The Employment Situation, November 2010:
Little Holiday Cheer in the News

- Nearly 2.2 million people aged 55 and over were unemployed in November 2010, 18,000 more than in October. At 7.3 percent, the unemployment rate for this age group was unchanged from October. After falling in October, the number of older persons with jobs rose by 123,000 in November.

- Older men, whose unemployment rate had risen in October, experienced a decline in unemployment in November—from 8.3 percent to 8.1 percent. The unemployment rate for older women rose to 6.2 percent from 5.9 percent over the same period.

- Average duration of unemployment for older jobseekers rose from 44.3 weeks in October to 44.9 weeks in November. Nearly six in ten (57.6 percent) older unemployed workers had been out of work for 27 or more weeks as of November.

Employment Change by Sector

Nonfarm payroll employment rose by only 39,000 in November after an increase of 172,000 in October. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), jobs were added in temporary health services and health care; employment in retail trade declined.

Unemployment Rates

The overall unemployment rate rose from 9.6 percent in October to 9.8 percent in November, during which month, 15.1 million persons aged 16 and over reported that they were out of work and looking for a job. This was an increase of 276,000 over October.

The unemployment rate for persons aged 55 and over remained unchanged in November at 7.3 percent, continuing the recent high unemployment rates not seen at any other time in the past six decades (figure 1). Nearly 2.2 million persons aged 55 or older were unemployed in November, 18,000 more than in October. Older persons were 14.5 percent of the unemployed in November, about what they were in October (14.7 percent). The unemployment rate for older men, which had risen to 8.3 percent in October, fell to 8.1 percent in November. The unemployment rate for older women, on the other hand, rose from 5.9 percent to 6.2 percent. (See figure 2.)

The unemployment rate for persons aged 55 and over remains lower than rates for the total labor force, prime-age workers (ages 25–54), and, especially, the workforce aged 16–24 (figure 3). However, since the start of the recession, both the number of unemployed and the unemployment rate have increased by a greater percentage for the segment of the workforce aged 55 and over than for younger segments (table 1). The November unemployment rate for older persons, for example, was more than double (128 percent higher) what it was in December 2007.
Duration of Unemployment

Once unemployed, older workers, on average, continue to be out of work longer than their younger counterparts. The average duration of unemployment for those aged 55 and over in November was 44.9 weeks, up slightly from 44.3 weeks in October.5 (At the start of the recession in December 2007, the average duration of unemployment for older jobseekers was 20.2 weeks.) Average duration of unemployment for younger persons fell from 33.2 weeks to 32.8 weeks.

As of November, nearly six in ten older unemployed workers, or 57.6 percent,
were “long-term unemployed”; that is, they had been out of work for 27 or more weeks. This figure was up from 55.6 percent in October. At 41.4 percent, the percentage of younger jobseekers who had been out of work for 27 or more weeks was slightly lower than it had been in October (41.8 percent).

The percentage of all unemployed workers who are among the long-term unemployed has grown significantly. In December 2007, only 23 percent of the older unemployed and 17 percent of the younger were long-term unemployed.

The Older Employed Population

Despite their high—and for much of the past three years, rising—unemployment rates, millions of older Americans have succeeded in remaining employed. As of November, 28 million persons aged 55 and over had jobs. This was an increase of nearly 1.8 million, or 6.8 percent, since the start of the recession (table 1). October had seen a drop of more than 300,000 in the employment of older persons, one of the few declines since the start of the recession (figure 4).

Much of the increase in the labor force participation and employment of older

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number Employed (000s)</th>
<th>Number Unemployed (000s)</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total, 16+*</td>
<td>146,173</td>
<td>138,888</td>
<td>-5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–24</td>
<td>19,551</td>
<td>17,174</td>
<td>-12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–54</td>
<td>100,421</td>
<td>93,672</td>
<td>-6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>26,218</td>
<td>28,001</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimates for specific age groups above do not add up to the total 16+ because the seasonal adjustments are made independently.

persons in recent years is a result of the increase in the number of persons aged 55 and over. In December 2007, there were 69.6 million persons aged 55 and over in the United States. As of November 2010, that number had increased to 75.4 million, or by 8.2 percent. Even if the labor force participation rate for this age group had remained at its December 2007 level (38.9 percent), the aged 55-plus labor force would have risen from 27.1 million to 29.3 million. But with a participation rate of 40.1 percent, 30.2 million people aged 55 or older were in the labor force in November.

Part Time for Economic Reasons

Part-time work appeals to many older workers interested in scaling back while remaining attached to the labor force. However, not every part-time worker wants part-time work. In November, nearly 1.3 million older nonagricultural workers were working part time because they had no choice. This was 112,000 more than in October—a 9.7 percent increase. These workers, also known as involuntary part-timers, were employed part time for economic reasons, that is, because of slack working conditions or because they could not find full-time work. They were 4.8 percent of all older nonagricultural workers in November, up slightly from October’s 4.4 percent. Differences by sex were minor: 4.6 percent of employed older men and 4.9 percent of employed older women were working part time for economic reasons in November.

The proportion of nonagricultural workers working part time for economic reasons in November was double what it was at the start of the recession. In December 2007, only 2.4 percent of older workers were working part time because they could not find full-time work.

Multiple Jobholders

Working more than one job may indicate an inability to find a job that pays enough or provides enough hours. Relatively few workers aged 16 and over—4.9 percent—were multiple jobholders in November, the same percentage as in October. In November, 4.3 percent of workers aged 55 and over held more than one job, not much changed from the October figure of 4.5 percent. As was the case in October, older female workers were only
somewhat more likely than their male counterparts to be multiple jobholders in November—4.5 percent and 4.1 percent, respectively.

**Self-employment**

Some wage and salary workers move into self-employment upon job loss. Published monthly self-employment figures are available from BLS only for unincorporated workers employed in their own business, profession, trade, or farm. (BLS regards self-employed workers who report being incorporated as employees of a corporation and thus classifies them as wage and salary workers.) The number of older unincorporated self-employed workers in nonagricultural industries increased from fewer than 2.6 million in December 2007 to more than 2.8 million in November 2010, but the percentage self-employed rose only modestly over that period. Between October and November 2010, the number of older unincorporated nonagricultural self-employed workers rose by only 15,000, while the percentage remained unchanged at 10.4 percent.

**Interest in Working**

Most older persons who are out of the labor force say that they do not want a job (97 percent), a figure that has remained stable since the start of the recession in December 2007. The number of older persons out of the labor force but expressing interest in work fell by 5.6 percent in November. Still, the number was 68 percent higher than it was at the start of the recession—1,387,000 vs. 826,000 in December 2007.

The number of older discouraged workers was down sharply in November (280,000 vs. 335,000 in October, or a 16 percent drop). In November, discouraged workers were 20 percent of the population of older persons who were not in the labor force but who wanted a job; this compares to 23 percent from the month before. Discouraged workers are not looking for work because they believe that no work is available, employers would find them too old, they lack the necessary schooling/training, or they face other types of discrimination. At the start of the recession in December 2007, only 53,000 older persons were classified as discouraged workers.

**A Look at the Aged 65-plus Workforce**

More than three-fourths (77 percent) of older persons in the workforce are aged 55–64; however, the labor force participation rate of persons aged 65 and over has increased markedly in recent years. In 2009, an average of 17.2 percent of persons aged 65 and over were in the labor force, up from 10.8 percent in 1985.

The number of labor force participants aged 65 and over has increased by more than 14 percent since December 2007. As of November 2010, 6.8 million members of the labor force were at least 65 years old.

The labor force participation rate for persons aged 65 and over was 17.5 percent in November, compared with 17.6 percent in October and 16.3 percent in December 2007. Since the start of the recession, unemployment in the aged 65-plus workforce has risen substantially. In December 2007, only 3.3 percent were unemployed, compared with 6.8 percent in November 2010. November’s unemployment rate for this age group was up sharply since October, when it stood at 6 percent.

In November, duration of unemployment for jobseekers aged 65 and over averaged 46.1 weeks, up from 43 weeks in October.
for this age group averaged 20.2 weeks in December 2007.) The percentage that could be classified as long-term unemployed also rose between October and November—from 56.3 percent to 59.8 percent; the November figure was 156 percent higher than at the start of the recession (23.4 percent).

Concluding Observations

November’s employment news for older workers could have been worse. The unemployment rate could have risen, as it did for the total workforce. Instead, it remained unchanged at 7.3 percent. The number with jobs could have fallen, as it did in October. Instead, 123,000 more reported being employed. More older workers might have become discouraged. Instead, their numbers actually fell.

What the country needs, however, is for things to get better, and there is little evidence of that in the November figures. Older jobseekers were not succeeding in finding work. Their average duration of unemployment exceeded 11 months in November, and nearly six in ten had been out of work and looking for at least 27 weeks. These are the long-term unemployed.

There might be a glimmer of something positive in the drop in the number of discouraged workers. Perhaps some formerly discouraged workers have seen signs of improvement and have reentered the labor force. It is hard to say yet what this might mean—if anything. But for most unemployed older Americans, the employment picture is anything but bright this holiday season.

1 Unless otherwise specified, “older” refers to persons aged 55 and over. Employment and unemployment figures are seasonally adjusted unless otherwise noted.
3 The October Fact Sheet reported an increase of 151,000 for October. This number has been adjusted upward. The figure for November is a preliminary one and may be revised as well.
4 The unemployment rate for men aged 55 and over is seasonally adjusted; the rate for women aged 55 and over is not. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment for women in this age group does not appear to show seasonal variation.
5 Duration of unemployment figures are not seasonally adjusted.
6 Involuntary part-time figures are not seasonally adjusted.
7 Multiple jobholder figures are not seasonally adjusted.
8 Self-employment figures are not seasonally adjusted.
9 Data in this section are not seasonally adjusted.