



Customers wait in line outside a Walmart Supercenter store, due to COVID-19 restrictions on store capacity, Wednesday, April 7, 2021, in Miami. (AP)

to retain workers, Walmart moves more of them full time

Walmart is moving more of its workers full time, with the goal of having two-thirds of its U.S. store hourly jobs be full time with more consistent work schedules by early next year.

That's up from 53% five years ago, the company said.

With this move, announced Wednesday, the nation's largest private employer says it will have 740,000 of its 1.2 million U.S. Walmart hourly store workers work full time by Jan. 31. That would mean it will have roughly 110,000 more full-time workers than

it did five years ago. Walmart employs roughly 1.5 million workers in the U.S., including those at Sam's Club, distribution centers and in corporate and managerial jobs.

Drew Holler, Walmart's senior vice president of U.S. people operations, told The Associated Press Wednesday that workers are demanding full-time jobs, which have better health and dental benefits. Holler also noted that full-time work offers the Bentonville, Arkansas-based retailer a competitive

edge as it's able to retain and attract better employees in a fiercely competitive environment. The moves also come as the exploding pickup and delivery businesses are calling for more full-time jobs as Walmart's stores operate both as fulfillment centers and retail spaces.

"We know offering more full-time opportunities along with skills training and equipping associates with tools to make work easier will help us continue to attract and retain top talent," Holler wrote in a corporate blog. (AP)

Market Movements

15-04-2021

	Change	Closing pts
↑ AUSTRALIA - All Ordinaries	+36.83	7,317.46
↑ JAPAN - Nikkei	+21.70	29,642.69
↑ S. KOREA - KRX 100	+34.07	6,878.54
↑ PHILIPPINES - PSEI	+16.75	6,539.96
↑ INDIA - Sensex	+259.62	48,803.68

	Change	Closing pts
↓ PAKISTAN - KSE 100	-81.04	45,230.18
↓ CHINA - Shanghai SE	-17.73	3,398.99

Business

JPMorgan profit up sharply, Wells Fargo earned \$4.74bn in Q1

BoFA profit doubles in Q1 to \$8.1bn, Goldman earnings surge

CHARLOTTE, North Carolina, April 15, (AP) — Bank of America Corp says its net income doubled to \$8.05 billion in the first quarter.

The bank, based in Charlotte, North Carolina, said Thursday that it had earnings of 86 cents per share, up from 40 cents a year earlier.

Bank of America was able to free up \$2.7 billion of the reserves it had set aside early in the pandemic in case of loan defaults, giving a boost to its bottom line in the latest quarter.

The results surpassed Wall Street expectations. The average estimate of nine analysts surveyed by Zacks Investment Research was for earnings of 65 cents per share.

The nation's second-largest bank posted revenue of \$24.02 billion in the period, while the S&P's 500 index has climbed almost 10%. The stock has climbed 68% in the last 12 months.

Investment bank Goldman Sachs saw its profits nearly quintuple in the first quarter, driven by a massive surge of revenue from its core investment banking and trading operations.

The jump in profits is similar to that seen at JPMorgan Chase, which also reported its results on Wednesday, although unlike JPMorgan, Goldman's results did not benefit from a release from its loan-loss reserves of any significant amount.

The New York-based company had a profit of \$6.71 billion, or \$18.80 a share, compared to a profit of \$1.12 billion, or \$3.11 a share, in the same period a year earlier. The results were much better than the \$10.20-per-share profit that analysts had forecast, according to FactSet.

Goldman's results reflect the health of the stock and bond markets compared to a year earlier. Markets across the world plunged sharply in March 2020 as investors realized how much economic and human damage the coronavirus pandemic could cause. The S&P 500 index dropped 12.5% just in the month of March last year.

But as the economy has recovered and millions of vaccines have been administered, so has Goldman's profits. The stock and bond market had relatively healthy volatility in the first quarter, which allowed the bank's traders to profit from the moves. Several companies went public and the volatile trading of certain stocks like GameStop, AMC Entertainment and others allowed Goldman's traders to take advantage.

In investment banking, Goldman had revenues of \$3.57 billion, more than



This file photo shows a Wells Fargo office in New York. Wells Fargo & Co says first-quarter net income jumped to \$4.74 billion from \$653 million a year earlier, when the pandemic struck the global economy. (AP)

double the revenues of \$1.74 billion in the year-ago quarter. Trading revenues rose 60% from a year earlier as well.

Goldman only had a small \$70 million benefit to its results from its releasing money from its loan-loss reserves. Goldman doesn't have a significant consumer finance division, or sell mortgages, as compared to its Wall Street counterparts. The bank is only sitting on \$4.24 billion in loan-loss reserves, whereas JPMorgan has \$26 billion in reserves.

Goldman's return on equity, a measurement used by investment banks on how well they are using their underlying assets, was 31% in the quarter. That's the best quarterly performance for Goldman since 2009. Typically banks like Goldman aim for a return on equity above 10%.

Wells Fargo had its best quarter in a year and a half, posting a profit of \$4.74 billion and freeing up more than a billion dollars that had been set aside for potential loan defaults at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

The San Francisco-based bank on Wednesday said it earned \$1.05 per share on revenue of \$18.06 billion in the quarter, both surpassing Wall Street's forecasts. Analysts surveyed by Zacks were expecting earnings per share of 69 cents and revenue of \$17.62 billion.

The biggest US mortgage lender had net interest income of \$8.8 billion, a more than 22% decline from the \$11.3 billion in the same period last year. Although interest rates have ticked up recently, they have remained low as the Federal Reserve has signaled plans to keep its benchmark borrowing rate near zero until 2023.

The consumer bank released \$1.6 billion from its loan loss reserves, acknowledging an improving economy as millions of people get vaccinated and governments scale back pandemic-related business restrictions. The bank said the return of that cash, plus the sale of some student loans, helped boost its earnings by 30 cents per share.

In the same quarter last year, just as the virus pandemic was blowing a hole through the global economy, Wells reported a 90% plunge in profits and set aside nearly \$4 billion in loan loss provisions. Wells and other banks set aside the money in preparation for consumers and businesses defaulting on loans due to the pandemic.

Wells Fargo CEO Charlie Scharf said in a statement that low interest rates remain a "headwind" for the bank, but that it remains focused on "appropriate risk and control environment."

"This is a multiyear effort and there is still much to do, but I am confident we are making progress, though it is not always a straight line," Scharf said. Wells has been operating under strict federal guidelines for years, limiting its ability to grow.

In 2018, the Fed capped the size of Wells Fargo's assets after a series of scandals beginning in 2016 with the uncovering of millions of fake checking accounts its employees opened to meet sales quotas. The Fed lifted that cap last April as part of the federal government's Payroll Protection Program because many of Wells' small business customers were getting shut out from applying, but most of the restrictions remain.

JPMorgan Chase saw its first-quarter profit jump nearly five fold from a year earlier, as the improving economy allowed the bank to free up roughly \$5 billion that it had stored away to guard against loan defaults in the early weeks of the pandemic.

US economy rebounding, helped by stimulus – Fed

Stepped-up vaccine rollout boosts outlook

WASHINGTON, April 15, (AP) — A Federal Reserve survey has found that the economy was rebounding in late February through early April, helped by billions of dollars in a new round of stimulus payments and the stepped-up rollout of coronavirus vaccines.

The new survey released Wednesday showed that the Fed's business contacts around the country were expressing more optimism about the economy's outlook as activity accelerated.

The survey credited a range of factors, from vaccinations to the payments of up to \$1,400 for individuals from the \$1.9 trillion relief package that President Joe Biden pushed through Congress last month.

The survey, known as the beige book, will form the basis for discussions when Fed officials meet on April 27-28 to discuss what to do about interest rates.

Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial, said the message from the beige book is that business activity is picking up but "the economy still has a lot of room to strengthen further."

While private forecasters have been busy boosting their economic projections for this year, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell has continued to stress that the central bank is not



In this file photo, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Jerome Powell appears before the Senate Banking Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington. (AP)

close to raising rates. The Fed released projections last month that indicated it will hold off raising rates until after 2023.

The beige book report, based on information from business contacts supplied by the Fed's 12 regional banks, said that manufacturing activity continued to expand, with half of the Fed districts reporting robust manufacturing growth. Those gains came despite supply-chain disruptions in such critical areas as computer chips.

The survey found that the Fed's regional bank in New York is seeing growth for the first time since the pandemic shut down the economy a year ago and that the expansion is "broad-based across industries."

The Fed's Philadelphia regional bank found that demand for goods and services is "on fire" but myriad severe supply constraints are continuing to hamper various industries.

Cleveland reported improvements in the hard-hit hotel and restaurant sectors. Similar improvements were reported by the Fed's Atlanta regional bank, which covers tourist destinations in Florida.

Dallas reported that supply-chain disruptions have led to sharp increases in prices of goods, while the San Francisco district reported that residential construction remains strong.

The Fed survey found that many of its districts are seeing moderate price increases, specifically for materials such as metals, lumber, food and fuel.

The beige book reported that employment growth picked up as economic activity increased. It noted strong job gains in manufacturing, construction, and leisure and hospitality.

In an appearance Wednesday before the Economic Club of Washington, Powell acknowledged rising concerns about inflation following a report Tuesday that consumer prices rose 0.6% in March, the biggest one-month gain since 2012.

But Powell, who has been predicting a temporary spike in inflation this spring, repeated the view that the central bank wants to see inflation rise "moderately above 2% for some time" to make up for a decade when inflation has failed to reach the Fed's 2% inflation target.



Coinbase employees gather outside the Nasdaq MarketSite during the company's IPO, in New York's Times Square, Wednesday, April 14, 2021. Wall Street will be focused on Coinbase Wednesday with the digital currency exchange becoming a publicly traded company. (AP)

Company valued near \$86 billion

Coinbase soars in market debut

NEW YORK, April 15, (AP) — Coinbase made a rousing debut on Wall Street Wednesday, with shares of the digital currency exchange rising as high as \$429, briefly giving it a market value over \$100 billion.

Coinbase Global Inc.'s initial public offering happened with cryptocurrency chatter seemingly everywhere, even at the U.S. Federal Reserve. Digital currencies are being incorporated into business plans and accepted for payment by major corporations like Tesla, PayPal and Visa.

The San Francisco-based company's listing on a public stock exchange is seen by some as an inflection point for digital currencies, as Coinbase's fortunes are closely tied to Bitcoin, the most popular cryptocurrency. Bitcoin's price topped \$64,000 on Wednesday, up from \$29,000 at the start of the year, and Coinbase said recently that first-quarter revenue should total around \$1.8 billion, exceeding its revenue for all of 2020.

Shares of Coinbase are listed on the Nasdaq under the ticker "COIN," and closed at \$328.28, up 31% from the

\$250 reference price set by Nasdaq ahead of the first trade. That puts Coinbase's market value at \$85.78 billion.

That market value makes Coinbase one of the biggest publicly traded U.S. companies - just 93 companies in the S&P 500 index have a higher market value. Coinbase's value is close to the combined market value of Nasdaq Inc., which runs the Nasdaq Stock Market, and Intercontinental Exchange, which owns the New York Stock Exchange.

Founded in 2012, Coinbase became popular among cryptocurrency fans by providing them with an easier way to exchange shares of Bitcoin and other digital currencies. Unlike many newly public companies Coinbase is profitable - the company estimates it had net income of between \$730 million and \$800 million in the first quarter.

Dan Ives, analyst at Wedbush Securities, said in a note Wednesday that "Coinbase is a foundational piece of the crypto ecosystem and is a barometer for the growing mainstream adoption of Bitcoin and crypto for the coming years."

Still, even as more companies warm

up to digital currencies, there are many doubters. Until recently the major financial institutions avoided cryptocurrencies, and Bitcoin is still viewed more as a store of value than as a method of payment.

Even as Coinbase made its trading debut, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell described cryptocurrencies as "vehicles for speculation" in comments to the Economic Club of Washington. "No one is using them for payments, for example, like the dollar."

And not all investors are buying into the Coinbase hype. David Trainer, CEO of investment research firm New Constructs, said Coinbase has "little-to-no chance of meeting the future profit expectations that are baked into its ridiculously high valuation."

Trainer last week put a valuation on Coinbase closer to \$18.9 billion, arguing it will face more competition as the cryptocurrency market matures.

Coinbase said it had 56 million verified users as of March 31, with 6.1 million making transactions monthly. Trading volume in the first quarter was \$335 million.

In Global Finance's Annual Survey

NBK Named Best Bank in Kuwait for 2021



National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) received the award of "Best Bank in Kuwait" for 2021, in the 28th annual survey of the reputable international magazine Global Finance, based on the input from a large panel of experts, analysts, corporate financial executives, bankers and banking consultants around the world.

In selection of the Best Banks in the Middle East, Global Finance relied on a set of objective criteria including: growth in assets, profitability, geographic reach, strategic relationships, new business development and innovation in products.

Naming NBK for this prestigious award is a

recognition of its continuous efforts to provide an exceptional banking experience to its customers, despite the unprecedented economic circumstances wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The award of Best Bank in Kuwait for 2021, which is for the 10th year in a row, is an addition to NBK's rich record of awards and recognitions, and manifestation of preserving its leading position and dominant share in the local market and across all business sectors.

Global Finance said that this year's awards highlight the leaders in restoring growth and mapping a way forward in the economic recovery from the pandemic.

Global Finance, founded in 1987 and headquartered in New York, is one of the most reputable magazines specialized in finance and economics. It has a circulation of 50,000 readers in 189 countries around the world, including senior corporate and financial officers responsible for making investment and strategic decisions at multinational companies and financial institutions.

The magazine conducts various surveys annually about innovation and profitability for banks and financial institutions all over the world, based on which it selects top performers on the regional and international levels.

Meanwhile, NBK continues to collectively enjoy one of the highest credit ratings among all banks of the Middle East from the top three international credit rating agencies: Moody's, Fitch Ratings and Standard & Poor's. The Bank's ratings are supported by its strong capitalization, prudent lending policies, disciplined approach to risk management, as well as its highly experienced and very stable management team. In addition, the bank continues to be in Global Finance's list of the World's 50 Safest Banks.