Employment continued its seesaw pattern in April, as nonfarm payrolls edged up by only 2,000. The unusually small rise has been attributed to myriad factors, including the timing of the survey, the implementation of new seasonal adjustment factors, and the weather.

Manufacturing employment continued to decline in April (down 17,000), while the factory workweek lengthened slightly. Year-to-date job losses in manufacturing now total 120,000, about 75% of which occurred in nondurable goods. Just offsetting April's loss in the goods-producing sector was a 73,000 gain in service-producing employment. Notably, a solid rate of job additions has been evident in the quickly growing computer and data processing industry.

The unemployment rate stood at 5.4% in April, compared to 5.6% in March. Much like the establishment survey, household-reported employment may exhibit wide month-to-month swings. However, the long-run averages of the two series reflect similar trends in the labor market.

Increases in civilian workers' wages and salaries have hovered around 3% for the past few years, and continued to do so during the year ended March 1996 (3.2%). Meanwhile, growth in benefit costs (which account for roughly one-third of total compensation) resumed its downward trend, falling from 2.8% to 2.2% over the same period.