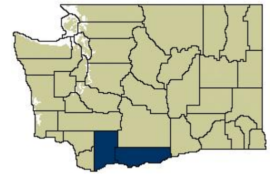
Washington State
Employment Security
Department

Klickitat and Skamania Counties



Labor Area Summary

January, 2021

Volume 2022, Number 1

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Monthly Review

Jan. 2022 Unemployment Rates	Jan. 2022	Dec. 2021	Jan. 2021
Seasonally Adjusted:			
U.S.	4.0	3.9	6.4
U.S. U-6**	7.1	7.3	11.1
Washington	4.4	4.5	6.0
Oregon	4.3	4.2	6.4
Portland Metro	3.9	3.9	7.0
Columbia Gorge*	4.8	4.5	6.3
Unadjusted:			
U.S.	4.4	3.7	6.8
Washington	5.1	4.0	7.0
Oregon	4.7	3.6	7.1
Columbia Gorge*	5.4	4.0	7.5
Klickitat	6.9	5.1	8.3
Skamania	6.4	4.9	8.9
Hood River	4.0	2.8	6.3
Sherman	4.3	3.4	5.3
Wasco	5.5	4.1	7.9
Clark	5.1	4.0	6.8
Cowlitz	6.3	4.9	7.9
Wahkiakum	6.9	5.1	7.9
Portland Metro	4.4	3.4	6.7

*Includes Hood River, Klickitat, Sherman, Skamania, and Wasco counties.
**See text for definition.

It ain't nothing but a heartbreaker
Friend only to the undertaker

War, Edwin Starr (sadly, not the first time referencing this song)

The Big Picture

It's like a heat wave: I'm thinking Martha & the Vandellas, but Linda Ronstadt's version works as well. This past week temperatures in the Antarctic *and* Arctic were 50 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than normal. Imagine if one of those heat domes settled over the Pacific Northwest! We'd see temperatures of 110, maybe even 120 degrees! Oh wait, that happened to us, didn't it… Readers might remember me cautioning you that as scary as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports are, they are based on what can currently be explained by accepted scientific models. When scientists start ripping up their models of the Antarctic climate, it is not a good sign.

They're trying to wash us away: In Neal Stephenson's latest book, Termination Shock, set roughly 20 years in the future, a wealthy Houston businessman with a doctorate in statistics attempts to form an alliance with other low-elevation areas (the Netherlands, Singapore, Venice) to geo-engineer their way into keeping climate change, and specifically rising sea levels, at bay. When the topic of sea level comes up, the businessman snorts, saying there's no such thing—sea level is "stochastic". Another character explains what he means: sea level is an *average* (as in, a statistical term), and the *actual level of the sea* in a particular time and place (on an island or on a shore) varies around that average, according to the tides, wind, storms, whether the shoreline is sinking (subsidence) or rising, and nowadays by the rate at which glaciers are melting.

So the new IPCC report (again, probably too conservative!) stating that sea levels will rise about a foot by 2050 needs to be looked at through that statistical lens. In Anchorage, where shorelines are rising, the sea level will *decrease* by 8 inches, while the increase in sea level will be closer to 4 to 8 inches on the West Coast, 10 to 14 inches on the East Coast (where coastline flooding has already increased noticeably—with an octopus washed up in a parking garage in Miami recently), and 24 inches in Galveston on the Gulf of Mexico (just downstream from the aforementioned Houston).

And—this is just the *average* rise. In statistics, it's often the distribution that counts. With higher average sea level and stronger and more frequent "king" tides, storms and storm surges, flooding and flood damage will increase substantially in the coming decades.

All for one, one for all: In The Dawn of Everything, David Wengrow and the late David Graeber quote a French friar who lived among the Wendat nation in what is now Ontario in the 1600s.

> The Wendat were particularly offended by the French lack of generosity to one another: 'They reciprocate hospitality and give such assistance to one another that the necessities of all are provide for without there being any indigent beggar in their towns and villages; and the considered it a very bad thing when they heard it said that there were in France a great many of these needy beggars, and thought that this was for lack of charity in us, and blamed us for it severely.' (page 39)

Just adding a little historical context: according to Columbia University's Center on Poverty & Social Policy, the child poverty rate in the U.S. jumped from 12.1 percent in December to 17.0 percent in January. Another 3.7 million children in this country were living in poverty, in large part due to the expiration of the monthly Child Tax Credit program. The rate rose from 19.5 percent to 25.4 percent for African-American children; from 16.8 percent to 23.9 percent for Latino children; from 11.9 percent to 15.1 percent for Asian-American children; and from 7.5 percent to 11.4 percent for white children. *Plus ça change…* the more they stay the same.

Our famously free markets. Textbook economics treats the labor market as if it were the market for, say, wheat: lots of buyers, lot of sellers, interchangeable parts, free flow of information about prices and quality, and inevitable forces leading to a balance between supply and demand. More technically, a worker's wage will equal the (monetary) value their work creates for their employer (the "marginal revenue product of labor"). Raising the minimum wage will create unemployment, because if workers are paid more than the value they create, their employer will lose money and have to lay them off.

Except…no. A new report from the U.S. Treasury Department summarizes several decades of research on wages and concludes that employers have more market power than workers, who are paid on average about 20 percent below what they're worth. In manufacturing, that figure may be as high as 35 percent. Employers have the upper hand a number of different ways, including:

- Large employers can act like a monopsony—think monopoly, except a single buyer instead of a single seller. More often, a group of dominant employers can effectively act as one to set wages at a lower than competitive level.
- Asymmetry of information—employers know more about the labor market than workers. They know what they pay similar workers, and often know what their competitors pay, in much more detail than individual workers, who often face a taboo about talking about their pay, do.
- Employers occasionally conspire to fix wages or agree not to poach each other's employees, reducing competition and dampening wage growth.
- Non-compete agreements (preventing workers from moving to a competing employer), non-disclosure agreements, and mandatory arbitration "agreements" (which new hires may be forced to sign, and which "prevent workers from legal recourse to rectify violations of labor laws, antitrust laws, or employment terms") all put a damper on wages.

Because depressed wages lead to lower labor force participation, and because employees are paid below their value to their employer, increasing the minimum wage actually increases employment by luring more workers into the job market.

The Nation—current business cycle

Nonfarm employment for the past year has been revised in the annual benchmarking process, the result being many of the ups and downs were smoothed out, but the overall trend remained the same. Employment growth has ranged between 424,000 and 689,000 jobs a month for the pasts 10 months, with February (+678,000) on the high side. The nation was still 2.1 million jobs short of the February 2020 pre-COVID peak, a 1.4 percent gap. Again, that's not counting the jobs that would be needed just to keep up with population growth over the past 24 months (now well over 2 million jobs).

Industries gaining jobs over the past two years			Industries losing jobs		
Industry	Change	Percent	Industry	Change	Percent
Building material stores	+113,600	+9 percent	Mining	-82,700	-13 percent
General merchandise stores	+184,600	+6 percent	Clothing stores	-196,500	-15 percent
Nonstore retailers	+63,800	+11 percent	Nursing homes	-397,600	-12 percent
Warehousing	+419,600	+32 percent	Childcare services	-123,500	-12 percent
Professional services	+540,900	+6 percent	Arts, entertainment	-263,700	-11 percent
Computer systems design	+154,200	+7 percent	Hotel/motels	-443,600	-21 percent
Temp agencies	+240,400	+8 percent	Restaurants	-824,000	-7 percent
Nonstore retailers	+63,800	+11 percent	Local government	-627,000	-4.3 percent

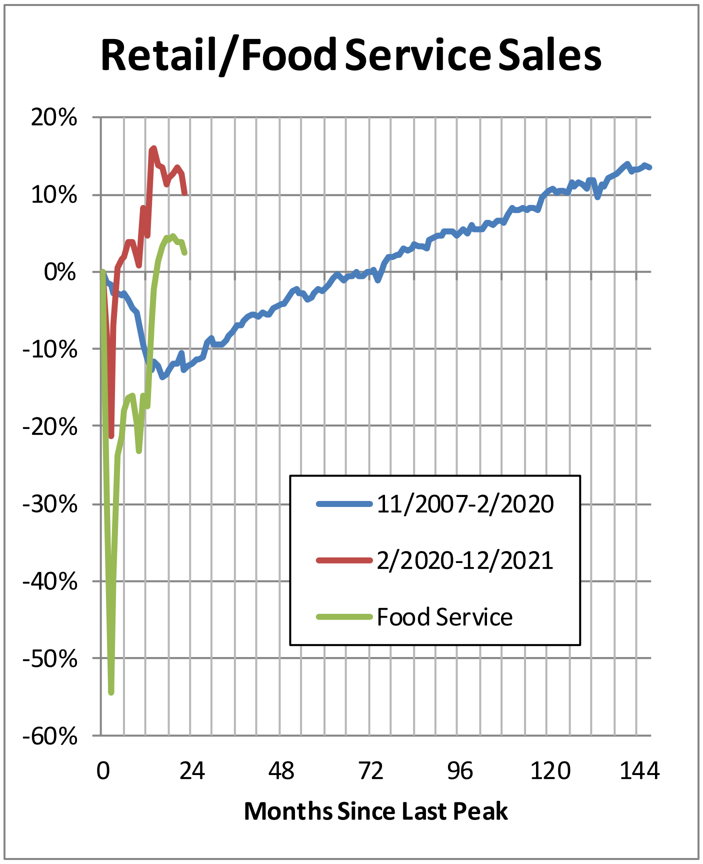
Month	Job Change
March, 2020	-1,498,000
April	-20,493,000
May	2,642,000
June	4,505,000
July	1,388,000
August	1,665,000
September	919,000
October	647,000
November	333,000
December	-115,000
January	520,000
February	710,000
March	704,000
April	263,000
May	447,000
June	557,000
July	689,000
August	517,000
September	424,000
October	677,000
November	647,000
December	588,000
January 2022	481,000
February	678,000
Net change	-2,105,000
Percent	-1.4%

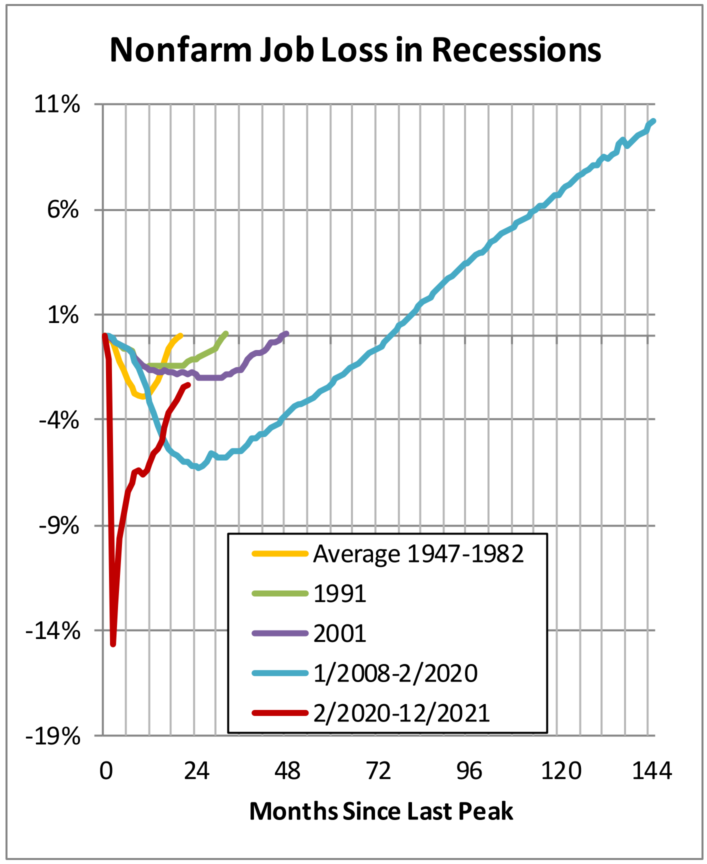
The biggest deficit in terms of numbers of jobs was still leisure & hospitality (-1,532,000, -9.0 percent, over half in restaurants (-824,000, -6.7 percent). Another big loser within this sector: hotel/motels (-443,600, -20.9 percent). Local governments have also been slow to recover (-627,000, -4.3 percent, a majority in public education). Other notable shifts: the increase in nonstore retailers (which includes online shopping) and warehousing, and the continued large losses in nursing homes and childcare.

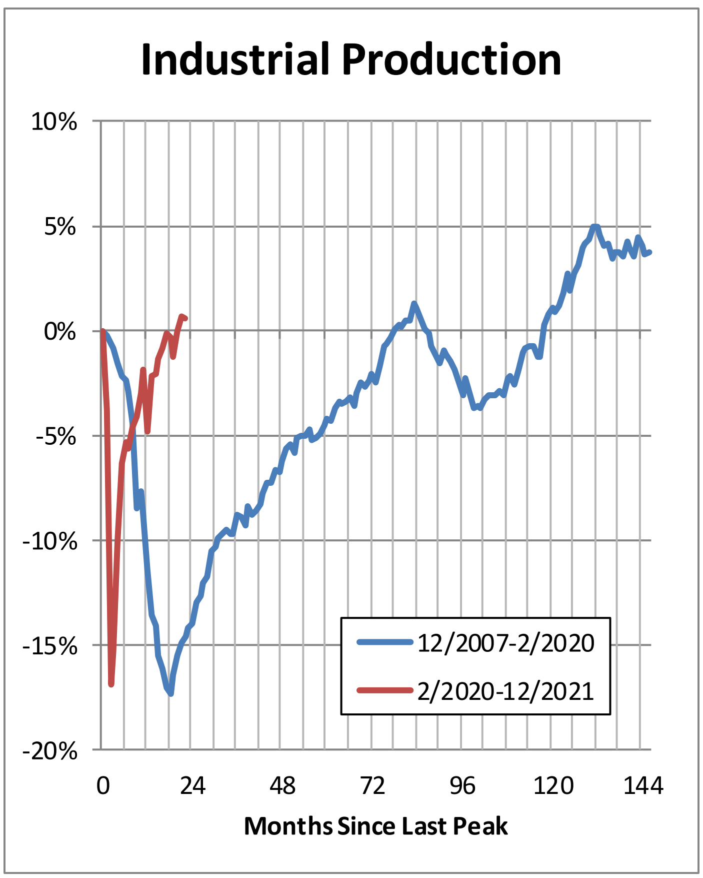
For the third month in a row, the unemployment rate was only 3.6 percent. The more inclusive U-6 rate, which includes part-time workers who can't find a full-time job, and discouraged workers who dropped out of the labor market, inched up to 7.2 percent, only four tenths of a point off its all-time low (going back to 1994).

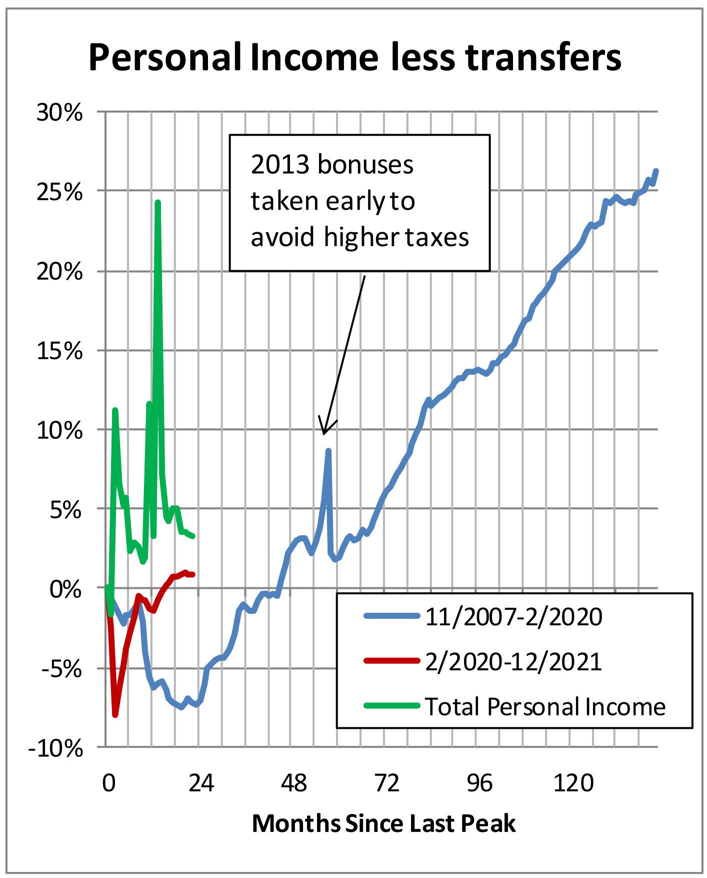
The labor force participation rate has finally begun trending upward, rising from 61.7 percent in October to 62.3 percent in February—still a point below the 63.3 percent from February 2020, but definite progress.

COVID exacerbated inequities in the labor market. Now as cases have declined, some of these have abated, bringing inequities back to "normal." For example, the number of employed individuals has fallen by -0.7 percent over the course of the pandemic. The number of employed African American males (+4.5 percent) and Latino men (+3.7 percent) was higher in February than pre-COVID. While Latinas were still showing a job loss (-0.3 percent), it was less than average. That was not true for other women (white, -2.1 percent, African American, -3.6 percent). Educational disparities continued to loom large for some—the number of workers without a high school diploma or GED has dropped by 6.0 percent, and those with some college or an AA degree had shrunk in numbers by a similar 5.8 percent. On the other hand, employment for those with a high school diploma or GED as their formal education has greatly improved over the past few months, and was better than average at -0.3 percent.


Retail/Food Service Sales
20%
10%
0%
-10%
-20%
-30%
-40%
-50%
-60%
0
24
48
72
96
120
144
Months Since Last Peak
11/2007-2/2020
2/2020-12/2021
Food Service


Nonfarm Job Loss in Recessions
11%
6%
1%
-4%
-9%
-14%
-19%
0
24
48
72
96
120
144
Months Since Last Peak
Average 1947-1982
1991
2001
1/2008-2/2020
2/2020-12/2021


Industrial Production
10%
5%
0%
-5%
-10%
-15%
-20%
0
24
48
72
96
120
144
Months Since Last Peak
12/2007-2/2020
2/2020-12/2021


Personal Income less transfers
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
-5%
-10%
0
24
48
72
96
120
Months Since Last Peak
2013 bonuses taken early to avoid higher taxes
11/2007-2/2020
2/2020-12/2021
Total Personal Income

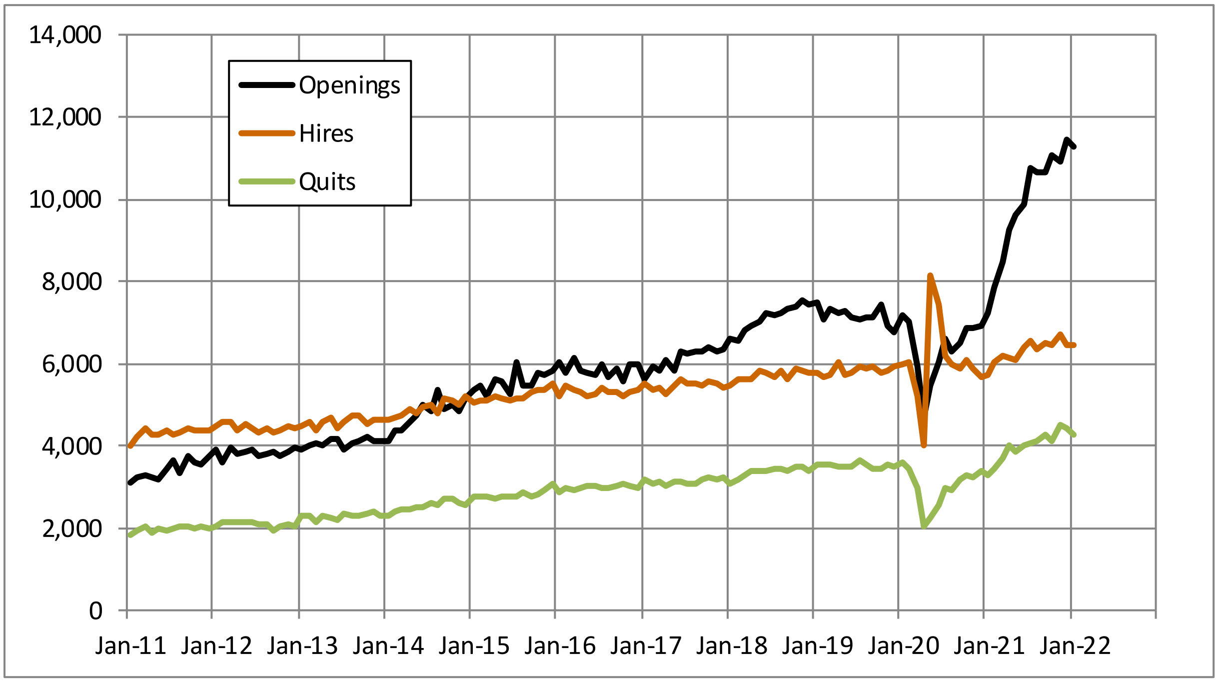
Month	Job Change
March	-1,683,000
April	-20,679,000
May	2,833,000
June	4,846,000
July	1,726,000
August	1,583,000
September	716,000
October	680,000
November	264,000
December	-306,000
January	233,000
February	536,000
March	785,000
April	269,000
May	614,000
June	962,000
July	1,091,000
August	483,000
September	379,000
October	648,000
November	249,000
December	199,000
Net change	-3,572,000
Percent	-2.3%

The table below continues our look at who has been hit the hardest by COVID, looking at unemployment, labor force dropouts, and employment. Note the disparities in the unemployment rate before the onset of the pandemic, reflected in the first column. Looking at the top line, the official unemployment rate for all workers has risen by 0.3 percentage points from February 2020 to February 2022, and the labor force participation rate has fallen by 1.1 percentage points; overall, the number of employed individuals has fallen by 0.7 percent.

Unemployment Rate, and the Change in Unemployment Rate, Participation Rate, Employment Since February 2020					
	Feb. 2020	Feb. 2022	Change in:		
Type of worker	Rate	Rate	UR	LFPR	Emp.
All workers, aged 16+	3.5%	3.8%	0.3	-1.1	-0.7%
African American	6.0%	6.6%	0.6	-1.0	0.1%
Latino/Hispanic	4.4%	4.4%	0.0	-1.4	2.2%
Asian American	2.5%	3.1%	0.6	-1.3	-0.4%
White	3.0%	3.3%	0.3	-1.1	-1.1%
Workers aged 20+:	3.2%	3.6%	0.4	-1.1	-0.8%
Women	3.1%	3.6%	0.5	-1.3	-2.0%
Men	3.2%	3.5%	0.3	-1.0	0.3%
African American women	4.8%	6.1%	1.3	-2.2	-3.1%
African American men	6.1%	6.4%	0.3	1.0	4.5%
Latina women	4.9%	4.8%	-0.1	-2.5	-0.3%
Latino men	3.1%	3.7%	0.6	-0.6	3.7%
White women	6.1%	6.4%	0.3	1.0	4.5%
White men	2.8%	3.0%	0.2	-1.3	-0.4%
Workers aged 25+:	2.9%	3.3%	0.4	-1.0	-0.5%
Less than HS Diploma	5.7%	4.3%	-1.4	-0.8	-6.0%
HS/GED only	3.7%	4.5%	0.8	-2.3	-0.2%
Some College	3.1%	3.8%	0.7	-1.2	-5.8%
Bachelor’s or more	1.9%	2.2%	0.3	-0.8	3.2%
By age group:					
Teenagers (16 to 19)	11.3%	10.3%	-1.0	-0.8	1.4%
Ages 20-24	6.5%	7.5%	1.0	-1.5	-3.3%
Ages 25-34	3.7%	4.1%	0.4	-0.9	-2.7%
Ages 35-44	2.8%	3.3%	0.5	-0.2	3.4%
Ages 45-54	2.5%	2.5%	0.0	-1.1	-1.3%
Ages 55+	2.6%	3.0%	0.4	-1.2	-1.3%

The Great Resignation, revisited. There's been little change in job openings, hires and quits over the past month. All three were stable or down slightly. Job openings remained extremely elevated, quits were a bit above trend, and hires looked to be close to the long-term trend. Together, these three indicate a tight labor market. Higher wages and better working conditions will be needed to close the gap between openings and hires. As the Treasury Department report cited above indicates, corporations can afford this.

Job openings, hires and quits, adjusted for seasonal patterns
United States, January 2011 through January 2022
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics/JOLTS



The Great Retirement—not so great after all? There have been numerous news stories, and some research, about the "great retirement"—how older workers have been retiring in droves, and how retirements have been the driving factor in the shortage of workers. For example, a recent article by economists at the St. Louis Fed notes that "our estimates from the monthly Current Population Survey indicates that there are 3.3 million or 7% more retirees as of October 2021 than in January 2020. The figure below shows that the increase is largely among those age 65 and older, with notably stronger growth among those ages 65 to 74. In contrast, retirements among those ages 55 to 64 have been largely flat during the pandemic. The rate of retirements exceeds that predicted by the demographic shift of baby boomers into retirement."

Since that article was written, population estimates for older residents have been revised sharply downward. That means the number of people over the age of 55 not in the labor force has increased by 2.4 million, not 3.3 million. We can calculate how much of that would be expected simply due to aging baby boomers by applying labor force participation rates for older workers from February 2020 to the February 2022 population. The upshot: there were about 840,000 more older people who were not in the labor force than would have been expected pre-COVID. While not a small number, it was much smaller than the 2.8 million job gap in February—arguably a ~5.2 million job gap when population growth is factored in.

The authors of the above analysis make a mistake when they label anyone over the age of 64 who leaves the labor force is "retired", which implies choosing a life of leisure over showing up at the workplace. In their write-up, they do acknowledge that surveys show that older people had increased bouts of anxiety since the beginning of the pandemic (perhaps related to COVID), which may have led to workers dropping out of the labor force. But they ignore a number of other non-retirement reasons for leaving the labor force, including:

long COVID and other chronic health issues; caring for other family members (e.g. an adult child who has long COVID or other chronic health issue, caring for grandchildren in the absence of the children's parents); fear of exposure to COVID; and giving up looking for a job due to age discrimination. When an older person may have wanted to continue working but didn't because of these or similar reasons—that's not retirement.

Sarah Wolf's recent article in the *Columbian* notes that nationally there has not been an unusual increase in Social Security beneficiaries, and a look at payout data shows nothing abnormal as well. Locally, a deeper analysis will have to wait until the state Office of Financial Management updates population by age estimates based on new 2020 Census data. Looking at employment by age data using just a pair of eyeballs, employment for older workers as of Spring 2021 didn't look much different from Spring 2019.

- GDP rose by 7.0 percent in the final quarter of 2021, after an upwardly-revised 2.3 percent gain in the third quarter.
    - Consumer spending was up 3.1 percent, and has averaged 2.2 percent per year over the past two years—a moderate growth rate. That's of interest because some are saying that the primary reason for inflation was that the stimulus put too much money in people's pocketbooks. The stimulus has likely been a contributor to inflation of goods (a major portion of the consumer price index) because spending shifted away from services and towards goods (bidding up their value). However, it's not the only factor, and will likely not be the major factor going forward.
    - Investment shot up 33.5 percent, but mostly due to an increase in business inventories. Both residential (+1.0 percent) and nonresidential (+3.1 percent) investment rose modestly.
- Industrial production rose by 0.5 percent in February, and has fully recovered, topping pre-COVID levels by 2.2 percent. Breaking production into its three components: factory production rose by 1.2 percent over the month and was 3.4 percent higher than pre-COVID—despite (or because of?) supply chain issues. Mining (mostly petroleum production and fracking) increased 0.1 percent over the month, but was -6.7 percent below where it stood before the pandemic. Energy production was down 2.7 percent over the month (after a big weather-related increase in January) but was 5.4 percent above February 2020.
- Total personal income slipped by 0.5 percent in January, but when transfer payments like Social Security, Medicare and unemployment insurance benefits were factored out—and in particular, child tax credit payments came to an end—income was down only 0.2 percent. Compared with February 2020, total income was higher by 3.0 percent; if transfer payments were excluded, incomes were 1.0 percent higher.
- Retail and food service sales fell by half a point in January. Sales were 14.1 percent higher than pre-pandemic levels. Food service sales rose by 1.9 percent over the month, and 3.3 percent over the course of the pandemic.

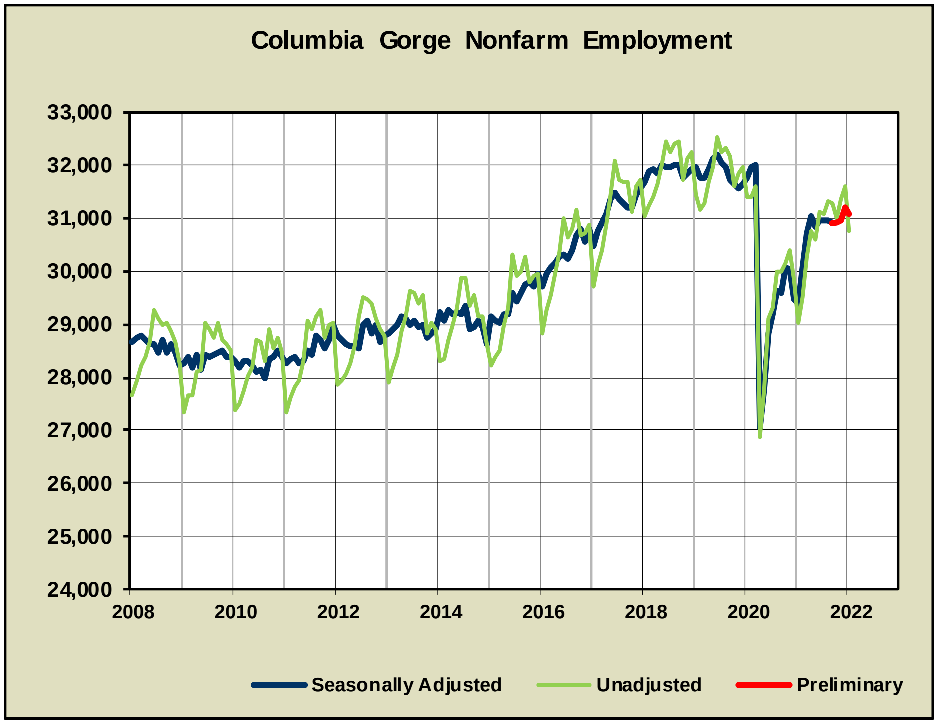
Inflation remained at high levels in February, more on that in the next issue.

State of the States—and PDX

More details in the next issue. For now, just the table below.

Monthly and cumulative employment change for the COVID recession by area					
Month	Washington	Seattle Metro	Oregon	Portland Metro	US
March, 2020	-23,600	-15,500	-17,400	-16,000	-1,498,000
April	-393,900	-195,600	-264,600	-163,800	-20,493,000
May	-14,600	-12,000	18,300	6,000	2,642,000
June	84,800	34,600	57,600	30,200	4,505,000
July	50,800	19,300	29,000	14,700	1,388,000
August	30,500	13,000	18,400	13,600	1,665,000
September	14,200	13,000	8,500	5,900	919,000
October	1,400	0	7,300	5,800	647,000
November	6,200	700	2,900	3,700	333,000
December	-13,000	-7,200	-18,500	-12,600	-115,000
January 2021	400	-5,000	300	2,200	520,000
February	22,000	10,000	14,900	8,600	710,000
March	22,300	7,400	24,000	10,400	704,000
April	21,700	10,200	7,700	4,200	263,000
May	2,400	500	1,100	3,300	447,000
June	17,800	9,200	2,600	4,000	557,000
July	38,400	17,300	34,800	14,600	689,000
August	13,400	11,300	-1,500	2,700	517,000
September	10,100	12,300	900	2,200	424,000
October	11,800	13,700	-900	5,000	677,000
November	13,200	7,600	11,600	7,600	647,000
December	13,600	10,000	6,600	6,500	588,000
January 2022	3,000	4,100	5,100	5,200	481,000
February	31,700	8,900	12,300	NYA	678,000
Net change	-35,400	-32,200	-39,000	-36,000 (Jan.)	-2,105,000
Percent	-1.0%	-1.8%	-2.0%	-2.9%	-1.4%

The Gorge



The good news: quarterly benchmarking led to an upward revision in nonfarm employment in the Gorge, on the order of 200 jobs.

The not-so-good news: preliminary estimates showed the Gorge losing 135 jobs in January, on a seasonally-adjusted basis. The decline came almost entirely in leisure & hospitality, and considering the level of COVID cases that month, was not unexpected hiring.

Unadjusted employment declined by 880 jobs over the month. Trade, transportation & utilities had seasonal layoffs of 400 jobs, while local government payrolls dropped by 115 jobs. Mining, logging & construction cut 100 jobs, manufacturing 70 and leisure & hospitality 60.

The Gorge was 895 jobs (-2.8 percent) short of its pre-COVID levels. Unfortunately there has been little improvement over the last six months.

Gorge Nonfarm Employment		
	Monthly Change	
Month	Not adjusted	SA
March	210	60
April	-4,750	-4,975
May	890	735
June	1,330	1,030
July	230	360
August	670	455
September	5	-55
October	165	485
November	250	-30
December	-570	-540
January	-825	-115
February	480	690
March	770	645
April	510	345
May	-180	-235
June	530	135
July	-30	5
August	240	-20
September	-35	-35
October	-285	20
November	335	20

December	255	260
January	-840	-135
Net change		-895
Percent		-2.8%

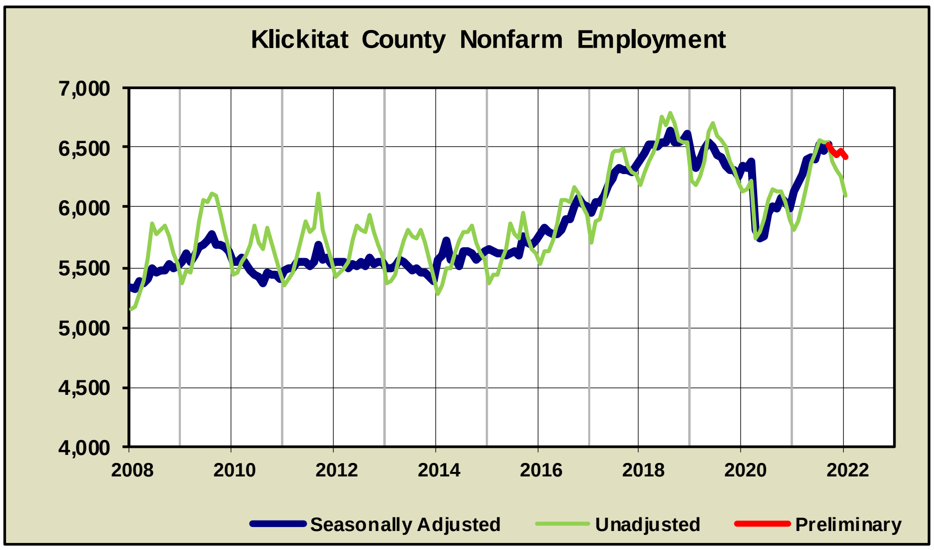
Unadjusted employment in December rose by 215 jobs. Leisure & hospitality added 300 jobs, and local government was up 40 jobs. Manufacturing declined by 60 jobs and mining, logging & construction dropped by 40 jobs.

Comparing December with February 2020, before COVID struck:

- Total nonfarm employment declined by 1,010 jobs, or 3.2 percent. This was a bit more than the U.S., both states, and the Portland and Seattle metro areas (see table below).
- Mining, logging & construction employed 1,480 in December, which after seasonal adjustment was 30 jobs fewer February 2020 (-2.2 percent).
- Manufacturing employed 3,900; after adjustment, that was a drop of 200 jobs, a 4.9 percent decline.
- Trade, transportation & utilities had 6,055 employees, a gain of 320 jobs/5.8 percent after adjustment.
- Professional & business services employed 2,120, matching its pre-pandemic level.
- Education & health services, with 4,860 jobs, up 20 jobs (0.4 percent) from February 2020.
- Leisure & hospitality employment was estimated at 4,485 jobs, down 590 jobs, a 12.0 percent decline.
- All other service industries—including information services, finance and real estate and other services—employed 2,435, a loss of 270 jobs (-10.1 percent) over the course of the recession.
- Government declined by 190 jobs to 5,990, a -3.1 percent decline. The loss remained concentrated in K-12 education.

The unemployment rate for the Gorge was estimated at 3.8 percent. That was two and a half points lower than the 6.3 percent from last December. The very unofficial seasonally-adjusted rate was unchanged at 4.3 percent.

Klickitat Summary



Quarterly benchmarking led to a sizable upward revision in Klickitat County nonfarm employment. "All other services"—which includes information service, financial services, and other services (ranging from hair salons to auto mechanics) received a considerable boost, as did manufacturing. Other industries were adjusted up or down by 20 to 40 jobs.

January brought a loss of 50 jobs in seasonally-adjusted nonfarm employment in Klickitat County. Unadjusted employment declined by 170 jobs to a total of 6,090 jobs. Over the month, local government payrolls declined by 70, 30 in K-12 education and 40 in other local government agencies. Manufacturing dropped by 40 jobs, and most other industries had small losses.

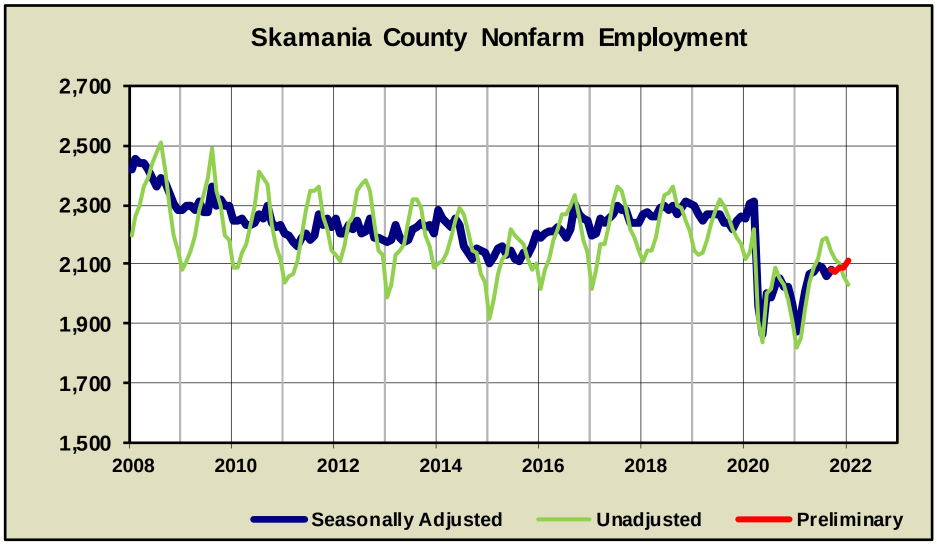
Job Loss Since February 2020	
Klickitat	1.4 percent
Skamania	-8.0 percent
The Gorge	-2.8 percent
U.S.	-1.8 percent
Washington	-1.8 percent

Seattle Metro	-2.1 percent
Oregon	-2.6 percent
Portland Metro	-2.9 percent

Going back to the start of the pandemic, employment has increased by 75 jobs (+1.4 percent). On the plus side: construction (+40 jobs), retail trade (+60 jobs), transportation services (+30 jobs), professional & business services (+80 jobs), education & health services (+40 jobs), and other services (+50 jobs). On the down side: manufacturing (-170 jobs), leisure & hospitality (-20 jobs), and K-12 education (-60 jobs).

The county unemployment rate was estimated at a 6.9 percent, compared with 8.3 percent last January. About 700 county residents were jobless and looking for work, 80 fewer than a year ago. There were 135 county residents who filed a continued unemployment claims for the week ending March 5.

Skamania Summary



Skamania County nonfarm employment was revised downward slightly, by 30 jobs, in the quarterly benchmarking process.

In January, unadjusted employment fell by 30 jobs, to a total of 2,030 jobs. There were small declines in construction, leisure & hospitality and state government over the month. The county was still 190 jobs (on a seasonally-adjusted basis) below the pre-COVID total. Trade, transportation & utilities has gained 30 jobs, and manufacturing and local government were each up 10 jobs. Accommodations & food services was 160 jobs below pre-pandemic levels, while “all other services”—information services, financial services, professional & business services, and other services—has dropped by 50 jobs.

The county’s estimated unemployment rate of 6.4 percent was two and a half points below last January’s 8.9 percent. About 360 county residents were jobless and seeking work, 130 less than a year ago. Residents filed 59 continued unemployment claims in the week ending March 5.