The BLS monthly jobs report should be thrown out, economists say

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The government shutdown means no jobs report. Is it time to kill the jobs report anyway?

The employment report blackout comes at a time when the BLS faces both an accounting and a public relations problem

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Updated Thursday 1:14 PM

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With a federal government shutdown having gone into effect at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday, Americans will have to live, for now, without several key monthly U.S. economic reports, including the Labor Department's closely watched jobs report.

The report, formally known as the Employment Situation Summary, compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, was scheduled to roll out on Friday, like it does on the first Friday of every month. Now that won't be the case, as the Labor and Commerce Departments said that agency economic data would halt immediately after a government shutdown.

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Historically, the Federal Reserve, U.S. businesses, and households nationwide rely on the monthly employment report as a gauge of the country's labor market picture. With no agreement on a government spending pact, the jobs report is sidelined indefinitely.

The employment report blackout comes at a time when the BLS faces both an accounting and a public relations problem, as the agency, regularly tasked with reporting employment data, reported in an adjustment announced on Sept. 9 that 911,000 fewer jobs had been created between March 2024 and March 2025 than initially reported.

Such significant variations in the job numbers aren't uncommon. Take the official BLS employment data from March 2023 to March 2024, which reported 818,000 fewer jobs. In February 2025, the BLS adjusted those numbers to 598,000 jobs lost.

That's one reason why U.S. employment calculation woes, and the political reaction to them, aren't exactly fresh news. In an Aug. 7 interview with Fox Digital, E.J. Antoni, President Trump's incoming head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, called for the end of the monthly official U.S. jobs numbers report, following earlier reports of BLS reporting issues.

"How on earth are businesses supposed to plan — or how is the Fed supposed to conduct monetary policy — when they don't know how many jobs are being added or lost in our economy? It's a serious problem that needs to be fixed immediately," Antoni noted in the interview.

"Until it is corrected, the BLS should suspend issuing the monthly job reports but keep publishing the more accurate, though less timely, quarterly data," Antoni said. "Major decision-makers from Wall Street to D.C. rely on these numbers, and a lack of confidence in the data has far-reaching consequences."

There are upsides and downsides to shifting BLS job report timelines

Economic analysts say juggling official U.S. employment data timelines isn't cut and dried, but an updated BLS model recast may be justified.

"While the BLS's monthly figures are designed to provide timely insights into labor market trends, their accuracy has suffered due to factors like declining employer survey participation, difficulties capturing new business formation and closures, and challenges adjusting for undocumented or transient workers," said Lauren Winans, chief executive officer at Next Level Benefits, in Pittsburgh.

Those figures are routinely benchmarked against more comprehensive data sources such as quarterly tax filings, but that data set leads to accuracy problems.

"For instance, the lag in updates often exposes significant discrepancies well after decisions have been made," Winans said. "Such inconsistencies in official employment numbers can be damaging, eroding public trust and potentially misguiding policymakers, investors, and business leaders who rely on precise labor data for strategic planning."

While the health of the U.S. economy depends on consistent, reliable data, there's a bigger issue at play here, economic experts say.

"The way we measure the health of the economy needs to change," said Maria Flynn, CEO of Jobs for the Future, who previously spent 15 years working for the Department of Labor. "The way we measure jobs hasn't kept up with how people actually work. Today, we measure the health of the economy based only on job quantity. It's time for better data on job quality."

Here's what employment data change might look like

Any shift in BLS jobs data timelines needs to be made with U.S. companies' accommodation in mind.

"Misses like the magnitudes of recent BLS forecasts ripple through investment decisions for businesses," said Jara Euston, co-founder and CEO at WorkWhile Jobs, an hourly labor marketplace. "For staffing platforms, it plays a meaningful role in informing how we assess labor demand momentum and where to prioritize growth efforts."

Euston said her company's customers, which span the retail, logistics, warehousing, and hospitality industries, among others, see unreliable data forcing them into a holding pattern before making key staffing decisions. "To overcome these forces, we need significant coordination and investment in modernizing the approach to measuring labor activity," she added.

Yet longer reporting timelines could work against those same companies.

“Businesses plan month to month, so moving the model to a quarterly release would leave companies flying blind when making decisions,” said Tim Mobley, president at Connext Global, a business process outsourcing company in Honolulu. “The smarter approach would be to modernize inputs, tap into real-time payroll and hiring data, strengthen transparency around revisions, and make the 'noise' more visible.”

At Connext Global, Mobley said he’s seeing clients redesign hiring with smaller, outcome-based adjustments. “That nuance is what should show up more clearly in government data,” he noted.

Mobley stops short of saying BLS jobs should report on a quarterly calendar.

“A quarterly report may reduce some errors, but it would especially reduce visibility when flexibility matters most to businesses,” he said. “Companies are already navigating rapidly changing impacts like AI adoption, economic pressure, and hybrid workforce demands.”

Stretching the timeline on the BLS reports also risks leaving all parties with a lack of critical information. “What would work best is monthly data reports that are improved and reformed, rather than outright abandoned,” Mobley added. “Businesses need more frequent and clearer data to adjust hiring strategies as soon as they can.”

One benefit a quarterly jobs report could provide, as Antoni suggests, is more accurate numbers since there’s more time to perform double-checks.

Yet there’s a trade-off in doing so.

“Timely monthly updates help the government and businesses to react faster,” Winans said. “A hybrid approach — for example, retaining monthly updates but improving post-release checks and transparency — might best serve the diverse needs of U.S. policymakers, investors, and business leaders who rely on precise labor data for strategic planning.”

Where the federal government may land on quarterly jobs reporting

Antoni’s proposal will likely get a spirited hearing in Washington, D.C., but the smart money says pragmatists on both sides of the aisle will wind up meeting in the middle.

“Quarterly reporting would likely be more accurate and, with more data, less prone to revisions,” said Usha Haley, Barton Distinguished Chair in International Business at Wichita State University. “But the trade-off is slower recognition of turning points, leaving policymakers flying blind in fast-moving labor shifts as we are experiencing with tariffs and AI.”

“A hybrid system with monthly preliminary estimates, plus quarterly final numbers, might strike a better balance,” Haley noted.