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John Robbins **832-280-5815**
Jun Gai **281-498-4310**

CenterPoint asks for gas utility rate increase, the third in three years



Inside C2

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Make Today Different

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Publisher: Wea H. Lee
General Manager: Catherine Lee
Editor: John Robbins, Jun Gai
Business Manager: Jennifer Lopez
Address: 11122 Bellaire Blvd., Houston, TX 77072
E-mail: News@scdaily.com

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China signals tough trade stance as U.S. officials push negotiations



The U.S. flag is seen in the wine section of a supermarket in Beijing

BEIJING/WASHINGTON (Reuters) - China would win any trade war with the United States, the country's state media said on Thursday, as U.S. officials sought to ease market jitters over escalating tensions between the world's two biggest economies. Sports utility vehicles (SUVs) waiting to be exported are seen at a port in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, China April 5, 2018. REUTERS/Stringer

After Washington and Beijing targeted each other with planned steep tariffs, Chinese state media declared that the country never surrendered to external pressure and would prevail in any tit-for-tat on trade. In Washington, U.S. officials emphasized a desire for negotiations as a way to ease or avert punishing tariffs and get the two countries off a trade war footing. The dispute has roiled global markets, but stocks rose on Thursday as investors responded to comments from U.S. officials seeking to soothe concerns about a trade war.

China launches WTO complaint on U.S. tariffs linked to IP issues

Brazil unclear on benefits of U.S.-China trade spat: minister

U.S. says tool chests from China, Vietnam are being dumped in U.S. market

"As part of this deal - and I think we are going to get a deal over a period of time - yes, I think these barriers will come down on both sides," Larry Kudlow, director of the White

House National Economic Council, told On reporters on Thursday.

U.S. President Donald Trump understands that economies do better when trade barriers are reduced rather than raised, Kudlow said, and that tit-for-tat tariffs do not work for the economy in the long term.

"It's all part of the, you know, fairly delicate, broad-based negotiation that's long overdue if it fixes things, it could have a great ending," Kudlow said.

Later in the day, Trump continued his tough talk, however, although providing few details about the current dynamic between the two nations.

"You probably saw that, for many years, no president wanted to go against China economically," he told a crowd at an event in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.

Even as U.S. markets remained stable on Thursday, investors struggled to make sense of the signals coming from the administration.

"I don't think anybody really knows what's going on. That's why you've seen the volatility we've seen," said Paul Nolte, portfolio manager at Kingsview Asset Management in Chicago.

"Investors aren't dealing with it well. What we're trying to figure out is how he handles policy and negotiation. We're still learning what to expect from his negotiating style."

Trump has wedded much of his economic message to the performance of the stock market, and White House aides insisted this week that any downturn as a result of the trade standoff would be momentary.



Cars waiting to be exported are seen at a port in Lianyungang



Hundreds sue engineering firm over Harvey flooding in Fort Bend levee district

Hundreds of Fort Bend County residents sued a local engineering firm Wednesday alleging the company acted negligently in designing a stormwater management system for a local community that flooded during Hurricane Harvey.

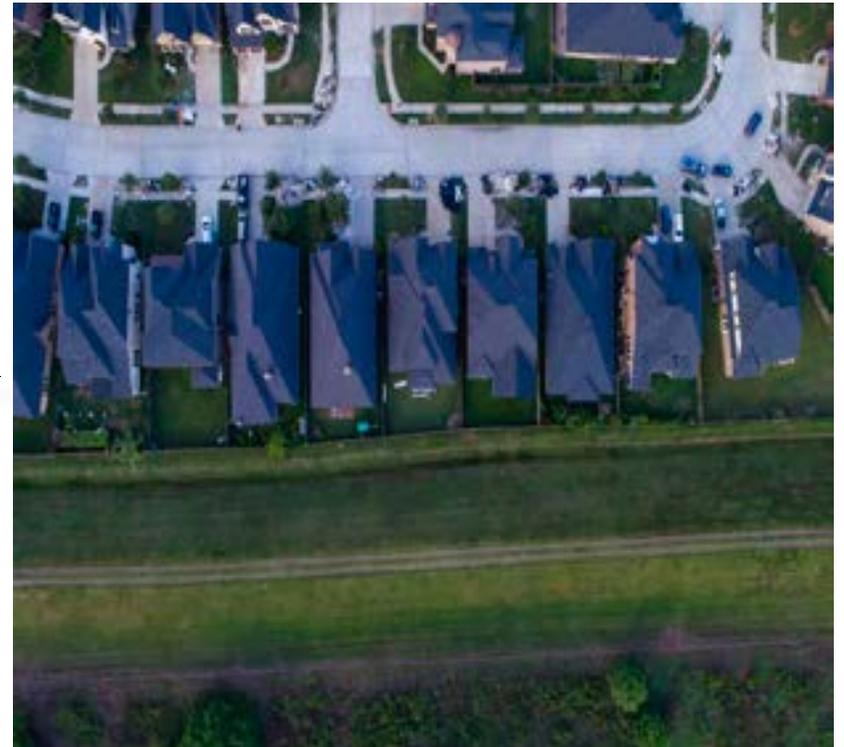
The lawsuit filed against Costello, Inc. in state district court focuses on work the engineering firm performed more than a decade ago for a Fort Bend Levee Improvement District.

The district, known as LID 19, was designed to protect the Riverstone community from inundation, but roughly a third of the 1,760 homes in the district flooded last August.

“The stormwater management system was not designed to handle rainfall amounts that should have been reasonably anticipated,” the plaintiffs’ attorneys wrote in the complaint. “As a result of defendant Costello’s acts and omissions, plaintiffs and their children have been displaced from their homes and have many months and years of costly repairs and rebuilding to come.”

The lawsuit seeks damages for repairs, lost property value, lost income and emotional distress, among other flood-related costs. A representative for Costello, Inc. did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The engineering firm was founded by Steve Costello, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner’s so-called “flood czar.”

A levee protects portions of the Riverstone neighborhood where Steep Bank Creek runs toward the Brazos River. The flood gates through which the creek normally flows closed during Hurricane Harvey to keep water from the Brazos from flowing up the creek. But the pumps working to push out water inside the levee could not keep up with the amount of runoff and rain, and many homes along the creek flooded.



Harris County’s recovery from Harvey may hinge on state funds

Harris County’s recovery from Hurricane Harvey may hinge on receiving aid from the state, but Gov. Greg Abbott’s reluctance to tap into the Rainy Day Fund is hindering it, Harris County judge Ed Emmett said. Harvey’s record setting flooding in Texas will cost an estimated \$150 billion in damages.

Emmett said that after Harvey struck, his job has shifted toward recovery efforts.

While Abbott gave \$50 million in state funds to the city of Houston to avert

a tax hike back in October, Harris County hasn’t received funding for projects to help prevent future flooding.

“If this wasn’t a rainy day, then I don’t know what was. They’re saying, ‘We’ll get to that.’ I’m afraid they’re not going to get to it,” Emmett said.

Among the projects Emmett said the county seeks to undertake are updating the flood maps, dredging the San Jacinto River, constructing a third reservoir and converting both Lake Houston and Lake Conroe into flood

control facilities.

The projects are part of Emmett’s 15-point plan to prevent flooding in the future.

The third reservoir alone is estimated to cost \$500 million.

“We’ve got a lot to do and we don’t have the money to pay for it,” Emmett said. For residents who live along Cypress Creek in northwest Harris County, it would help prevent catastrophic flooding.

When originally built, the Addicks and Barker dams didn’t have residents living in the area, which were flooded during Harvey and then afterward during a

controlled release.

Other homes along creeks were also affected during the storm.

“When they built all that, nobody bothered to keep track of where the old tributaries were,” Emmett said.

“Mother Nature has long memory. When the waters got high enough, it went back to its old flow pattern.”

Various businesses closed once the Harvey’s waters subsided in Precinct 4.

The justice of the peace courthouse on Cypresswood Drive had up to four feet of water and closed to the public due to repairs.

Four branches of the Harris County Public Library located north and northwest of the county also closed due to flood damage.

The Barbara Bush, Katherine Tyra and Kingwood branches will reopen in May. The Baldwin Boettcher branch will remain closed after suffering from repeated flooding in recent years.

County officials will decide whether to reopen in a different location. Adjacent to Baldwin Boettcher, Mercer Botanic Gardens reopened in February.

A Snapshot Of The World



A supporter of leftist front-runner Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of MORENA holds up a sign at a campaign rally in Nuevo Laredo



Leftist front-runner Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of MORENA leaves a campaign rally in Nuevo Laredo



FILE PHOTO: A sign for Michigan State University is seen near the campus in East Lansing



Britain's Ambassador to the U.N., Karen Pierce, addresses an incident in Salisbury, during a meeting of the U.N. Security Council in New York



Soccer Football - Europa League Quarter Final First Leg - Arsenal vs CSKA Moscow - Emirates Stadium, London, Britain - April 5, 2018 Police officers with a police dog stand by their van outside the stadium before the match REUTERS/Simon Dawson



Apr 5, 2018; Boston, MA, USA; Members of the USA Olympic team throw out the first pitch before the start of the Boston Red Sox home opener against the Tampa Bay Rays at Fenway Park. Mandatory Credit: David Butler II-USA TODAY Sports



Europa League Quarter Final First Leg - RB Leipzig vs Olympique de Marseille



Girls wearing hats with an U.S. flag motif hold them down during windy weather in Washington



U.S. President Donald Trump visits West Virginia

Can Cellphones Cause Cancer? Experts Surprised By Latest Tests

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

PITTSBURGH (KDKA) – Can cellphones really cause cancer? It's been a question that's dogged researchers for years.

However, a group of experts say the results of some tests are pretty surprising.

Millions of people constantly call, text, click, take pictures and play on cellphones.

Even the top cellular radiation researchers from around the world have a hard time untethering.

But, they gathered recently in North Carolina to talk about cellphone concerns and whether they really do increase the chances of developing cancer.

The panel voted that the results from years of testing on mice and rats were more significant than originally thought.

They say they found clear evidence that phone radiation caused tumors in the hearts of rats, which were similar to tumors in people.



"In humans, it's seen in the vestibular nerve, in the ear, the acoustic nerve. We found it in the heart, although our animals were exposed in their whole body condition," John Bucher said.

"While a given animal is not making a cellphone call, they are, throughout their short two-year lifetime getting the same exposure that we expect people to get in their 70-plus years of life," Dr. Devra Davis, of Environmental Health Trust, said.

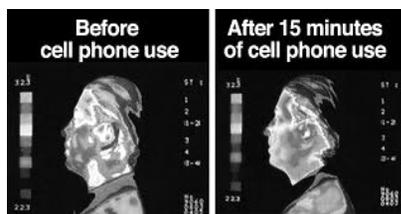
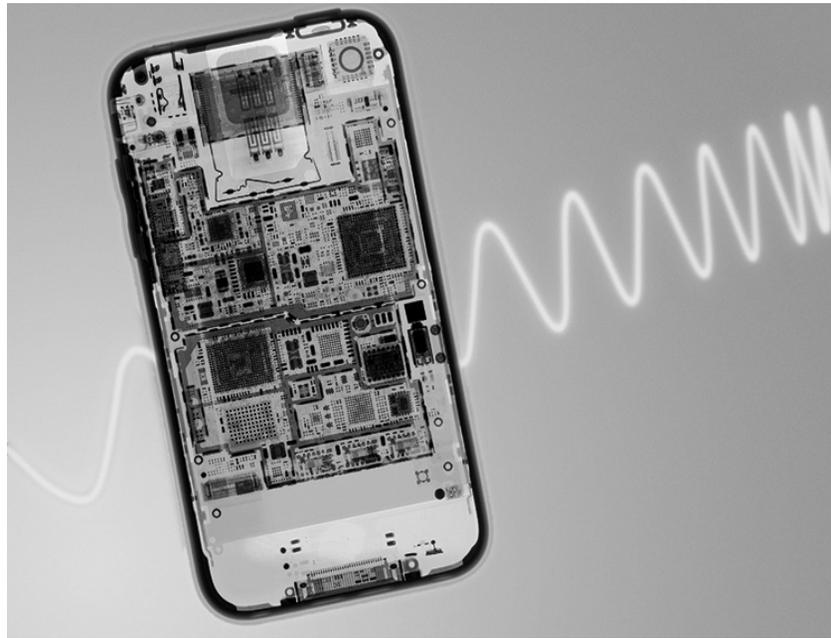
Activists are now calling for more protections, citing separate studies from France and Italy.

"Many brain tumor lawsuits going on right now that are waiting for a study like this to prove that people's brain tumors were caused by their cellphone radiation," Kevin Mottus, of the California Brain Tumor Association, said.

There are new concerns on the horizon as 5G, which is a stronger broadband system, is about to debut.

Some activists say the government has a responsibility to increase regulations.

"And I think it's the responsibility of the ones making the phones to make them as safe as possible, and I'm sure they can do better than what we actually have," Dr. Annie Sasco said.



Both activists and researchers agree that people can minimize any risk by holding phones away from the body when in use and not putting them in your pocket. (Courtesy <http://pittsburgh.cbslocal.com>)

Related

Why is there concern that cell phones may cause cancer or other health problems?

There are three main reasons why people are concerned that cell phones (also known as "mobile" or "wireless" telephones) might have the potential to cause certain types of cancer or other health problems:

Cell phones emit radiofrequency energy (radio waves), a form of non-ionizing radiation, from their antennas. Tissues nearest to the antenna can absorb this energy.

The number of cell phone users has increased rapidly. As of December 2014,

there were more than 327.5 million cell phone subscribers in the United States, according to the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association. This is a nearly threefold increase from the 110 million users in 2000. Globally, the number of subscriptions is estimated by the International Telecommunications Union to be 5 billion.

Over time, the number of cell phone calls per day, the length of each call, and the amount of time people use cell phones have increased. However, improvements in cell phone technology have resulted in devices that have lower power outputs than earlier models.

The NCI fact sheet Electromagnetic Fields and Cancer includes information on wireless local area networks (commonly known as Wi-Fi), cell phone base stations, and cordless telephones.

WHAT GOVT PANEL RECOMMENDS

- Continuous online monitoring and display of radiation level in mobile network frequency range at prominent places in cities and online data transfer to the central server
- New-tech, low power transmitters within building solutions for the future expansion of telecom network
- SAR level should be displayed on handset
- SAR level for handsets be limited to 1.6 watt/kg average over a 6-minute period & taken over a volume containing mass of 1 gram of human tissue
- List of SAR values for handsets be uploaded on DOT/TEC website

What is radiofrequency energy and how does it affect the body?

Radiofrequency energy is a form of electromagnetic radiation. Electromagnetic radiation can be categorized into two types: ionizing (e.g., x-rays, radon, and cosmic rays) and non-ionizing (e.g., radiofrequency and extremely low frequency, or power frequency). Electromagnetic radiation is defined according to its wavelength and frequency, which is the number of cycles of a wave that pass a reference point per second. Electromagnetic frequencies are described in units called hertz (Hz).

The energy of electromagnetic radiation is determined by its frequency; ionizing radiation is high frequency, and therefore high energy, whereas non-ionizing radiation is low frequency, and therefore low energy. The NCI fact sheet Electromagnetic Fields and Cancer lists sources of radiofrequency energy. More information about ionizing radiation can be found on the Radiation page.

The frequency of radiofrequency electromagnetic radiation ranges from 30 kilohertz (30 kHz, or 30,000 Hz) to 300 gigahertz (300 GHz, or 300 billion Hz). Electromagnetic fields in the radiofrequency range are used for telecommunications applications, including cell phones, televisions, and radio transmissions. The human body absorbs energy from devices that emit radiofrequency electromagnetic radiation. The dose of the absorbed energy is estimated using a measure called the specific absorption rate (SAR), which is expressed in watts per kilogram of body weight.

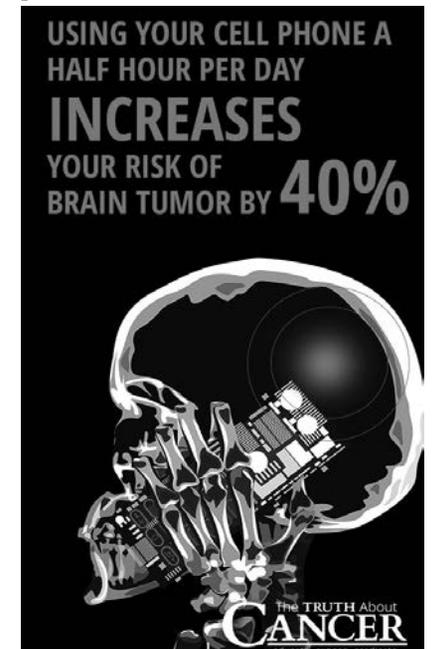


Exposure to ionizing radiation, such as from x-rays, is known to increase the risk of cancer. However, although many studies have examined the potential health effects of non-ionizing radiation from radar, microwave ovens, cell phones, and other sources, there is currently no consistent evidence that non-ionizing radiation increases cancer risk (1).

The only consistently recognized biological effect of radiofrequency energy is

heating. The ability of microwave ovens to heat food is one example of this effect of radiofrequency energy. Radiofrequency exposure from cell phone use does cause heating to the area of the body where a cell phone or other device is held (ear, head, etc.). However, it is not sufficient to measurably increase body temperature, and there are no other clearly established effects on the body from radiofrequency energy.

It has been suggested that radiofrequency energy might affect glucose metabolism, but two small studies that examined brain glucose metabolism after use of a cell phone showed inconsistent results. Whereas one study showed increased glucose metabolism in the region of the brain close to the antenna compared with tissues on the opposite side of the brain (2), the other study (3) found reduced glucose metabolism on the side of the brain where the phone was used.



Another study investigated whether exposure to the radiofrequency energy from cell phones affects the flow of blood in the brain and found no evidence of such an effect (4).

The authors of these studies noted that the results are preliminary and that possible health outcomes from changes in glucose metabolism are still unknown. Such inconsistent findings are not uncommon in experimental studies of the biological effects of radiofrequency electromagnetic radiation (5). Some contributing factors include assumptions used to estimate doses, failure to consider temperature effects, and lack of blinding of investigators to exposure status. (Courtesy <https://www.cancer.gov/>)

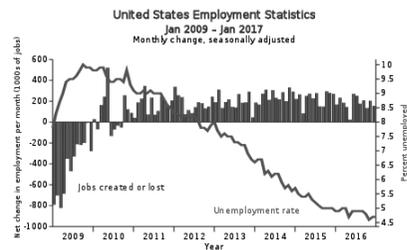
The US economy seems back on track after a brutal set of hurricanes—employers added 261,000 jobs in October and the unemployment rate edged down to 4.1%.

While markets had expected a whopping 310,000 new jobs to replace the ones temporarily lost because of the hurricanes, the news is still good: Unemployment is now at its lowest since 2000, and job creation has edged up in stronger fashion.

Still, the overall results are mixed. The labor force participation rate—which measures how many people are actively looking for jobs—fell. And the number of workers relative to the population as a whole also fell.

“It’s important to note that this [the drop in the unemployment rate] happened for all the wrong reasons—the result of workers leaving the labor force, not finding jobs,” warns Elise Gould, of the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute.

What’s most concerning is that while jobs are plentiful, what people are actually getting paid has hardly grown.



Average hourly earnings for private workers have barely budged, growing just 2.4% in October from a year earlier. (This partially reflects the automatic fall in average wages from the previous month because of the return of workers in low-paid sectors temporarily kept from their jobs by hurricanes.) But in general, weak earnings growth has been a problem throughout Donald Trump’s presidency. For production and nonsupervisory private workers (i.e. non-managers) annual hourly wage growth adjusted for inflation was 0.1% in October.

Inflation-adjusted wage growth has also been lower during Trump’s term than in recent years. (To be fair, real wage growth at the start of Obama’s term was so high because inflation had virtually disappeared.) The new numbers come as the Trump administration is pushing for a corporate-tax cut. Trump’s Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) believes that such a cut will boost annual earnings by \$4,000 for the average American. The evidence suggests otherwise: Analysis from the Tax Policy Center finds that Trump’s tax cuts will benefit foreign investors more than the middle class. Moreover, the CEA’s proposal relies on disputed models of how tax cuts affect wages and far outpaces others’ forecasts. (Here’s a close look at what the CEA report gets wrong.) Now, all eyes are on the Federal Reserve, and whether the Federal Open Market Committee will raise rates come December. Despite dismal wage growth for the average American, traders still believe a rate hike is

U.S. Monthly Inflation Moves Up With Jobless Claims At 48-Year Low

U.S. Labor Market Grows New Jobs But Wages Still Behind

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

imminent: Fed funds futures, after this morning (Nov. 3), still indicate a 90% chance of a December raise.



“Flat wages doesn’t concern us too much,” said Sean Lynch, co-head of global equity strategy at the Wells Fargo Investment Institute. “We do think wage pressure could start to weigh on the markets next year in a tight labor market.” (Courtesy <https://qz.com/>)

Related U.S. Consumer Prices Showed Increase In January With Underlying Inflation Gains

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. consumer prices increased in January, with a gauge of underlying inflation posting its largest gain in 12 months, bolstering views that price pressures will accelerate this year.

Those expectations were underscored by other data on Thursday showing the number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits fell last week to a 48-year low as the labor market tightens. Another survey showed prices paid by manufacturers for raw materials hit a more than six-year high in February.

The combination of rising inflation and a robust labor market could force the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates a bit more aggressively this year than currently anticipated as it worries about the economy overheating. The U.S. central bank has forecast three rate hikes in 2018. The first rate increase is expected later this month.



“The Fed wanted to see more inflation and it looks like it is getting it,” said Joel Naroff, chief economist at Naroff Economic Advisors in Holland, Pennsylvania. “I am down for four (rate hikes) because the acceleration in inflation is not likely to fade anytime soon.”

The Commerce Department said consumer



prices as measured by the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index rose 0.4 percent. That was the biggest increase since September and followed a 0.1 percent gain in December. The annual increase was, however, unchanged at 1.7 percent in January because of unfavorable base effects.

Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the PCE price index advanced 0.3 percent in January - the largest gain since January 2017. The so-called core PCE price index rose 0.2 percent in December. Base effects also kept the annual increase in the core PCE price index unchanged at 1.5 percent in January.

The inflation readings were in line with economists’ expectations. The core PCE index is the Fed’s preferred inflation measure and has undershot the central bank’s 2 percent target since mid-2012.



The core PCE index is the Fed’s preferred inflation measure.

Inflation is expected to rise toward its target this year also as a \$1.5 trillion tax cut package and increased government spending spur faster economic growth. Rising commodity prices as well as a weakening U.S. dollar are also seen stoking inflation.

“All the ingredients are in place. We are going to see inflation perk up a little through the rest of this year, but there is no cause for concern,” said Ryan Sweet, senior economist at Moody’s Analytics in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell earlier this week offered an upbeat assessment of the economy, saying before the U.S. House of Representatives Financial Services Committee “my personal outlook for the economy has strengthened since December.” On Thursday, Powell told the Senate Banking Committee that there was no evidence of the economy overheating and also that “the thing we don’t want to have happen is to get behind the curve.”

The dollar initially firmed against a basket of currencies before surrendering gains to trade little changed. Prices for U.S. government bonds rose marginally while stocks on Wall Street fell.



Leaflets lie on a table at a booth at a military veterans’ job fair in Carson, California October 3, 2014. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson

CONSUMER SPENDING COOLS

In another report, the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) said its index of prices paid by factories increased to a reading of 74.2 in February, the highest level since May 2011, from 72.7 in January.

The ISM’s overall index of national factory activity jumped to a reading of 60.8 last month from 59.1 in January amid strong order growth and hiring. A reading above 50 in the ISM index indicates growth in manufacturing, which accounts for about 12 percent

of the U.S. economy.

January’s increase in inflation cut into consumer spending growth. Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, gained 0.2 percent. That was the smallest increase since August and followed a 0.4 percent advance in December.

When adjusted for inflation, consumer spending fell 0.1 percent, declining for the first time in a year. The so-called real consumer spending rose 0.2 percent in December.



The drop in real consumer spending in January suggests consumption will slow this quarter from the fourth-quarter’s robust 3.8 percent annualized growth pace.

It was also the latest indication that economic growth moderated at the start of the year after a 2.5 percent rate of expansion in the fourth quarter. Industrial production, home sales and core capital goods orders fell in January while construction spending was flat.

Growth estimates for the first quarter are as low as a 1.7 percent rate. But spending remains underpinned by a strong labor market. In a third report on Thursday, the Labor Department said initial claims for state unemployment benefits dropped 10,000 to a seasonally adjusted 210,000 for the week ended Feb. 24, the lowest level since December 1969.

Consumer spending could also get a lift from the tax cuts, which boosted income and savings in January. The Commerce Department’s Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates that the tax package reduced personal income taxes by \$115.5 billion at an annual rate.



People applying for jobs at a job recruitment center in New York City.

Income at the disposal of households after taxes surged 0.9 percent in January, the biggest gain since December 2012, after rising 0.4 percent the prior month.

Wages were also boosted by one-off bonuses that businesses gave workers as part of the tax-cut windfall. The saving rate jumped to 3.2 percent from 2.5 percent in December. “This will give consumers the necessary fire-power to ramp up their spending in the months ahead,” said Scott Anderson, chief economist at Bank of the West in San Francisco. (Courtesy <https://www.reuters.com>)