



ALASKA ECONOMIC TRENDS

APRIL 2021

2015-18 recession hit men harder

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Income up in 2020
Pressures on retail

FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Creative thinking in hard times can reveal opportunity

By Dr. Tamika L. Ledbetter, Commissioner

I recently had the opportunity to address the National Governor's Association on the topic of Apprenticeship as a Strategy for Recovery. As Alaska moves toward economic recovery, *all* strategies are necessary. Any measures to get Alaskans employed and fortify businesses are on the table.

The kind of innovation Alaska needs right now requires working with multiple partners across the state to develop new and better employment and training opportunities and build a highly skilled workforce.

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development is leading this effort to ensure all Alaskans have access to the programs, services, and training they need to secure jobs that pay well. We have multiple tools for job seekers who want to enter or reenter the workforce, workers who want to advance or change careers, and employers who want to address their hiring needs.

Throughout the economic highs and lows, the department has consistently met challenges with creative ways to assist Alaskans. The current economic climate requires us to again communicate



the importance of the work we do and show Alaskans a clear path to current and future opportunities.

People often think about success in rigid terms, but opportunities can arise from difficult times if we think creatively. The pandemic challenged us by disrupting our jobs, industries, and way of

life. However, moving forward gives us a chance to rebuild in new ways. Alaska has clear options: apprenticeships, retraining, reskilling, internships, on-the-job-training, entrepreneurship, and more. Which will you choose?

If you or someone you know wants to pursue a new profession or acquire additional skills toward certification, Alaska offers excellent private and public options. Take some time to research the available options and the effectiveness and results of various training providers. And always reach out to department staff by contacting your local job center if you have questions or need assistance.

Contact Dr. Tamika L. Ledbetter, Commissioner, at (907) 465-2700 or commissioner.labor@alaska.gov.



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ON THE COVER:

Workers conduct an inspection on a rig on Spy Island in this January 2015 photo. Photo by the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement

ALASKA
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Trends is a nonpartisan, data-driven magazine that covers a range of economic topics in Alaska.

ON THIS SPREAD: The background image for 2021 is a cloudy sunset in Wasilla.
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2015-18 recession hit men harder

Men, women weathered statewide downturn differently

By KARINNE WIEBOLD

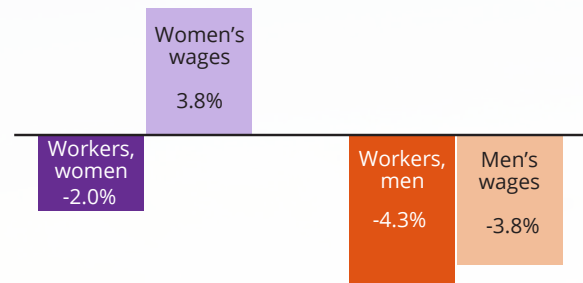
Alaska lost about 18,000 workers over the course of the 2015-2018 recession, 10,500 of whom were residents.

Men represent about 51 percent of resident workers, and women have held steady at 49 percent since the early 2000s. Both lost work during the recession, but it hit men harder — they lost twice as many jobs as women and \$329 million in total wages. While the number of women working also declined, total wages paid to women over that period grew by \$214 million.

The big movers behind these numbers were the oil and gas industry and health care. Essentially, the deep job losses in oil and gas were the biggest drag on wages for both genders, but men were more vulnerable because they make up about 85 percent of that industry's workforce.

Similarly, health care growth provided the biggest boost for men's and women's total wages alike, but women benefitted more because they represent just over three-quarters of health care workers.

Change in workers, wages by gender from 2015 to 2018



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

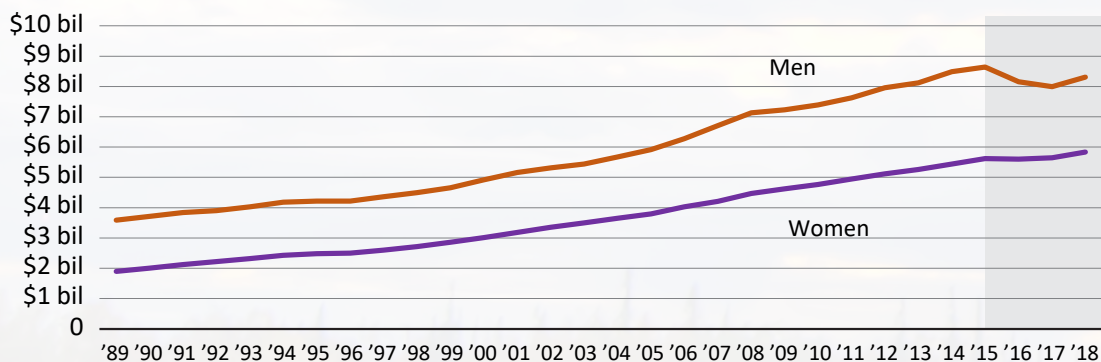
One big loser and one big winner among Alaska industries

Oil and gas was the big loss factor for men

Oil prices were high and stable for several years in the early 2010s, averaging around \$100 a barrel, but in

Article continues on page 6

Men's total wages dropped during the recent statewide recession



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

So far, the pandemic's downturn has affected women more

The 2015 to 2018 recession might feel like old news, fading in the rearview mirror as the pandemic wreaks havoc on our economy right *now*. But the details and outcomes of the last recession matter. They provide context on how men and women entered this period of pandemic-related job losses and on what we might see as more detailed data become available.

We entered the pandemic in a weakened state after a slight recovery in 2019

Alaska's economy was far from recovered when the pandemic hit in early 2020. The 2,300 jobs we'd added in 2019 were only about 20 percent of what we'd lost.

Growth briefly resumed for the most-hobbled industries in 2019: construction regained 600 jobs, oil and gas added 500, and professional and business services added 400.

Health care kept growing in 2019, adding 500 jobs, while state government continued to decline, losing another 350.

The employment losses caused by COVID-19 were fast and much larger

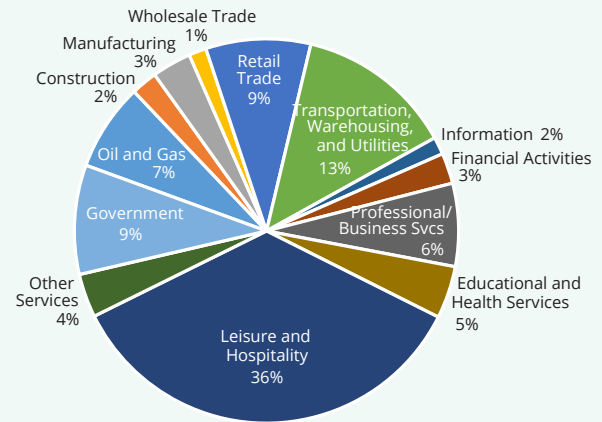
Pandemic-related job losses have diverged from the recent recession in several ways.

The shock was quick, with all major industries shedding jobs in April 2020, unlike the mix of growth and contraction during the recession. Alaska lost 27,900 jobs over the course of the year, while the net loss for all three years of the previous recession was 11,400.

So far, estimates show substantial pandemic-related losses from industries that are majority women. Leisure and hospitality, which is 54 percent women, lost 9,900 jobs in 2020. Local government, which is 58 percent women, lost 2,400, mainly from public education. Health care, which is 77 percent women and was responsible for women's total wage gains during the previous recession, lost 700 jobs last year.

Oil and gas employment losses, totaling 2,000 in 2020, will continue to affect men more, as will additional losses from professional and business services (-1,800) and transportation. The transportation, warehousing, and utilities sector is Alaska's second-largest, after leisure

Industry makeup of 2020 job losses



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

and hospitality, and it's 77 percent men. The 3,600 jobs it lost last year were nearly all in transportation.

Unemployment claims and national numbers tell a similar story so far

National data from the U.S. Department of Labor show unemployment rates have been higher among women during the pandemic than men.

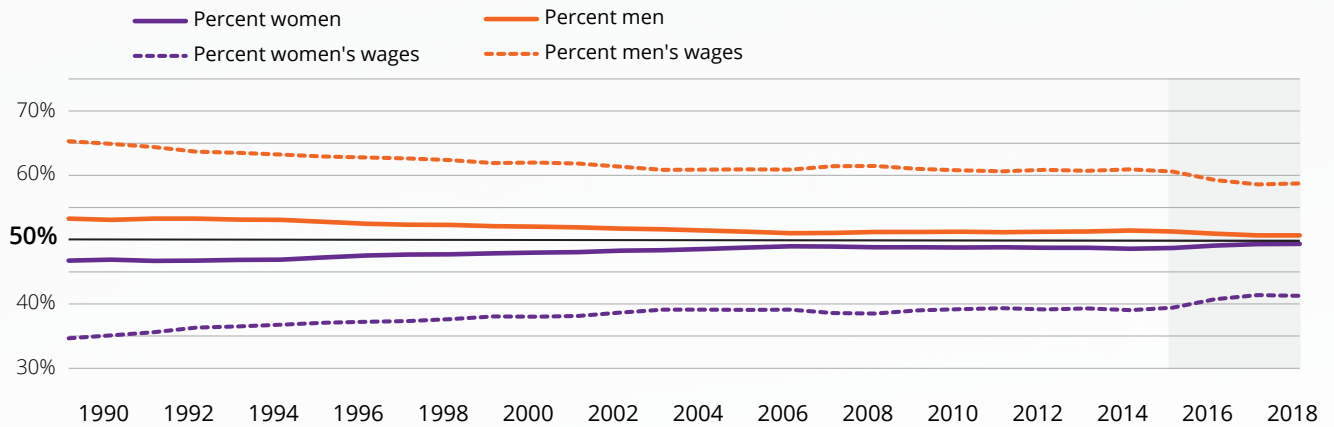
Women are also leaving the workforce at a higher rate than men, and once they're no longer looking for work, they aren't counted as unemployed. While labor force participation dropped for both genders initially, more women have remained out of the workforce, likely dealing with family health, child care, or education needs.

We will have to wait for most Alaska-specific data, especially by gender. However, the data from unemployment insurance claims also suggest the current economic downturn has been disproportionately hard on women.

Alaska's typical pattern is that two men file for unemployment benefits for every woman who does, but the number of women filing claims during the pandemic grew faster. Women filed 4.6 times more claims in 2020 than in 2019, and for men it was 3.6.

Unemployment claims hit record highs for both genders in 2020 and remained elevated in early 2021.

Recession brought men's and women's total wages, worker counts closer



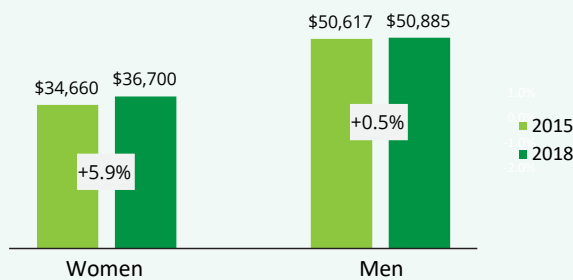
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Recession narrowed Alaska's gender gap in average wages

The gender gap commonly refers to the difference in average wages between men and women. In past studies, we've found that men earn more than women in nearly every major industry, age group, and geographic area. Men also make more in 85 percent of occupations and at every level of education. (See the March 2017 issue of *Trends*.)

The recession narrowed the gender wage gap because men took such a massive hit in oil and gas and at the same time, the recession slowed but didn't stop women's wage growth, which was buoyed by health care.

Over the three-year recession, the average annual wage increased 5.9 percent for women and about half a percent for men. This pulled the earnings ratio – the average pay for a woman compared to a man – up from 68 percent (where it had been for years) to 72 percent. This is the closest men's and women's average earnings have ever been.



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

2015 the price suddenly plunged by half and stayed low. (See the June 2020 issue of *Trends*.) The industry began losing jobs midway through 2015, with the bulk of the losses following in 2016 and 2017.

During the recession, the numbers of men and women working in the oil industry both fell by about 40 percent, but more men lost their jobs because few women work in oil and gas. The oil industry lost 712 women and 3,867 men.

About the data

Alaska lost 11,400 total jobs on a year-over-year basis in 2016, 2017, and 2018. This article refers to that period as the recession, and it mostly compares 2015, the last year before job losses, to 2018, the last year before job gains.

However, this article focuses on workers rather than jobs. Those numbers differ because a single job can be held by more than one worker over a period of time, and one worker can hold multiple jobs.

We matched worker data the Department of Labor and Workforce Development collects through the state's unemployment insurance program with demographic data from Permanent Fund Dividend applications. Because we included only those who were eligible for unemployment insurance and applied for a dividend, this analysis doesn't capture nonresidents, who make up about 20 percent of the state's workforce. It also excludes those who didn't specify a gender, the self-employed, and federal civilian and military workers. Workers with multiple jobs were assigned to the industry where they earned the most money.

Details on workers and wages by industry for men and women, 2015 and 2018

	2015				2018				Change			
	Women	Women's wages (mils)	Men	Men's wages (mils)	Women	Women's wages (mils)	Men	Men's wages (mil)	Women	Women's wages (mils)	Men	Men's wages (mils)
Ag, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting	361	\$5.6	794	\$22.8	522	\$8.9	966	\$28.2	161	\$3.4	172	\$5.5
Mining	2,120	\$208.6	12,750	\$1,434.1	1,420	\$158.1	8,865	\$1,045.7	-700	-\$50.5	-3,885	-\$388.4
Oil and Gas	1,763	\$185.1	10,392	\$1,230.2	1,051	\$132.4	6,525	\$829.9	-712	-\$52.8	-3,867	-\$400.3
Construction	2,820	\$107.0	17,847	\$992.6	2,713	\$108.7	16,807	\$940.7	-107	\$1.7	-1,040	-\$51.9
Manufacturing	3,173	\$74.9	7,091	\$267.4	3,279	\$79.0	6,986	\$272.3	106	\$4.1	-105	\$4.9
Trade, Transportation, Utilities	27,895	\$705.3	41,342	\$1,818.2	26,354	\$729.6	40,699	\$1,870.2	-1,541	\$24.2	-643	\$52.0
Information	2,801	\$137.4	3,988	\$253.0	2,309	\$117.6	3,657	\$234.0	-492	-\$19.8	-331	-\$19.0
Financial Activities	8,100	\$337.0	5,686	\$302.5	7,863	\$355.1	5,592	\$316.3	-237	\$18.1	-94	\$13.8
Professional and Business Svcs	12,817	\$512.4	16,671	\$909.3	11,684	\$484.3	15,176	\$836.9	-1,133	-\$28.1	-1,495	-\$72.5
Private Ed, Health Care/Social	36,871	\$1,499.1	11,217	\$625.6	38,789	\$1,717.6	12,171	\$727.8	1,918	\$218.4	954	\$102.2
Health Care	27,195	\$1,231.7	7,812	\$506.1	29,187	\$1,430.6	8,744	\$605.4	1,992	\$198.9	932	\$99.3
Leisure and Hospitality	18,697	\$291.2	16,242	\$311.7	18,431	\$315.7	16,198	\$320.2	-266	\$24.6	-44	\$8.6
Other Services/Unknown	6,126	\$164.2	5,113	\$184.8	6,241	\$177.1	5,212	\$191.5	115	\$13.0	99	\$6.6
Local Government	27,175	\$982.4	19,455	\$819.8	27,375	\$1,024.3	19,567	\$868.2	200	\$42.0	112	\$48.4
State Government	13,220	\$595.9	12,491	\$697.8	12,006	\$558.7	11,427	\$658.7	-1,214	-\$37.3	-1,064	-\$39.1
Total	162,176	\$5,621.0	170,687	\$8,639.6	158,986	\$5,834.7	163,323	\$8,310.6	-3,190	\$213.8	-7,364	-\$329.0

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

The losses took an outsized bite from men's wages because the industry pays about two-and-a-half times the statewide average wage. Both genders lost more wages in oil and gas than they did anywhere else, but women lost \$50 million while men lost eight times that.

Men's \$400 million loss was by far their largest in any industry and was the primary reason their statewide earnings fell \$329 million during the recession.

Professional and business services and construction were tied to oil's woes

Professional and business services and construction are tied to the oil industry, so they took a parallel hit. Of the 2,628 workers professional and business services lost, 43 percent were women. However, men in that industry lost \$72 million in wages and women lost \$28 million. More of the jobs men lost were high-wage positions in professional, scientific, and technical services.

Job losses in construction equaled about 10 men for every woman, roughly in line with their representation in that industry. The number of male workers fell by 1,040 and their total earnings decreased by \$52 million.

Construction cut just 107 women, but women's total earnings increased, suggesting the small number of women who lost construction work had been in low-paying positions.

We're talking about residents, but nonresidents were hit too

This article focuses on Alaska residents, but it's important to recognize that Alaska's large nonresident workforce also suffered during the recession — disproportionately so.

The nonresident workforce shrunk by 8 percent between 2015 and 2018 while the resident workforce declined 4 percent. Of the 18,000 people who lost a job during that period, about 7,700 were nonresidents.

Nonresidents are consistently about a fifth of Alaska's total workers, and because they're likely to work in jobs that are seasonal and/or remote, they make up even larger shares of the industries that declined most during the recession.

About a third of oil and gas workers and those who work in tourism-related jobs are nonresidents, for example. Roughly three-quarters of seafood processing workers are nonresidents, which is the highest among industries. Construction and retail also lost large numbers of nonresidents between 2015 and 2018.

State government was a mostly equal blow

State government cuts affected men and women about the same. State government employment has been falling for most of the last decade, and pressure from dwindling oil revenue hastened the decline.

By 2018, state government employed 1,214 fewer women, representing \$37 million in lost wages. State government cut fewer men (-1,064), but they lost slightly more total wages (-\$39 million).

Retail losses followed an unexpected pattern

Men and women weathered retail losses in opposite ways. Both lost work (-958 for men and -1,604 for women) but men's wages decreased by \$11 million while women's total wages went up by \$3 million.

Retail accounted for about half of the lost female workers, but it didn't reduce their earnings. The combination of fewer women working in that industry and higher earnings among those who remained drove women's *average* wages up during that period. (See the sidebar on page 6 for more on the average wage.)

Women's gains were due to health care

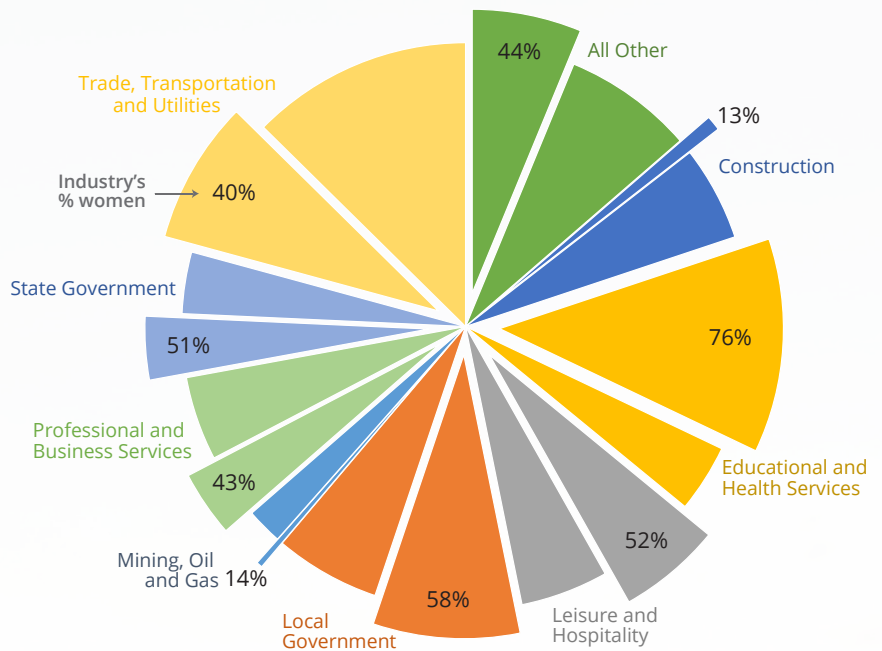
Health care grew more than any other industry during the recession and was one of just three to add jobs. Women make up about three-quarters of the health care industry, so they gained more of the additional jobs and wages. This drove their statewide totals up considerably.

By the end of the recession, health care employed an additional 1,992 women and 932 more men. Women's total wages grew by \$199 million and men's increased \$99 million.

The shakeout by gender and what happened next

In the end, aside from health care, the ups and

A few Alaska industries are over half women



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

downs in wages paid to women in all other industries evened each other out. (See the table on the previous page for more industry detail.) Health care adding nearly \$200 million to the equation was the reason women netted \$214 million more in 2018 than they did three years before, despite losing nearly 3,200 workers over that period.

Men took a bigger hit in lost jobs and wages, with nearly 7,400 fewer men working in 2018 than in 2015. While they lost wages in professional and business services, construction, information, and state government, gains in other industries such as health care and local government came close to canceling out the losses. This left oil and gas as the primary driver.

After the recession, we recovered a small number of the lost jobs before a public health crisis in early 2020 brought on its own economic downturn. See page 5 for more on what we know so far about how men and women have fared during the pandemic and how those losses compare to the 2015-2018 recession.

Karinne Wiebold is an economist in Juneau. Reach her at (907) 465-6039 or karinne.wiebold@alaska.gov.

Relief funds boosted income

Alaskans' personal income rose 3 percent in 2020

By NEAL FRIED

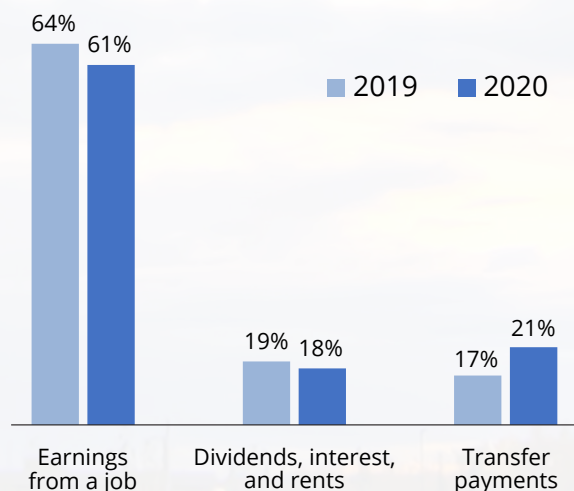
Thousands of jobs evaporated last year, unemployment soared, and some businesses struggled to stay open while others closed. One would expect such economic devastation to put a dent in people's income, and it has before. During the recent statewide recession, Alaskans' total personal income fell by \$800 million in a single year.

But when the pandemic-led slump piled on job losses in 2020, the opposite happened — personal income went up.

Personal income data show a jump of more than \$1.5 billion in 2020, or a little over 3 percent, from 2019. Alaskans received more than \$47 billion overall last year.

Income is what people take in from all sources. Two-thirds come from what people earn at their jobs or through self-employment, and the rest comes from dividends and interest earnings as well as government checks known as transfer payments. (See the

Job earnings dipped as a percent of income; transfer payments rose



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Alaskans' personal income jumped



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

sidebar on this page for examples.)

Work earnings did drop last year, as one would expect with so many lost jobs. Alaskans earned about \$29 billion at work in 2020, which was \$435 million less than the year before.

COVID-related transfer payments more than made up for those lost wages, however, pushing the level of annual transfer payments Alaskans received to a new

Continued on page 13

About the data

Each quarter, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis releases comprehensive personal income data for all 50 states. Personal income includes what every adult and child in the state takes in from all sources: work earnings, dividends (such as Alaska Native Corporation shareholder dividends), interest income, and transfer payments.

Transfer payments include government payments such as Social Security, unemployment benefits, veterans' benefits, Permanent Fund Dividends, and Medicaid, to name just a few.

Retail faces a trio of pressures

Job losses from e-commerce, recession, and COVID

By NEAL FRIED

The pandemic took a serious bite out of retail in Alaska. Seven percent of 2020's job losses came from this industry, and it was the third-hardest hit after transportation and the leisure and hospitality sector.

But COVID-19 was just the latest in a series of downward pressures on retail. E-commerce has been on the rise for more than a decade, stripping jobs from brick-and-mortar stores nationwide, and Alaska's retail industry had weathered a three-year state recession before the pandemic layered on store closures and strengthened the grip of online shopping.

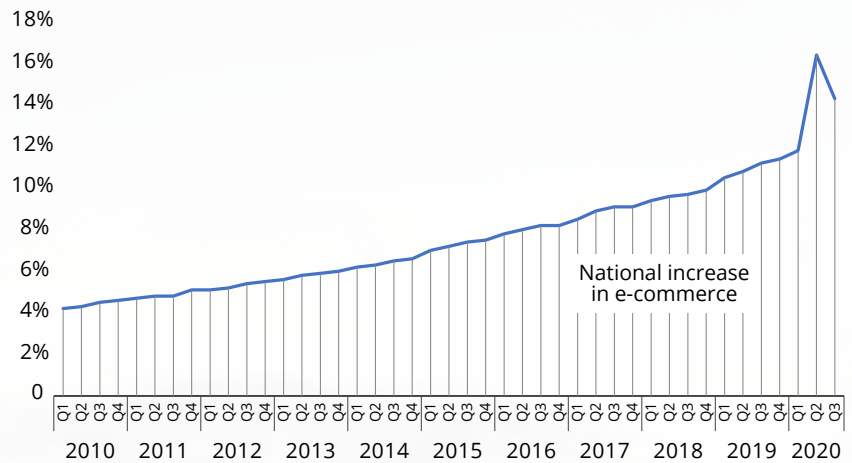
Online shopping has made inroads for over a decade

Retail trade is big in Alaska. Alaskans spend more than \$10 billion a year at the state's 2,343 stores, and retail is the second-largest private-sector employer at more than 33,000 jobs.

In the early 2010s, retail's expansion mirrored overall economic and population growth. Employment peaked in 2015 at 37,432 jobs. But online shopping had taken the first nibbles from the industry's growth long before the recession cut into the numbers in 2016.

It's impossible to quantify the clout of online shopping in Alaska (see the sidebar on page 13), but Alaskans probably do it at least as much as most Americans, and national numbers show its clear upward trajectory. The graph above shows e-commerce's share of U.S. retail sales was about 4 percent in 2010, and by 2019 it was 11 percent. In 2020,

Online shopping got a big boost nationally in 2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

online sales shot up to 16 percent during the second quarter and settled at around 14 percent during the third quarter.

The pandemic came on the three-year recession's heels

After the recession took hold in Alaska, retail employment fell by a little less than 1 percent in 2016, or about 346 jobs. Losses gained momentum in 2017 with employment falling another 2 percent (-700). By the end of 2018, retail had shed over 5 percent of its employment (-2,052).

Employment rebounded slightly in 2019 after the recession ended, but when the pandemic hit in April 2020, retail shed 5,000 jobs in a single month compared to the previous April.

May employment was still down 4,200 from the previous May, with continuing store closures, social distancing requirements, and reluctant shoppers. By September, the losses were smaller with about 2,500 fewer jobs than the year before.

Types of stores that suffered most

Retail's 2020 losses weren't uniform. Some types of stores thrived during the pandemic while it crippled others.

The hardest-hit stores in Alaska sold clothes, sporting goods, books, electronics and appliances, health and personal care products, and miscellaneous items. The effect on health and personal care stores was a surprise because they include pharmacies and other necessities, but they also carry beauty products and other discretionary goods.

Furniture and home furnishings also took an unexpected downturn. While the need for new office furniture dropped with so many working from home, demand for furniture increased overall. Home sales and construction had both grown, and families were spending more time at home. However, the pandemic caused severe supply chain problems and product shortages.

Less surprising were the declines for electronics and appliance stores. This category, a casualty of online shopping, had been dragging for years. Its employment peaked in 2011, nationally and in Alaska.

The story was similar for sporting goods, books, and music, the category where e-commerce first made inroads. Alaska began losing jobs in these stores in mid-2015, in line with the national trend.

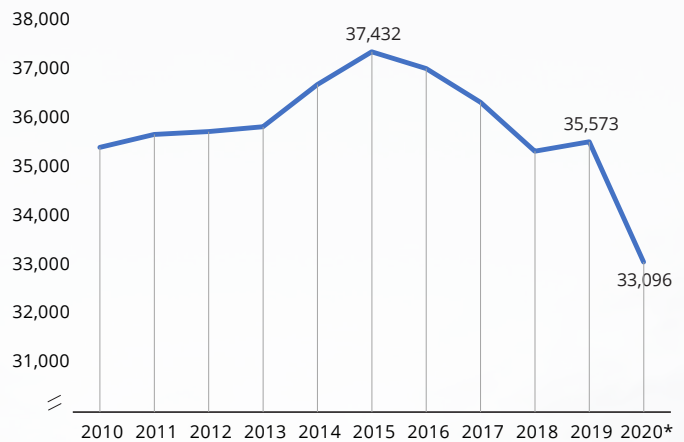
Clothes stores were another category hit early by online shopping, and the recession hastened the decline. Multiple national retailers had already gone dark in Alaska in recent years, including Forever 21, Nordstrom, and Banana Republic. Shopping behavior changed again when the pandemic arrived. Demand for new clothes fell as schools closed and more adults left their workplaces.

Some categories did well last year

Grocery stores lost relatively few jobs in 2020. They sell essentials, and e-commerce doesn't pose much of a threat. If anything, it's a surprise that grocery employment didn't grow as restaurants closed and people began eating mostly at home. As of February 2021, grocery spending was up nearly 15 percent from pre-pandemic levels, according to Opportunity Insights.

General merchandise stores (Fred Meyer and Costco are examples) followed a similar pattern, losing a modest number of jobs overall last year.

Retail jobs had been on a multiyear decline in Alaska before COVID-19



*Based on the first three quarters

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Retail jobs by area, 2019 to 2020

	Jobs in 2019*	Jobs in 2020*	Change, 2019-20	Percent change
ALASKA	35,724	33,117	-2,607	-7.3%
Aleutians East Borough	45	53	8	17.8%
Aleutians West Census Area	137	140	3	2.2%
Anchorage, Municipality	16,461	14,896	-1,565	-9.5%
Bethel Census Area	797	806	9	1.1%
Bristol Bay Borough	70	59	-11	-15.7%
Denali Borough	ND	65	ND	ND
Dillingham Census Area	198	203	5	2.5%
Fairbanks North Star Borough	4,756	4,481	-275	-5.8%
Haines Borough	123	111	-12	-9.8%
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	75	64	-11	-14.7%
Juneau, City and Borough	1,865	1,570	-295	-15.8%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	2,637	2,562	-75	-2.8%
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	1,030	761	-269	-26.1%
Kodiak Island Borough	479	471	-8	-1.7%
Kusilvak Census Area	341	352	11	3.2%
Lake and Peninsula Borough	30	30	0	0
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	3,758	3,945	187	5.0%
Nome Census Area	362	360	-2	-0.6%
North Slope Borough	230	269	39	17.0%
Northwest Arctic Borough	178	158	-20	-11.2%
Petersburg Borough	181	171	-10	-5.5%
Prince of Wales-Hyder CA	247	227	-20	-8.1%
Sitka, City and Borough	454	410	-44	-9.7%
Skagway, Municipality	206	78	-128	-62.1%
Southeast Fairbanks CA	208	198	-10	-4.8%
Valdez-Cordova Census Area	394	387	-7	-1.8%
Wrangell, City and Borough	123	125	2	1.6%
Yakutat, City and Borough	33	29	-4	-12.1%
Yukon Koyukuk Census Area	127	103	-24	-18.9%

*Based on the first three quarters for both years, for comparison

ND means not disclosable for confidentiality reasons.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Building material and garden stores thrived. Their employment grew 3.1 percent as people pursued home and garden projects while isolating and as residential construction flourished. E-commerce is also a minor competitor at best for these stores, as it's much harder to shop online for plants and two-by-fours.

Most Alaska areas lost retail in 2020

Most areas of the state lost retail jobs between 2019 and 2020, and how they fared depended on the size of their industries, the types of stores they have, and how much they depend on tourists.

For example, after the cruise ship season was canceled, Ketchikan lost more than a quarter of its retail jobs and Skagway lost 62 percent.

Anchorage lost the largest *number* of jobs because of wary consumers, store closures, online shopping, and few tourists. Fairbanks and Juneau, with their large retail sectors, suffered similar declines.

Some areas took a glancing blow. Retail in Kodiak is dominated by "essential" stores such as grocers, general merchandisers, and building supply stores. The Kenai Peninsula Borough's loss was also modest, which was unexpected because it has a large visitor industry and its sales took a dive last year. According to borough sales tax data, sales fell 15 percent borough-wide in the third quarter of 2020 compared to the previous year and dropped 45 percent in Seward.

A few places added retail jobs in 2020, led by Mat-Su

Some rural areas recorded minor retail gains, or at least smaller losses, as most have few stores or visitors. Rural areas that added retail jobs last year included Bethel, Dillingham, the Aleutians East and North Slope boroughs, the Kusilvak and Aleutians West census areas, and Wrangell.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough was the star for retail growth, adding 187 jobs in 2020. Mat-Su has the third-largest retail industry in the state and a

Alaska retail employment and sales by category

	Jobs in 2019*	Jobs in 2020*	Change, 2019-20	Percent change	Total retail sales, 2017**
TOTAL RETAIL	35,724	33,117	-2,607	-7.3%	\$10.4 bil
Motor Vehicle/Parts Dealers	3,970	3,796	-174	-4.4%	\$2.1 bil
Furniture, Home Furnishings	790	671	-119	-15.1%	\$190.2 mil
Electronics and Appliances	595	526	-69	-11.6%	\$148.2 mil
Building Material and Garden	3,561	3,671	110	3.1%	\$1.0 bil
Food and Beverages	5,406	5,340	-66	-1.2%	\$1.9 bil
Health and Personal Care	1,053	922	-131	-12.4%	\$374.5 mil
Gasoline Stations	1,759	1,646	-113	-6.4%	\$694.6 mil
Clothing and Accessories	1,839	1,253	-586	-31.9%	\$361.9 mil
Sporting Goods, Books, Music	2,030	1,701	-329	-16.2%	\$308.7 mil
General Merchandise	10,454	9,943	-511	-4.9%	\$2.6 bil
Miscellaneous	2,996	2,429	-567	-18.9%	\$374.4 mil
Nonstore Retailers	1,271	1,219	-52	-4.1%	\$376.0 mil

*Based on the first three quarters of both years, for comparison

**Because Anchorage and Fairbanks don't have a sales tax, Alaska has no reliable, up-to-date retail sales figures. These estimates come from the U.S. Census Bureau; 2017 is the most recent year available.

Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Census Bureau

population that continued to grow through 2020 (unlike most of the state), and it had no mandated closures. Mat-Su residents probably also spent more of their retail dollars closer to home as fewer commuted to Anchorage during the pandemic.

Changing technology makes a full retail recovery unlikely

Retail has always been and will remain hyper-competitive, with old standbys falling by the wayside as new actors take their place. The ways people shop will remain in flux as well, although in-person shopping is here to stay. It's a favorite pastime for some, and e-commerce can't efficiently and economically supply every type of good. Pent-up demand will give brick-and-mortar stores a boost this year, and they'll find new ways to compete with online retailers.

Still, e-commerce will continue to increase its share of the market. In the January issue of *Alaska Economic Trends*, we forecasted that 1,800 of the 2,400 retail jobs lost in 2020 would return in 2021. But a full recovery would require regaining the 1,600 jobs lost during the pre-pandemic recession too, and that's unlikely given the increasing popularity of online shopping.

Neal Fried is an economist in Anchorage. Reach him at (907) 269-4861 or neal.fried@alaska.gov.

About the retail data

For this article, retail includes any business that sells merchandise for personal or household consumption. In Alaska, this generally means a place with a storefront. Some Alaska retailers sell both in-store and online, but Alaska has few strictly online retailers.

While Alaskans probably shop online at least as much as most Americans, there is no barometer for online purchasing in Alaska. The state has no reliable or timely way to track retail sales because the two largest markets, Anchorage and Fairbanks, don't have a sales tax. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates Alaska retail sales, but they are survey-based and only come out every five years. (The table on the previous page gives the 2017 estimates, the most recent available. The bureau has released more recent numbers, but they are part of a new experimental data set.) Employment data augmented by limited consumer spending data remain the best proxy for the retail industry's health.

Retail has nearly a dozen broad categories. Most are straightforward, such as gas stations, furniture stores, and motor vehicle and parts dealers, but others need some explanation. Food and beverage stores include grocery and convenience stores while specialty food stores cover meat markets and bakeries. The miscellaneous category encompasses florists, office supply stores, pet stores, souvenir shops, used goods stores, and mobile home dealers. Nonstore retailers include mail order/online sellers and vending machines.

Many places are hybrids and not so easily defined. The largest category, general merchandise stores such as Fred Meyer and Costco, sells just about everything. In general, though, stores are categorized by what they sell most.

PERSONAL INCOME

Continued from page 9

high. In the preceding "normal" years — 2010 through 2019 — transfer payments made up between 14 percent and 17 percent of Alaskans' income. In 2020, that shot up to a record 21 percent.

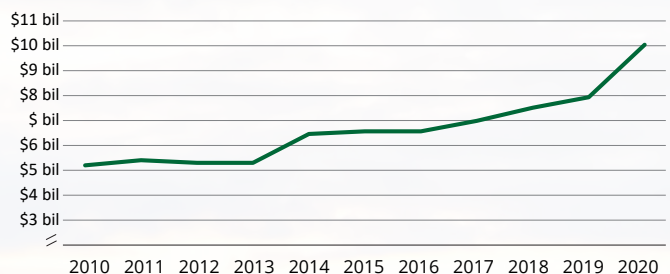
A large share of the massive federal CARES Act, signed in March last year, went to individuals. For Alaska that included nearly \$2 billion in unemployment compensation, almost \$2.5 billion in stimulus payments, a Medicare reimbursement boost, and payments through various other relief programs.

Pandemic relief programs also bumped up Alaska's per capita income, which is total personal income divided by the number of residents. It rose from \$62,629 per person in 2019 to \$64,780 in 2020.

Less clarity on 2021's outlook

The pattern for personal income in 2021 is less

Transfer payments rose in Alaska with unemployment, relief checks



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

certain. Congress passed a second large COVID-19 relief bill last month, and those funds will soon work their way into Alaska's economy. That bill includes another \$1,400 in economic stimulus payments for most Alaskans.

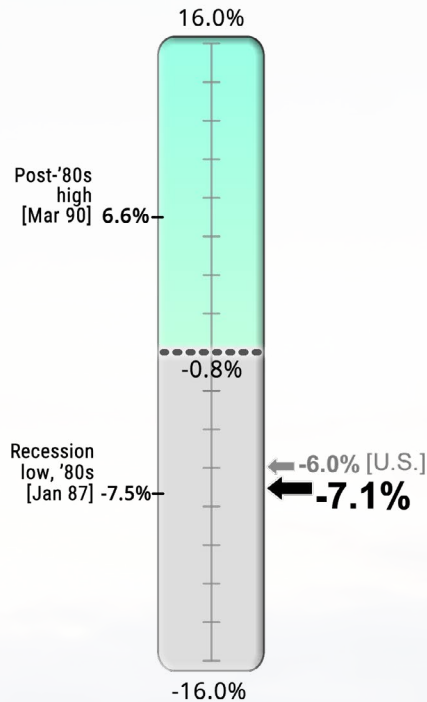
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Gauging The Economy



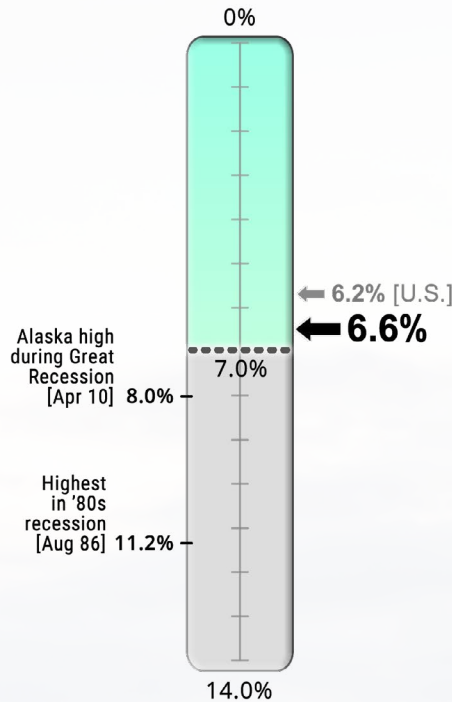
Job Growth

February 2021
Over-the-year percent change



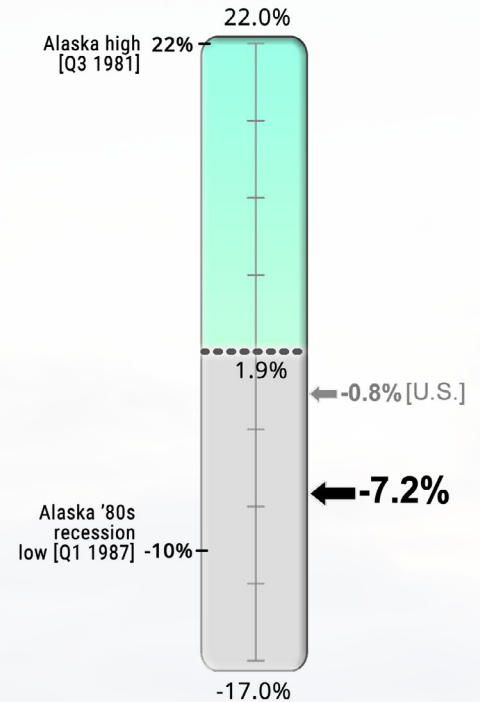
Unemployment Rate

February 2021
Seasonally adjusted



Wage Growth

3rd Quarter 2020
Over-the-year percent change



➤ The shutdowns to slow the spread of COVID-19 caused a rapid drop in employment, beginning in April 2020. January 2021 was the first month that COVID-related job losses were not as deep as Alaska's losses during the 1980s recession.

➤ Alaska's unemployment rate rose in December and is lower than the U.S. rate, but the lower rates in recent months are due to technical issues with the way the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates them and are far less useful than normal for assessing economic health.

➤ After 10 straight quarters of wage growth, Alaska's total wages fell dramatically with the pandemic.

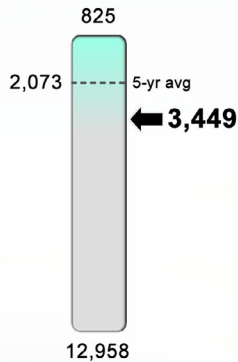
➤ Wage losses grew in the third quarter of 2020 as oil and gas job losses worsened and seafood processing, transportation, and federal wages all fell further below 2019 levels.

Gauging The Economy

---- ALASKA'S 10-YR AVERAGE
← CURRENT ALASKA

Initial Claims

Unemployment, week ending March 13, 2021**

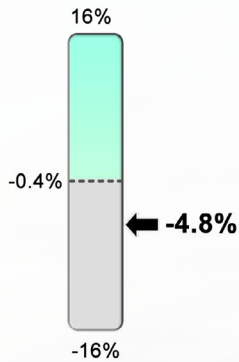


➤ Unemployment claims jumped in the spring with the coronavirus pandemic as many businesses shut down or limited services, and they remain elevated.

**Four-week moving average ending with specified week

GDP Growth

4th Quarter 2020 Over-the-year percent change*

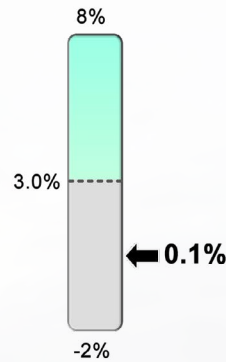


➤ Gross domestic product is the value of the goods and services a state produces. Alaska's GDP dropped significantly when COVID-19 hit.

*In current dollars

Personal Income Growth

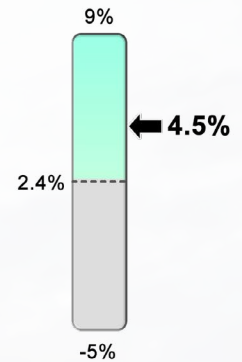
4th Quarter 2020 Over-the-year percent change



➤ Personal income includes wages as well as transfer payments (such as Social Security, Medicaid, and the PFD) and investment income. Growth slowed in the first quarter of 2020, then jumped with transfer payments in the second and third quarters before slowing again in the fourth quarter.

Change in Home Prices

Single-family, percent change from prior year, Q4 2020**

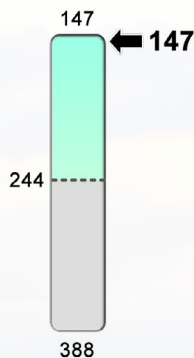


➤ Home prices include only those for which a commercial loan was used. This indicator tends to be volatile from quarter to quarter.

**Four-quarter moving average ending with specified quarter

Foreclosures

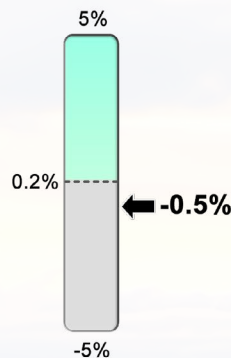
1st Quarter 2020



➤ Because of the pandemic, there has been an indefinite moratorium on foreclosures since the second quarter of 2020.

Population Growth

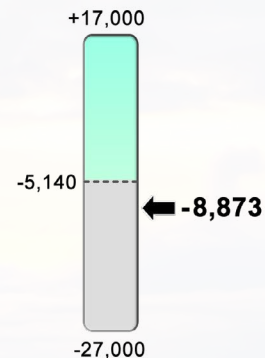
2019 to 2020



➤ This was the fourth straight year of population decline.

Net Migration

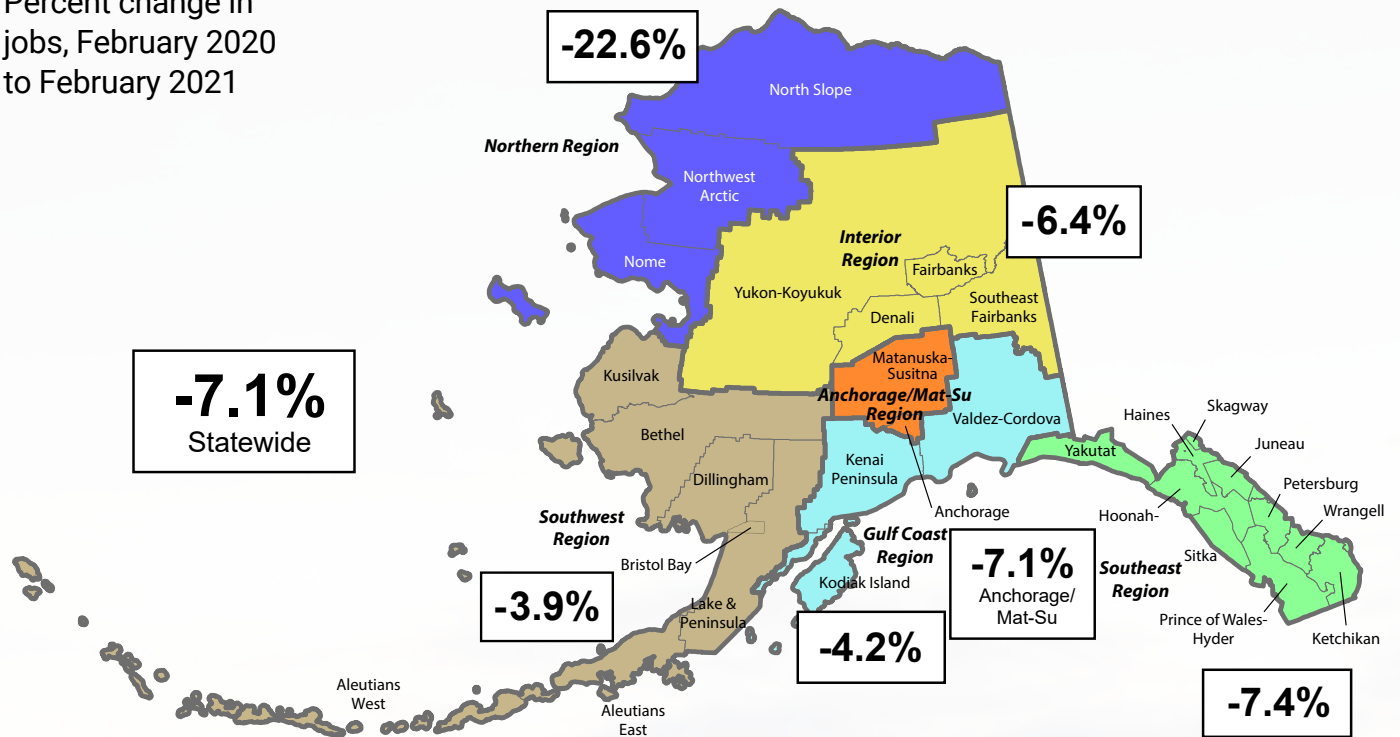
2019 to 2020



➤ The state had net migration losses for the eighth consecutive year in 2020. Net migration is the number who moved to Alaska minus the number who left.

Employment by Region

Percent change in jobs, February 2020 to February 2021



Seasonally adjusted

	Prelim.		Revised
	2/21	1/21	2/20
United States	6.2	6.3	3.5
Alaska	6.6	6.6	5.1

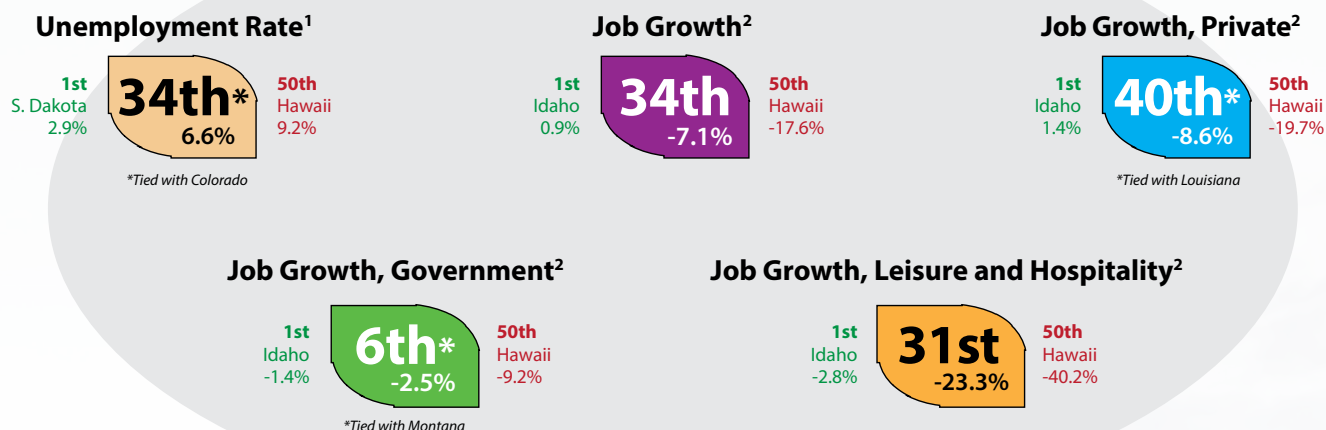
Not seasonally adjusted

	Prelim.		Revised
	2/21	1/21	2/20
United States	6.6	6.8	3.8
Alaska	7.1	6.9	5.2

Regional, not seasonally adjusted

	Prelim.			Revised				Prelim.			Revised		
	2/21	1/21	2/20	2/21	1/21	2/20		2/21	1/21	2/20	2/21	1/21	2/20
Interior Region	6.1	6.1	5.1				Southeast Region	7.5	7.3	5.8			
Denali Borough	16.0	15.8	16.2				Haines Borough	15.6	14.6	14.2			
Fairbanks N Star Borough	4.9	5.6	4.4				Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	13.4	12.2	15.1			
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	7.0	7.4	8.2				Juneau, City and Borough	5.7	5.4	3.6			
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	22.6	10.5	13.3				Ketchikan Gateway Borough	8.6	8.3	6.6			
Northern Region	8.6	8.2	8.4				Petersburg Borough	8.5	9.2	8.0			
Nome Census Area	8.7	8.2	9.5				Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	9.4	8.3	9.0			
North Slope Borough	6.4	6.3	4.1				Sitka, City and Borough	6.4	6.9	3.9			
Northwest Arctic Borough	10.4	10.0	12.4				Skagway, Municipality	21.0	21.4	21.0			
Anchorage/Mat-Su Region	6.7	6.6	4.4				Wrangell, City and Borough	7.7	7.7	6.8			
Anchorage, Municipality	6.5	6.3	4.0				Yakutat, City and Borough	9.2	10.5	9.9			
Mat-Su Borough	7.4	7.3	5.9										
Southwest Region	9.2	8.5	7.9										
Aleutians East Borough	2.0	2.7	1.8										
Aleutians West Census Area	2.3	4.8	1.7										
Bethel Census Area	12.9	9.9	10.9										
Bristol Bay Borough	12.5	12.3	13.9										
Dillingham Census Area	8.6	7.0	7.1										
Kusilvak Census Area	21.3	17.1	19.8										
Lake and Peninsula Borough	11.5	9.3	10.4										
Gulf Coast Region	8.5	8.4	6.4										
Kenai Peninsula Borough	8.8	8.5	6.4										
Kodiak Island Borough	6.2	7.8	3.9										
Valdez-Cordova Census Area	9.8	8.5	10.3										

How Alaska Ranks



Note: Government employment includes federal, state, and local government plus public schools and universities.

¹February seasonally adjusted unemployment rates

²February employment, over-the-year percent change

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Other Economic Indicators

	Current		Year ago	Change
Urban Alaska Consumer Price Index (CPI-U, base yr 1982=100)	227.258	2nd half 2020	228.495	-0.54%
Commodity prices				
Crude oil, Alaska North Slope, * per barrel	\$61.88	Feb 2021	\$54.48	+13.59%
Natural gas, residential, per thousand cubic feet	\$10.59	Dec 2020	\$10.78	-1.76%
Gold, per oz. COMEX	\$1,790.40	2/24/2021	\$1,676.60	+6.79%
Silver, per oz. COMEX	\$27.76	2/24/2021	\$18.96	+46.41%
Copper, per lb. COMEX	\$432.00	2/24/2021	\$258.35	+67.22%
Zinc, per MT	\$2,859.75	2/24/2021	\$2,018.00	+41.71%
Lead, per lb.	\$0.96	2/24/2021	\$0.86	+11.63%
Bankruptcies				
	75	Q4 2020	92	-18.48%
Business	7	Q4 2020	6	+16.67%
Personal	68	Q4 2020	86	-20.93%
Unemployment insurance claims				
Initial filings	15,356	Feb 2020	3,956	+288.17%
Continued filings	69,394	Feb 2020	37,888	+83.16%
Claimant count	17,764	Feb 2020	10,365	+71.38%

*Department of Revenue estimate

Sources for this page and the preceding three pages include Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Energy Information Administration; Kitco; U.S. Census Bureau; COMEX; Bloomberg; Infomine; Alaska Department of Revenue; and U.S. Courts, 9th Circuit

SAFETY MINUTE

Small protective equipment vital to women in construction

Women are slowly increasing as a percentage of the construction industry, now making up about 12 percent. The prevalence of health and safety hazards may be one reason for the slow increase. While all construction workers face risks, some concerns are unique to women, including properly fitting personal protective equipment.

Because construction is a male-dominated industry, many employers take a one-size-fits-all approach to buying PPE. Providing the correct PPE and clothing is one way to eliminate barriers to women working in construction. The following tips will ensure a proper fit for your female workers.

Safety hard hats

Most women have smaller heads than men. To find the proper size, measure the head circumference slightly above the ears. Confirm the hard hat fits correctly and stays on the employee's head when bending over but isn't so tight that it leaves a mark on her face.

Safety goggles

Pay attention to the fit around the eyes, bridge of the nose, and temples. Goggles should be snug around these areas but not tight enough to disrupt vision or

injure the face. Ensure there are no gaps.

Safety gloves

Most women also have smaller hands, so consider purchasing small and medium-sized gloves. Well-fitting safety gloves leave no skin exposed and allow for a good safety grip.

Fall harnesses

Gender-specific fall harnesses are important, and men and women differ significantly in chest, hip, and thigh measurements. We encourage employers to research fit before selecting a full-body harness for a female employee.

The International Safety Equipment Association has [a complete list of suppliers that offer female-specific PPE](#).

This Safety Minute was written by Elaine Banda, chief of the Alaska Occupational Safety and Health Consultation and Training Section of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. For more information on keeping your employees safe, please visit labor.alaska.gov/lss/oshhome.htm and follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/alaskalabor](https://www.facebook.com/alaskalabor).

EMPLOYER RESOURCES

Fidelity bonding program a no-cost tool for employers

Fidelity bonding is a proven and effective job placement tool that helps concerned employers *and* at-risk job seekers.

The Alaska Fidelity Bonding Program offers no-cost, non-deductible bonds to employers who hire at-risk individuals such as ex-offenders, people recovering from substance abuse, those with poor work or credit histories, and workers who are not otherwise bondable. Bonds insure employers against job-related theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement by an employee, on or off the worksite. The opportunity to obtain a free fidelity bond allows the employer to focus on a worker's skills and productivity without taking on added risk. It is the only program that bonds ex-offenders.

Nationwide, 99 percent of bonded at-risk individuals have proven to be honest employees.

Employers can bond any full- or part-time, permanent or temporary, first-time or returning employee. The bona fide employee must only meet the state's legal age for working. Under some circumstances, no-cost bonds may also

be available for employers wishing to promote or retain at-risk workers. The self-employed are not eligible.

Bonds can be issued without needing to sign forms. It takes just a few minutes for Alaska Job Center staff to take down information about the employer and employee and a hire date for the bond to take effect. A basic \$5,000 bond is effective for six months. Larger bond amounts and renewals are available in some circumstances, and the employer may also opt to continue coverage directly with the underwriter if there have been no claims in the first six months.

For more information about Alaska's Fidelity Bonding Program, visit labor.alaska.gov/bonding, contact the Alaska Job Center at jobs.alaska.gov/offices, or call (907) 465-5952 or (800) 770-8973 (Alaska Relay).

Employer Resources is provided by the Employment and Training Services Division of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.