

Obama Economy: 9.9 Million More Employed, But 14.6 Million Left Labor Force

Labor force participation rate for women, minorities, and veterans declined

By Ali Meyer

Since President Barack Obama took office in January 2009, the number of employed Americans increased by 9.9 million, but there were 14.6 million more who left the labor force, according to the latest numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

From January 2009 through December 2016, there were 9,959,000 more Americans 16 years and over who became employed. In that same time frame, there were 14,573,000 more Americans 16 years and over who were not in the labor force, which means they did not have a job or look for one in the past four weeks.

The labor force participation rate, which measures the percentage of the population that participated in the labor force by either having a job or looking for one, declined for all Americans during Obama's time in office from 65.7 percent to 62.7 percent. In September 2015, the participation dipped to 62.4 percent—the lowest level seen in recent times since 1977.

During Obama's time in office, the unemployment rate declined from 7.8 percent to 4.7 percent. This measure counts those who do not have a job but looked for work in the past month. It does not account for those who have been discouraged and stopped looking for work.

"If you, a family member, or anyone is unemployed and has subsequently given up on finding a job—if you are so hopelessly out of work that you've stopped looking over the past four weeks—the Department of Labor doesn't count you as unemployed," said Jim Clifton, who is chairman and CEO of Gallup. "The official rate is misleading."

This is why some point to the U-6 measure, or what

some call the "real" unemployment rate, which includes those who may have been discouraged, as a better measurement. When Obama took office in January 2009, that rate stood at 14.2 percent, and in December 2016 it fell to 9.2 percent.

"There are systematic problems in the U.S. job market that aren't clearly visible from looking at the general unemployment numbers," said Alfredo Ortiz, president and CEO of the Job Creators Network. "By reducing the regulatory burden placed on small business job creators the labor force participation can return to healthy levels."

During Obama's time in office, women, minorities, and veterans have also left the work force.

From January 2009 to December 2016, there were only 4,311,000 women 16 years and over who became employed, while 7,756,000 left the labor force. The labor force participation rate for women declined from 59.4 percent to 56.7 percent.

For black individuals, the labor force participation rate declined from 63.2 percent in January 2009 to 61.8 percent in December 2016. There were 2,811,000 more black individuals who were employed during Obama's time in office, and 1,949,000 left the labor force.

Employment for veterans declined under the Obama administration. There were 11,496,000 veterans 18 years and over who were employed when Obama took office, which declined to 10,009,000 in December 2016. There were also 384,000 more veterans who left the labor force since Obama took office.