

Encouraging Numbers, but We're Not Celebrating Yet

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Today's [jobs report](#) tells the story of a solid and steady economic recovery delivering more opportunity for more people. We saw 192,000 new jobs in the month of March, and the private sector has now created 8.9 million jobs over the last 49 consecutive months of employment growth. The unemployment rate held steady at 6.7 percent and is down from 7.5 percent a year ago.

There is encouraging news across sectors. Health care employment increased by 19,000 jobs. The average workweek in manufacturing rebounded to 42.0 hours, tied for the highest mark since July 1945. Motor vehicle sales had their strongest month in seven years. At the height of the recession, there were six job seekers for every job available. Today, it's 2 1/2 people competing for every open job.

Without question, there is more still to do. On issues from infrastructure to immigration reform, from manufacturing to the minimum wage, there are steps Congress can take that will help more people punch their ticket to the middle class.

For the 57th straight month (since the middle of 2009), at least one-third of jobless Americans have been unemployed for more than 27 weeks. So, priority No. 1 must be for the House and Senate to extend [emergency unemployment benefits](#) that they irresponsibly allowed to expire more than three months ago, creating profound hardship for 2.3 million people. These benefits are a critical lifeline for job seekers struggling to get back on their feet; but they also act as a broader economic stimulus, putting money in people's pockets and spurring consumer demand.

The success of the [Affordable Care Act](#) is helping working families enjoy greater economic security, the peace of mind of knowing they won't be wiped out by an injury or illness. The open enrollment period ended with 7.1 million people signing up for health coverage they didn't have before. The ACA will help provide a shot in the arm to the economy, as people are free to start their own businesses and pursue entrepreneurial ventures now that their health insurance is no longer tied to their job.

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