After the smallest monthly increase in four years, payroll employment surged by 416,000 workers in March. The Census Bureau alone hired 117,000 temporary census takers. In addition, there were five weeks between employment surveys instead of the usual four.

The employment-to-population ratio, essentially unchanged at 64.7%, remained near the record high it reached in January. The unemployment rate of 4.1% was also unchanged in March, which was the sixth consecutive month it has registered less than 4.2%.

Due to a sharp increase in construction employment, the goods-producing sector showed a net increase of 88,000 jobs in March. After a decrease of 17,000 jobs in February, construction employment posted an increase of 89,000 last month. Manufacturing employment, by contrast, declined in both February and March, reverting to its 1999 trend decline.

Following below-average growth in February, the service-producing sector added 328,000 jobs last month. The hiring of temporary Census workers accounted for most of the 142,000 increase in government payrolls in March. Significant job growth also occurred in business services (48,000) and transportation and public utilities (27,000).

The average workweek remained at 34.5 hours in March, matching the average recorded over the current expansion. Average hourly earnings increased 5 cents last month to $13.60, which is up 3.7% from March of last year.