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USA OUTLOOK

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Foto: CNN.com

Extreme cold in Chicago may cause some frostbite victims to lose limbs

The bitter cold in Chicago has kept hospitals busy, with doctors at one facility during the brunt of an Arctic freeze treating 50 frostbite victims, including some people who may lose an arm or a leg. "It's a horrific situation," says Dr. Stathis Poulakidas, the head of burn and wound care services at Cook County Health. Poulakidas works at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital, a level 1 trauma center, that in a really bad year will see 150 cases of frostbite for the season. He said based on what he has seen thus far, this could be one of those years.

Half of the patients that came in over the past few days are homeless, while others had jobs that kept them out. Poulakidas said they've seen "horrific injuries to feet and hands," some so severe that some victims may lose limbs. Frostbite in these extreme conditions can set in as quickly as three to 10 minutes, depending on age or exposure or other factors, such as wet gloves and socks, or even alcohol consumption, he said.

Colder than Alaska in some states

The brutally cold weather that's held millions in its frozen grip for days was so intense Thursday morning that 11 states in the continental United States hit a temperature lower than the one recorded in Alaska's northernmost city. The Dakotas, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, New York and Pennsylvania all saw temperatures fall below -14 degrees, according to CNN meteorologist Taylor Ward. That was the temperature in Utqiagvik (also known as Barrow) a town of about 4,400 that sits north of the Arctic Circle.

But the end is in sight. The historic deep freeze that's killed 16 people will let up by the end of the week, according to CNN meteorologists. At the cold's peak Thursday morning, about 7 a.m. ET, more than 216 million people saw temperatures below freezing, including 84 million who dealt with subzero temperatures, CNN meteorologist Dave Hennen said. By the afternoon, about 30 million people were still under wind chill warnings and advisories -- down from a peak of 140 million in the morning. But the misery will slowly melt away Friday, with a warming trend that could give many Americans thermal



Foto: Investing.com

Oil prices rise on hopes US-China breakthrough

Oil prices Opens a New Window. rose 1.5 percent on Friday, lifted by signs the United States and China Opens a New Window. could soon settle their protracted trade dispute Opens a New Window. while producer cuts and U.S. sanctions on Venezuelan exports have helped tighten supply.

International Brent crude oil futures were up 91 cents, or 1.5 percent, at \$61.75 per barrel by 1445 GMT. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures were at \$54.42, up 63 cents or 1.17 percent. Global markets gained support from comments on Twitter by U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday, saying he would meet Chinese President Xi Jinping soon to try to resolve a trade standoff, though Trump later warned that he could postpone talks if a comprehensive deal remains elusive.

China's trade delegation said the latest round of talks with the United States made "important progress," state news agency Xinhua reported on Friday. "Many traders recognize that sense is likely to prevail and a deal will be struck after the summit - although the shape of any deal will continue to drive a jittery market," Cantor Fitzgerald Europe said in a note.

But a survey on Friday that showed China's factory activity shrank by the most in almost three years in January, reinforcing fears that a slowdown in the world's second-largest economy is deepening, and China's woes amid the prevailing trade tensions are likely to hit fuel demand. "The specter of further US sanctions on Chinese goods still looms large and both sides will have their work cut out to settle their differences by a March 1 deadline," PVM Oil Associates strategist Stephen Brennock said.

"In any case, expect oil prices to dance to the tune of the US-China trade fiasco over the next few weeks." Analysts believe that the oil market will be more balanced in 2019 after supply cuts from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). A Reuters poll showed that OPEC pumped 30.98 million barrels per day (bpd) in January, down 890,000 bpd from December.

In Venezuela, meanwhile, U.S. sanctions imposed on state oil company PDVSA this week are keeping tankers stuck at ports as American refineries that rely on Venezuelan feedstock cut back operations. "The latest U.S. sanctions could directly halt around 500,000 bpd of Venezuelan exports to the U.S.," Citi said.

US employers added 304,000 jobs in January, soaring past expectations

U.S. employers added 304,000 jobs in January, soaring past Wall Street's expectations for an increase of 165,000 jobs, seemingly brushing off a 35-day government shutdown as investors braced for mixed results.

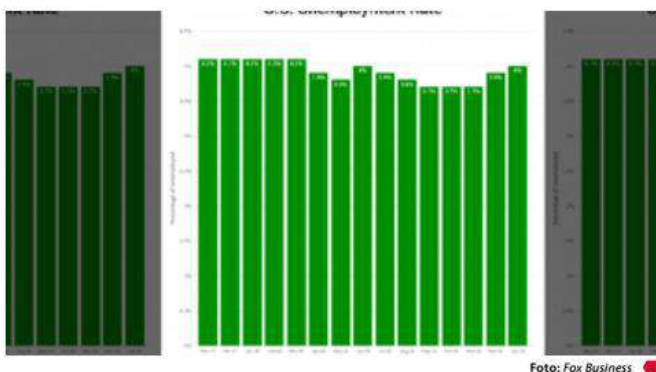
The unemployment rate climbed to 4 percent from 3.9 percent, while the labor force participation rate rose slightly to 63.2 percent. Average hourly earnings, meanwhile, rose by 3 cents to \$27.56. Over the year, average hourly earnings have increased by a total of 85 cents, or about 3.2 percent.

"The monthly average over the previous three months has been an impressive 254,000 jobs added," said Mark Hamrick, the chief economist for Bankrate.com, ahead of Friday's release. "Don't be surprised if we see something less robust. That doesn't necessarily signal a dramatic change in the trend for the job market or the U.S. economy."

Jobs numbers follow a report released on Wednesday from payroll processing firm ADP, which revealed the private sector added 213,000 jobs in December, beating analysts' expectations of 178,000 jobs.

Analysts anticipated that unemployment would hold steady at 3.9 percent, one of the lowest numbers in nearly 50 years, while forecasting the creation of 165,000 jobs, according to economists polled by Refinitiv (formerly Thomson Reuters). In December, the U.S. economy added a whopping 312,000 jobs, blowing past Wall Street's expectations. Analysts, at the time, had cast that number as unsustainable.

Initially, the White House was bracing for a potentially negative jobs number in January when the Department of Labor releases the payroll data. However, U.S. labor officials said last week they would count the once-furloughed workers as employed because they're getting paid retroactively once the government is up and running again.



Fuente
<https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/january-jobs-report-released-by-department-of-labor>

Free checking, with no strings attached, is harder to find, especially among credit unions

Finding a free checking account with no conditions is getting harder.

The share of banks, credit unions and thrifts offering totally free accounts dropped to 38.6 percent at the end of 2018 from 52.8 percent in 2017, according to a new survey of 2,947 institutions from Moebs Services, a research consulting firm for the banking industry. That marked the lowest level since at least 2000.

The rapid year-over-year decline was led by mid-sized credit unions — those with assets above \$100 million to \$25 billion — but banks and thrifts also reduced their options for free checking.

Moebs Services defines free checking as an account with no periodic fees, no minimum balance and no requirements for transactions, rewards sign-up, or enrollment in other accounts. Michael Moebs, CEO of the firm, noted two potential reasons for the change: First, credit unions may want to reduce costs associated with regulatory compliance that rose following the financial crises. And they may be tying checking to other, more profitable services as a way to boost revenue.

"It doesn't make sense to me and I don't think there is unified movement," he said of the credit union decline.

Unlike for-profit banks, credit unions are nonprofit, customer-owned financial cooperatives that serve only their customers. Large credit unions have assets over \$25 billion, while small ones have \$100 million or less.

What happened to real free checking?

In 2009, more than four out of five financial institutions provided free checking that met Moebs definition, the firm said. These accounts were meant to attract new customers who would eventually get a mortgage or credit card, which generated more money for the financial institution.



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<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/02/01/free-checking-banks-credit-unions-keep-getting-rid-these-accounts/2714434002>



Foto: msn.com

Amazon has its first \$200 billion sales year, but growth is slowing

Amazon now finds itself in an elite group of companies whose annual revenue can be measured in the hundreds of billions.

The company said Thursday that its holiday quarter sales hit \$72.4 billion, up 20% from the same period a year earlier and at the high end of its previous forecast. The strong end to the year pushed Amazon's annual revenue to an impressive \$232.9 billion.

But sales growth is slowing as Amazon (AMZN) runs up against the law of large numbers. Its 20% sales growth for the quarter was well below the 38% growth it saw in the same period a year earlier.

Amazon also forecast weaker than expected sales for the first quarter of 2019. It said sales would be between \$56 billion and \$60 billion for the quarter, which would represent annual growth of just 10% to 18%.

As its sales growth has slowed, the company has quickly positioned itself as a profit machine. Amazon reported \$3 billion in profit for the final three months of 2018, marking the fifth consecutive quarter that its profits topped \$1 billion.

Amazon's total profit for 2018 topped \$10 billion for the first time in the company's history, fueled in part by continued momentum for its higher-margin cloud computing service and its nascent advertising business.

Amazon Web Services, which remains the leader in the fast-growing cloud computing market, saw sales jump 45% from the prior year to \$7.4 billion, even as it faces stiff competition from Microsoft (MSFT). Its cloud business topped \$25 billion in sales for the year for the first time.

The company's "other" segment, which is largely made up of its advertising business, saw sales nearly double to \$3.4 billion in the quarter, as Amazon quietly competes with the likes of Facebook (FB) and Google (GOOG).

The string of billion-dollar profits is a noteworthy feat for a company that was once famous for reinvesting all of its earnings back into the business, often reporting a net loss as a result.

It's all the more remarkable considering Amazon continues to invest heavily in original content, physical stores and fulfillment centers. During the quarter, Amazon also raised the minimum wage for more than 250,000 Amazon employees and 100,000 seasonal workers to \$15 per hour.

The company has had a strong start to the year on the market. Its stock was up more than 10% in January. Amazon stock fell nearly 5% in after hours trading following the earnings report Thursday.