



## ***Jobless claims spiked in the U.S. last week, with 853,000 people seeking new benefits***

*Eli Rosenberg*

*The number of new unemployment claims rose sharply to 853,000 last week, an increase of 137,000 from the week before, another sign of the toll the pandemic is taking on the labor market.*



*Evan Vucci/AP President Donald Trump hands a pen to Vice President Mike Pence after signing an executive order on vaccine distribution during an "Operation Warp Speed Vaccine Summit" on the White House complex, Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)*

*The number of claims leap over 800,000 for the first time since the week ending Oct. 10, when they came in at 842,000.*

*A spike in coronavirus cases in the United States has rattled large parts of the economy in recent weeks.*

*There are now more than 1 million new cases of coronavirus each week in the United States, and the country shattered a record on Wednesday with more than 3,000 deaths from the pandemic. Hospitals in many parts of the country are overwhelmed, and many state and local jurisdictions have imposed fresh restrictions to try and curb the increase.*

*Meanwhile, lawmakers have spent months in unsuccessful negotiations about [another economic relief package](#), leaving the economy without the kind of support that economists say was so important to cushioning the pandemic's blow early on in the*

*crisis. A new round of talks recently started and has shown some progress, but a deal has remained elusive.*

*President Trump has pushed for a new round of \$600 stimulus checks but he has sought to extend only limited aid for unemployed Americans, while Democrats and some Republicans have sought more robust benefits in anticipation of a crush of new filings. There are still more than 10 million Americans who remain unemployed, following the big spike in layoffs in March and April.*

*The new burst of jobless claims from last week was slightly larger than the last two big jumps, for that October week, when they rose about 75,000 and in early August, when claims rose 133,000, making it the largest jump in claims since millions began flooding the system at the pandemic's outset in March.*

*An additional 427,600 claims were filed for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the program for gig and self-employed workers, according to data released Thursday by the Department of Labor.*

*Economists have been warning for months about coming damage to the economy if Congress failed to authorize another stimulus package to help prop up struggling businesses and households. The labor market has in general fared better than the most dire projections made during the pandemic's early months, but has been flashing warning signs for weeks.*

*Most residents of the state of California are now under stay-at-home orders, with nonessential travel and [hotel stays restricted](#), and closures affecting indoor dining, bars, nail salons, zoos and wineries.*

*Officials in some parts of Maryland are [prohibiting both indoor and outdoor dining](#). More measures in jurisdictions [like Virginia and New York](#) are expected soon.*

*The [245,000 jobs](#) added in November were the lowest number added since the recovery began in May, and a sign that December's report could go into the negative. The number of unemployment claims is another concerning data point.*

*The number of people claiming benefits in all the programs was just over 19 million, although officials have warned that tally may be inflated due to data processing issues compounded by the United States' patchwork unemployment system.*

*Eli Rosenberg - Washington Post*



***Global oil prices top \$50 a barrel for the first time since March on vaccine optimism***

*Myra P. Saefong*



*Mazen Mahdi/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images*

### **FUTURES MOVERS**

*Oil futures headed sharply higher Thursday, with the global Brent crude benchmark above \$50 for the first time in nine months, on progress toward a COVID-19 vaccine that may enable a return to economic normality next year.*

*Brent oil [had finished Wednesday](#) a couple pennies higher and U.S. benchmark West Texas Intermediate crude saw a modest decline, mostly shaking off pressure from a sharp rise in U.S. crude inventories — the largest weekly increase since April.*

*“Oil prices stood tall even after a massive 15.2-million-barrel crude oil increase in U.S. oil supply” reported by the Energy Information Administration Wednesday, said Phil Flynn, senior market analyst at The Price Futures Group.*

*“The crude oil market is looking beyond the numbers,” he said in a note. “The market held key support and is now focusing on vaccine distribution that could lead to a spike in demand that should drive global supply back below normal levels next year.”*

*West Texas Intermediate crude for January delivery rose \$1.33, or 2.9%, to \$46.85 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange after trading as high as \$46.88, the highest intraday level since March.*

*The global benchmark, February Brent crude rose \$1.42, or 2.9%, to \$50.28 a barrel on ICE Futures Europe. Prices haven’t traded at or above \$50 since early March.*

*“There is enough positive vaccine feeling to keep the market in check,” said Stephen Innes, chief global markets strategist at Axi, in a note.*

*“The World Health Organization said jumps in weekly COVID-19 cases in the United States and Canada are particularly problematic as winter approaches. But the U.S. is drawing closer to vaccine approval.”*

*An all-day regulatory meeting scheduled to take place Thursday is the [next step toward the likely authorization](#) of the first COVID-19 vaccine in the U.S. The vaccine, developed by Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE saw its rollout in the U.K. begin earlier this week after regulators in that country authorized it for emergency use.*

*Oil's resilience frustrated some analysts.*

*"It seems that cheap money, good sentiment on the stock market and, hopes that demand will soon normalize thanks to corona vaccines count for more than the reality," said Eugen Weinberg, commodity analyst at Commerzbank, in a note.*

*While the rise in crude inventories was attributed to a surge in imports, increases in gasoline and distillate inventories offered a disturbing picture on fuel demand, he said.*

*Total products supplied, a proxy for demand, averaged 18.9 million barrels a day over the last four week period ended on Dec. 4, down 7.5% from the same period last year, the EIA reported Wednesday.*

*On Nymex Thursday, January gasoline tacked on 3.1% to \$1.315 a gallon and January heating oil rose 3.1% to \$1.4428 a gallon.*

*Natural-gas futures were also higher, ahead of a weekly update from the EIA on U.S. supplies of the fuel.*

*On average, analysts expect the data to show a 78 billion-cubic-foot decline in natural-gas supplies for the week ended Dec. 4, according to a survey by S&P Global Platts. The decline would be bigger than the five-year average fall of 61 billion cubic feet, the survey said.*

*January natural gas was trading 1.4% higher at \$2.477 per million British thermal units.*

*"It seems that cheap money, good sentiment on the stock market and hopes that demand will soon normalize thanks to corona vaccines count for more than the reality," said*

### ***Natural-gas futures extend gains as U.S. weekly supplies fall more than expected***

*Myra P. Saefong*

*The U.S. [Energy Information Administration](#) reported on Thursday that domestic supplies of natural gas declined by 91 billion cubic feet for the week ended Dec. 4. On average, the data were expected to show a fall of 78 billion cubic feet for the week, according to analysts polled by S&P Global Platts. Total stocks now stand at 3.848 trillion cubic feet, up 309 billion cubic feet from a year ago, and 260 billion cubic feet above the five-year average, the government said. Following the data, January natural gas **NGF21, 5.41%** was up 9.8 cents, or 4%, to \$2.54 per million British thermal units. It traded at \$2.466 [shortly before the data](#).*

*Myra P. Saefong - Market Watch*

*Myra P. Saefong, assistant global markets editor, has covered the commodities sector for MarketWatch for 20 years. She has spent the bulk of her years at the company writing the daily Futures Movers and Metals Stocks columns and has been writing the weekly Commodities Corner column since 2005.*