

In this file photo, a JetBlue flight arrives at Salt Lake City International Airport, in Salt Lake City. (AP)



travel rebound: United plans to hire about 300 new pilots

United Airlines said it plans to hire about 300 pilots, another sign that airlines feel more confident that a recent increase in travel will continue.

The airline plans to start by hiring pilots who received conditional job offers or had a class for new hires canceled last year, when the industry was slammed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"With vaccination rates increasing and travel demand trending upwards, I'm excited to share that United will

resume the pilot hiring process that was halted last year," Bryan Quigley, Chicago-based United's senior vice president of flight operations, told employees.

Nearly 1,000 United pilots have retired or taken voluntary leave since September. Federal payroll aid to airlines blocked furloughs. Quigley said United's need for new pilots will depend on the airline's recovery from the pandemic. Airlines report that bookings have increased in recent

weeks, and the government says at least 1 million travelers a day have gone through airport checkpoints for the past three weeks. Still, U.S. air travel remains down nearly half from the same period in 2019.

United CEO Scott Kirby said this week that domestic leisure travel demand "has almost entirely recovered," but critical business and international travel remain severely depressed.

United's hiring plans were reported earlier by CNBC. (AP)

Business Plus



Millions of women can't take jobs because they can't find or afford child care

From child care to COVID, rising job market faces obstacles



A roadside banner beckons potential employees outside Channel Control Merchants LLC, an extreme value retailer and exporter of brand sensitive secondary market inventories, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, March 27, 2021. With hopes growing for a strong snapback in hiring this year, Friday, April 2 monthly jobs report will provide crucial insight into whether those sunny expectations will come true. The most optimistic economists are predicting the report could show a cool 1 million jobs were added in March. (AP)

By Christopher Rugaber

A surge in hiring in the United States last month - 916,000 added jobs, the most since August - coincides with growing confidence that a blistering pace of job growth will continue as vaccinations increase and federal aid fuels economic growth.

The most optimistic economists even predict that between now and year's end, the nation could produce as many as 10 million more jobs and restore the labor market to its pre-pandemic level.

Maybe so. Yet even in normal times, it would be hard to regain all those jobs so quickly. And these aren't normal times.

Many people who've been thrown out of the labor force remain fearful of the coronavirus and reluctant to take face-to-face service jobs. Millions of women are still caring for children attending school online - and can't take jobs because they can't find or afford child care.

Extended unemployment aid has meant that some employers might have to pay more to attract workers, which they may feel unable to do. And some people will need new skills before they can land a job to replace the one they lost.

While few doubt that the trillions in federal money flowing through the economy will help accelerate hiring, the challenges are sure to endure. Here's a look at some of them:

Health fears

For now, a sizable majority of Americans remain unvaccinated. And after weeks of sharp declines, the number of daily infections is creeping back up. Recruiters say that trend is discouraging some of the unemployed from taking jobs.

"People are afraid to come to work - there is some of that," said Tammy Browning, president of KellyOCG, a staffing agency.

Eventually, ongoing vaccinations ought to gradually reduce such fears, although a portion of Americans remain hesitant to get vaccinated. Browning also suggested that employers will need to become more creative about making workers feel comfortable on the job. Many of her firm's clients are manufacturing companies. On many hot factory floors, their employees have to wear masks and gloves for eight or more hours a day.

Companies should consider providing more break times, Browning said, and allow workers to remove their masks outside or in socially distant

break rooms.

As a single mother, Jennifer Knapp of Augusta, Maine, worries about what a return to work would mean for her and her children's health. A year ago, Knapp, 44, lost her job as a receptionist at a hotel and spa, a place she described as a "hub of germs."

"There is work out there, if you want to put yourself at risk," she said.

But the open jobs she sees are typically temporary and offer low pay. Right now, Knapp is living off savings, child support payments from her ex-husband and unemployment aid. Like many parents, she'd like to find a work-from-home job, ideally in her field of psychology and social work.

"The goal," she said, "is to get back out there and work, as long as my kids are doing OK."

Need for child care

Nearly 2.5 million women lost jobs and stopped looking for work during the pandemic. In most cases, experts say, it was because so many children were suddenly stuck at home, going to school online, and their parents lacked available or affordable child care. Better child care options or more flexible work schedules would be needed to fully reverse that trend.

Some such change is becoming evident as schools and child

care centers reopen. About 500,000 women returned to the labor force in March and found jobs. The improvement could continue in the coming months: Jed Kolko, chief economist at Indeed, the job listings website, says job openings at child care centers are growing, a sign that more of these centers are back in business.

Recruiters also say flexible or hybrid work schedules, along with benefits for part-time workers, may be critical in attracting job seekers, especially women. More companies could provide on-site child care.

"I think it is going to require some systemic changes by employers," said Karen Fichuk, chief executive of Randstad North America, a recruiting firm.

Extended jobless aid

Recruiters say the \$300-a-week federal unemployment benefit that was provided by President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID aid package, on top of regular state jobless benefits that average about \$340 a week, might have made it harder for some employers to find workers. For some job seekers, especially those fearful of the virus, part-time or temporary jobs at restaurants or stores that may pay less than their unemployment aid, aren't much of an

alternative.

Economic research suggests that unemployment benefits generally don't deter workers from taking jobs: A study by the JPMorgan Chase Institute found that last year's federal unemployment payment didn't discourage recipients from working. But the new \$300-a-week federal supplement is set to last six months - longer than the previous payment did.

"It's a much more attractive benefit now," said Julia Pollak, an economist at ZipRecruiter. "It would be foolish to think that wouldn't have any effect."

Economists have calculated that roughly half the unemployed are earning more from benefits than they did at their former jobs.

Another factor is that jobless benefits normally require the unemployed to document their efforts to seek a job in order to remain eligible. But during the pandemic, most states have suspended this requirement. That means there is less incentive to job hunt.

Browning said her firm is advising clients to pay more and offer other benefits, including bonuses, to offset the extended jobless aid. Six months ago, a client raised the hourly rate for a temporary position by \$4 an hour. The proportion of jobs filled, she said, jumped from 35% to 98%.

"You really have to encourage people to come back to work," Browning said, "and that means pay at the level the market is demanding."

Need for new skills

For some of the unemployed, their old job appears gone for good. In some cases, their former employers have learned to operate with fewer workers. Landing a job will require finding work in a new occupation or industry - perhaps only after obtaining job training. This takes time.

Many economists expect more companies to help reskill workers themselves, particularly if they become desperate to hire. Should the unemployment rate keep declining, businesses might have little choice.

"When the economy is running hot, businesses begin to increase training and take risks on someone they might not have hired in the past," said Ryan Sweet, an economist at Moody's Analytics.

Optimism needed

For millions of Americans, the past year has meant demoralizing job losses - sometimes multiple layoffs - and fruitless job searches, leading many to give up on finding work.

As an example, the number of people who said they want a job but were too discouraged to look for one in the past month didn't change in March. That was true even though several job search websites report that job postings have risen sharply in recent weeks.

For discouraged workers, Pollak said, it can take time to regain confidence.

"There are many job seekers who haven't yet realized how rapidly the conditions in the labor market have changed," she said. "Many searched for work earlier during the pandemic, when it was most difficult and frustrating to do so, and are now discouraged." (AP)

‘I think it is going to require some systemic changes by employers’

If you need to find tax help, try DIY first

By Liz Weston
NerdWallet

Getting help from the IRS this tax season is going to be a challenge. The IRS has finally opened the 23.4 million pieces of mail that piled up after the pandemic shuttered its processing centers last spring. But the agency still has a backlog of paperwork from last year even as it ingests this year's returns, issues a third round of relief payments and gears up to send monthly child tax credit payments to millions of families.

The tax deadline has been moved from April 15 to May 17, giving people more time to file. Getting help is another matter. Callers face long wait times with no guarantee they'll reach a human being. Meanwhile, many tax help sites are closed or working at reduced capacity because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Here are some common questions and answers that could save you some time or point you to resources that will help.

Where's my stimulus payment?
The IRS dispatched two rounds of economic impact payments last year. If you didn't receive your payments or received less than you should have, you can claim the "recovery rebate credit" on your 2020 tax return that's



This undated file photo provided by NerdWallet shows Liz Weston, a columnist for personal finance website NerdWallet.com. (AP)

due May 17.
The third relief payment, created by the \$1.9 trillion stimulus package that President Joe Biden signed into law March 11, started arriving in bank accounts shortly afterward. The rules are somewhat different for

this relief check, which is worth up to \$1,400 per person. For the first time, all dependents of eligible taxpayers can get the payment, including college students. Also, there is a steeper phaseout: Single filers with adjusted gross incomes up to \$75,000 can receive the full amount, but the payment decreases above that level and zeroes out at \$80,000. The phaseout range is \$112,500 to \$120,000 for heads of household, and \$150,000 to \$160,000 for married couples filing jointly. Payments will be based on adjusted gross income on 2020 returns, if those have been filed, and on 2019 returns otherwise.

None of the payments are taxable, and you typically won't have to repay the money if you get too much. Taxpayers can check the IRS' Get My Payment tool to track the status of their relief payments.

In addition to the relief payments, monthly payments of up to \$300 per child are expected to begin in July and continue through December. This enhanced child tax credit begins to phase out at adjusted gross incomes of \$75,000 for singles, \$112,500 for heads of household and \$150,000 for joint returns.

How do I get a refund of the taxes I paid on unemployment benefits?
The latest stimulus package also

exempts \$10,200 of last year's unemployment benefits from taxation for people with adjusted gross incomes under \$150,000. The IRS has promised to automatically refund the appropriate amounts to those who already filed their 2020 returns before the stimulus deal was signed.

Where can I get free tax help?

Most taxpayers can file their federal taxes online for free, using software that guides them through their returns and checks for errors. The IRS' Free File program is available for taxpayers with adjusted gross incomes of up to \$72,000. Unfortunately, some online tax preparers promise free filing but then divert users into paid options, so it's best to begin the process on the IRS' Free File page at www.irs.gov/freefile.

"If you need more help, you may be able to get free assistance through the IRS' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Tax Counseling for the Elderly programs, although many of the programs are operating differently this year."

Some sites are temporarily closed and others are not operating at full capacity, but the programs also have added low- and no-contact options.

For example, the largest such program, AARP Foundation's Tax-Aide, has added online and drop-off ser-

vices, says Lynnette Lee-Villanueva, program vice president. In-person sessions are still available but only by appointment.

I got a notice! what do I do now?

Consumer advocates have criticized the IRS for continuing with collection and enforcement actions while the agency was still dealing with its backlog. (As of Jan. 29, the IRS still hadn't processed 6.7 million tax returns from 2019.) In some cases, taxpayers received past-due notices for payments already made. Sometimes the notice itself was so delayed that the taxpayer didn't have enough time to respond before penalties were levied.

The IRS has information on its coronavirus tax relief hub about how its "mission-critical functions" have been affected. The website offers details on what you can expect and what you can do next if you received a bill or notice. If you've taken steps to resolve the issue that prompted the notice, for example, the IRS recommends doing nothing further - simply wait for the agency to catch up.

If your issue is pressing, though, you can try the number listed on the notice and consider contacting the Taxpayer Advocate Service office in your state. You also could hire a CPA or enrolled agent, who can give you advice and represent you with the IRS. (AP)

‘If you need more help, you may be able to get free assistance through the IRS' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Tax Counseling for the Elderly programs, although many of the programs are operating differently this year’