



WEEKLY ECONOMIC DIGEST

JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR, VICE CHAIR

April 16, 2013

Latest Data Show Exports Accelerating, Imports Down

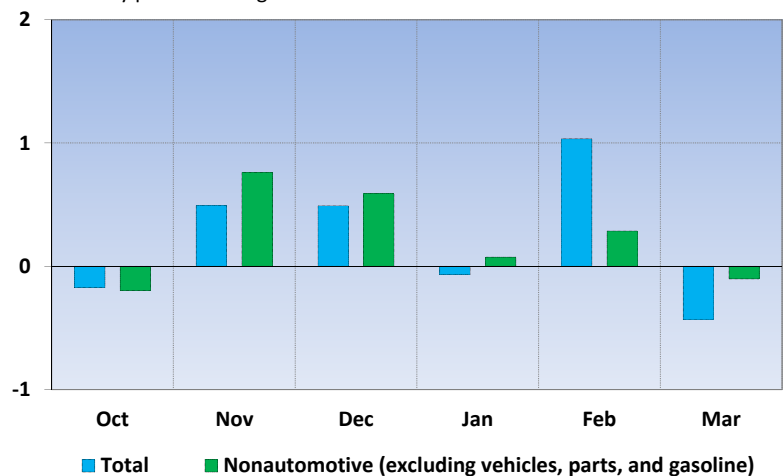
Trade deficit narrowed in February

- Exports increased more than imports in February, leading to a \$1.5 billion decline in the U.S. trade deficit to \$43.0 billion, according to the most recent data from the Census Bureau.
- February's trade deficit was smaller than most forecasters had anticipated.
- Increased overseas shipments of oil, chemicals and metals led overall growth of exports in February.
- Overall import growth was tempered by a 5.9 percent drop in oil imports during February, following a 12.4 percent increase in January.

March retail sales slightly below forecasters' expectations

- The total value of sales at retail establishments and food services decreased by 0.4 percent in March, following a strong gain in February (+1.0 percent), according to the Census Bureau's preliminary estimates (see chart).
- Over 80 percent of the March decrease in overall sales was due to declining automotive sales, a category that accounts for only about 30 percent of total sales but can fluctuate considerably from month to month.
- Automotive sales declined 1.2 percent in March after rising 2.8 percent in February as vehicle demand eased somewhat last month and retail gasoline prices decelerated sharply.
- Nonautomotive sales edged down 0.1 percent in March, the first decline since October.
- Total retail sales have increased 2.8 percent over the past year.

Sales at Retail & Food Services Establishments, Recent Months
Monthly percent change



Source: Staff calculations using data from the Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce.

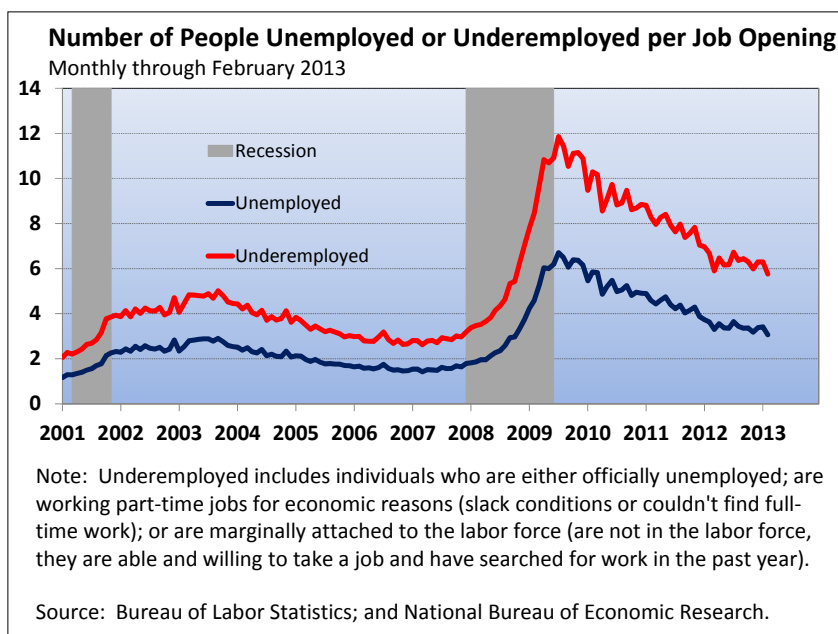
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Business sales rose in February while inventories were little changed

- The combined value of the inventories of wholesalers, retailers, and manufacturers rose by 0.1 percent in February, following a large 0.9 percent increase in January.
- By contrast, the combined sales of those businesses accelerated sharply in February.
- It appears that businesses were more likely to have met February sales demand out of existing stocks rather than increased production.
- Measured relative to current sales, February inventories dropped back to levels that prevailed during the closing months of last year.

Job openings and hires increased in February

- Job vacancies were up 8.7 percent in February, reaching the highest level since May 2008.
- Private and public employers reported 3.925 million job vacancies at the end of the month.
- While labor markets have improved somewhat since the recession, finding a job still tends to be more difficult than it was prior to the downturn.
- On average, there were 3.1 unemployed workers and 5.8 underemployed workers for every job opening in February (see chart).



THE WEEK AHEAD

DAY

SELECTED UPCOMING DATA RELEASES & EVENTS

Tuesday, Apr. 16

Consumer Price Index (March)
Industrial Production and Capacity Utilization (March)
New Residential Construction (March)

Wednesday, Apr. 17

Federal Reserve Board, Summary of Commentary on Current Economic Conditions

Thursday, Apr. 18

JEC Hearing, "The Fed at 100: Can Monetary Policy Close the Growth Gap and Promote a Sound Dollar?" Hart Senate Office Building, Room 216, 9:30am