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**90 Million
Americans Not
Working**

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

90 Million Americans Not Working

Another unfortunate milestone for the labor market.

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Updated Oct. 23, 2013 5:11 p.m. ET

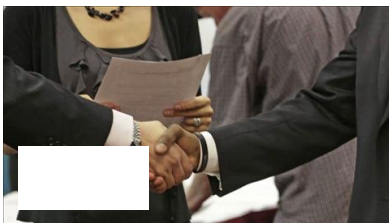
Maybe the Bureau of Labor Statistics should have skipped a month because the belated September jobs report it issued Tuesday after the government shutdown wasn't worth the wait.

Payrolls rose a humdrum 148,000 in September, the unemployment rate fell a tick to 7.2%, and wages were up slightly. But once again the number that stands out is the 136,000 Americans in September (following the 516,000 in August) who joined those "not in the labor force." The labor force participation rate stayed at its lowest level since the 1970s at 63.2%.

The U.S. now has 90.6 million "non-institutionalized" men and women over the age of 16 not working—an all-time high. That's 10 million above the 80.5 million when President Obama took office. With total employment at 144.3 million, for every three Americans over the age of 16 earning a paycheck there are two who aren't even looking for a job. That's an ugly portent for American prosperity.

Demographics is about half the explanation as about six million baby boomers have turned 65 since 2008. Another is that young people are staying in school longer. Both trends are reinforced by the bearish job market. Even among those in their prime working years between 25 and 64, the number not working has increased by about 1.8 million since 2008. That is on top of the 11.3 million who are officially unemployed.

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Editorial board member Steve Moore on September's lackluster jobs report. Photos: AP

Easy access to expanded government welfare benefits that substitute for work—unemployment insurance, disability, food stamps and soon ObamaCare—also contribute to the decline, as economists like Casey Mulligan of the University of Chicago have documented.

Our Keynesian friends chalk it up to the "fiscal drag" caused by sequester budget cuts and the government shutdown. But the September hiring figures predate the

shutdown. And though the federal government has been laying off some workers, states and localities are back hiring.

In August and September combined, public employment rose by 54,000, with all the gains in state and local governments. Government hired more workers in those two months than did any industry other than health care and business services. The government is not hurting for money.

To get more private jobs requires faster economic growth, and the Obama Administration

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National Federation of Independent Business, two big concerns are regulation and [ObamaCare](#).

"Consumers and small business owners are pessimistic," concludes NFIB from its latest survey. They aren't "expecting a 'crash' in the economy, just accepting the notion that growth is going to be sub-par and that their government is likely to continue in dysfunctional mode." Q.E.D.

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