GOOD NEWS ON JOBS TASKS HARD TRUTH ON EARNING POWER

Yes, there are more jobs out there, but many are low-wage or part-time positions

BY MAGAZINE HISHIRI

Lyin Richards is employed.

This wouldn't make the cut as news in a robust economy, but it does in a recovering one, because for over a year Richard was counted among this nation's 3.4 million long-term unemployed. "I found out about 12.4 million less than what I was making before." said the 33-year-old Richard, mother of two. "My husband and I had maxed out on 401k loans - the last of the loan money almost gone."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics data for May, released Friday, shows a U.S. economy in steady job growth, with employers adding 271,000 jobs, after April's strong showing of 300,000.

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"Opps 50, trying to support themselves and often a family. Many are folks who previously were in the middle class, and they're taking whatever jobs they can get."

Part-time labor accounts for more than 10 percent of U.S. job growth; contract workers now represent 2.3 percent of all U.S. employment. Both issues are among factors fueling a growing movement to raise the country's minimum wage from $7.25/hour.

Wenceslao Garcia, 35, of Little Village, and a college degree didn't help him break out of the low-wage, part-time jobs that were all he could find since returning in 2007 from two deployments in the U.S. Navy. He has worked jobs from part-time security guard to part-time English as Second Language instructor, and he went back to school to obtain a bachelor's degree. Still, he couldn't find work in his field. "I just stuck with an IT certification course at the National Able Network, a nonprofit job training program in the West Loop."

"It's crazy out here. One place advertised a position in accounts payable paying $45,000 a year. But when I got there, they said they were going to pay $45 an hour," Garcia said. "IT is supposed to be where the jobs are, so I'm trying it. They say unemployment is down, but it doesn't account for all the people who have given up looking."

Meanwhile, lower-wage industries — retail, restaurant and administrative support services, including temporary help — accounted for 22 percent of job losses, and 44 percent of U.S. job growth.

"It's a troubling trend in kind of the American Dream and the notion that we're going to be better off than our parents were," said John Bowman, president of Chicago's Supportive Housing National Center on Poverty Law. "We're not talking about teens. These are people over..."