决病痛，而对于真正在底层挣扎的人来说，就没那么容易了。比如，芭芭拉在当女佣期间，她的顶头上司何莉怀有身孕，加上工作强度大、营养不良，身体有点虚。有一天，何莉在打扫房间的时候，不小心一个跟头摔了一跤，胳膊和脚都扭伤了，抬都抬不起来。这时候，何莉最担心的不是自己或是肚里的孩子要不要紧，而是害怕得病后被老板辞退。因此，她坚持要把自己的工作干完。你想想，一个女人挺着大肚子，手脚受伤，还要继续干体力活，要是你估计会去帮一把吧？然而，其他女佣都冷眼旁观，完全没有帮忙的意思。最后芭芭拉实在看不下去，帮何莉把活儿干完。

事实证明，底层的世界没有那么多温情。每个人都生活艰难，经不起任何损失。员工之间不愿意互相帮助，怕的就是有人会挤掉自己。后来，在芭芭拉的协调下，何莉获得了带薪病假，芭芭拉也因此得到了老板青睐。可是，何莉不仅没有感激芭芭拉，反而觉得芭芭拉抢走了老板对她的关注。

你看，何莉对好心帮忙的同事心有不满，却默默接受老板的苛刻要求，甚至尽全力去迎合老板制定的规则。那大家要问了，员工为什么这么在乎老板呢？除了

他是金主爸爸，还有一个原因其实是心理上的需求——他们渴望受到老板的认可，以至于要是没达到老板的要求，还会心生愧疚。

就拿芭芭拉在这家清洁公司的另一位同事宝琳来说吧，她是个老员工，已经67岁。常年跪着擦地板，落下了严重的膝盖问题，需要动一场大手术。而且得了这个病，她可能以后都没法再做清洁工作，无奈只能辞职回家。她离职当天，老板泰德没有任何表示。宝琳心里虽然难过，但更多的是愧疚，她觉得要怪就怪自己不争气。

一段时间的观察下来，芭芭拉发现，雇主的压榨不仅耗尽了员工的体力，也榨干了员工的精神。他们在透支身体的同时，也丧失了反抗能力。他们只想老老实实地完成老板布置的任务，好让自己有口饭吃。如果老板哪天心情好，表扬一句，关心一下，就足以让他们激动老半天。

毕竟说到底，他们手上没有任何筹码，无从在雇佣关系中去维护自己的权益，去要求更好的待遇。

2. 雇主压榨：冷血无情，只求利益最大化。马克思曾经说过：“资本家是吃人不吐骨头的剥削者。”

看看我们的现实，好像还真就是这么回事。古今中外的各个老板，哪个不希望自家员工不嫌钱少、吃苦耐劳、毫无怨言？

现如今，好像“996”成了不成文的规定。你工作效率是多是少，家里有没有小孩、老人需要照顾，没人在乎，总之你必须得在公司呆够这么多时间。一句话，你人不在公司，就代表心不在公司。等到下次裁员，领导可能就第一个拿你开刀。

俗话说“天下乌鸦一般黑”，美国的老板也好不到哪里去。芭芭拉发现，公司会采取各种办法尽量压榨员工。

于是决定转去当房务员。结果没过几天，老板觉得给时薪不划算，改成以清扫的房间数量来算工资。这样一来，芭芭拉的时薪才5美元多一点，还不如在餐厅当服务员。

还有些公司，表面上遵守8小时工作制，但员工实际的工作时间远不止如此。芭芭拉之前做女佣的时候，公司要求他们早上七点半集合，再统一送他们去雇主的房子做清洁。要知道，集合可不是光人到了就行，还得准备好清洁要用的水和工具。于是，很多员工七点就得来公司做准备，但老板觉得准备阶段不属于工作，所以八点才开始算薪水。

更有甚者，公司连员工上厕所的自由也要剥夺，他们规定员工每6个小时才能去一次厕所。有些员工实在忍不住，就只能尿在裤子里。

总之，为了不付加班费，老板是想尽法子压榨员工，恨不得让他们在8小时里一刻不停地干活，仿佛这样才能对得起自己付的工钱。

就这种惨无人道的管理方式，竟然还有人美其名曰“压力管理”，说什么压力可以激发出人的最大潜力，只有这样才能进步。行吧，看来这些老板的套路就是，只谈精神，不谈福利。芭芭拉原本以为，小公司才会这样不择手段地剥削员工，但她意外的是，所谓正规的大公司也是如此。

在她深入底层社会的第三站——明尼苏达州，芭芭拉在以优待员工著称的沃尔玛当了一段时间的售货员。在入职培训的时候，HR不断向员工们强调一个规则，那就是不能“偷时间”。什么意思呢？说白了就是，老板已经花钱买下你们的8小时时间，你们但凡有一分钟不是在为老板卖力，就算偷了时间。

所以，别看上班时间是8小时，员工实际在公司要呆9个多小时。其中1小时是午餐时间，不算薪水。而且这1小时里如果出现紧急情况需要处理，员工必须马上到场。另外，员工每天只有两次上厕所

的机会，每次15分钟。这意味着，员工就连喝水也要提前规划好，定时定量，否则出现了尴尬情况，只能自认倒霉。

像沃尔玛这样的大型公司，肯定不是由老板直接管理员工，而是聘请的管理人员。芭芭拉觉得，管理人员本身也是打工的，对底层员工应该不会那么斤斤计较，得饶人处且饶人嘛。可是事实证明，很多管理人员都是把员工当“贼”在防。

举个例子，沃尔玛每个季度都有一些清仓拍卖的商品。按理说，员工买这些商品既能帮自己节省开支，又能帮公司消化库存，一举两得。然而，芭芭拉的直属经理霍华德可不这么觉得，他直接声明，禁止员工用员工价购买清仓拍卖的商品。

不让员工享受公司福利就算了，很多管理人员还要求芭芭拉经常变换衣物的摆放位置，他认为这样能给顾客带来新鲜感；他还要员工在离顾客3米之内的范围，就要咧开嘴笑，并且要主动上前提供服务。

但大家平时逛超市都知道，最怕的就是商品位置变了，找半天找不着，还有就是怕被营业员打搅，给你推销这个推荐那个。这些细节，都会影响顾客的购物体验。体验不好，顾客不高兴，承担负面后果的并不是霍华德这样的经理，而是芭芭拉这样的服务人员。管理层的种种无脑决策，让底层员工的工作更加越难熬。