Civilian unemployment rose to 5.4% in November, an uptick from its August low of 5.1%, but still consistent with a robust labor market. The employment-to-population ratio, at 63.3% last month, is little changed from its record high of 63.4% in October.

Employment growth was relatively flat last month. According to the establishment survey, the economy added 118,000 new jobs in November. This is somewhat off the average pace for the year, but monthly data exhibit substantial variation and are subject to revision. As has been the case throughout 1996, most of the gains came in the service-producing sector.

Manufacturing payrolls, which have followed a downward trend since March 1995, rose for the second consecutive month in November. In contrast to the establishment estimates, the household survey showed a slight decline in total employment last month. These surveys frequently diverge on a month-to-month basis, but tend to move together over longer periods.

Since August, unemployment lasting less than 27 weeks has picked up slightly. By contrast, long-term joblessness has been falling since June, and the median duration of unemployment dropped to 7.7 weeks in November, down from 8.3 weeks the month before.