

From VOA Learning English, this is As It Is.

Welcome back. I'm Caty Weaver in Washington.

Most economic experts say the United States is experiencing an economic recovery following the financial crisis that began five years ago. The gross domestic product -- the measurement of total goods and services -- is growing quickly. And the unemployment rate has fallen to levels seen before the crisis.

But 2014 may still be a difficult year for some unemployed Americans. We will meet one such American on the show today.

"I applied for a job yesterday. There were 865 applications went in for that one job."

Then, we'll report on the continuing efforts to legalize marijuana in the United States. One state welcomed the New Year with the first legal sales of the drug for use as recreation.

"Prohibition is over."

Reports on work and play in America today on As It Is.

In January 2008, the unemployment rate in the United States was around five percent. But by the end of the year it had increased to 7.3 percent. Just one year later, it had increased to almost 10 percent. The country had quickly entered its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Experts say the economy is now in full recovery. The unemployment rate is down to about seven percent. Still, millions of Americans are out of work, like Kathy Biscotti.

"I'm 51 years old, born, bred, raised in Baltimore. My father was a plumber, my mother was a nurse. I've worked my whole life for everything I've ever had."

Ms. Biscotti lost her job as an office assistant six months ago. She received her last unemployment check on December 31st.

"I received on Tuesday 332 dollars and now I have to decide what to do. If I give it to my landlord, then I have no money at all."

Kathy Boscotti is one of 1.3 million Americans struggling with the same problem. Congress did not agree to continue payments to unemployed people after December 28th. Conservative lawmakers said an extension would make people less likely to work.

Rand Paul is a Republican senator from the state of Kentucky. He was among those opposed to an extension. He spoke about the issue on an American television program.

“If you extend it beyond that, you do a disservice to these workers.”

But supporters of the unemployed say that is not true. Christine Owens is executive director of the National Employment Law Project. She says most of the four million Americans receiving unemployment payments want to work.

“These are not folks who are just sort of sitting around on their couch watching TV and eating Christmas candy. These are people who have made a full time job out of trying to find another job.”

For Kathy Biscotti, that means applying for 10 to 20 jobs a week.

“I applied for a job yesterday. There were 865 applications went in for that one job.”

Ms. Biscotti fears she will become homeless and unable to buy food or pay for transportation without unemployment payments. Many Americans make promises, or resolutions, at the beginning of the new year. Her New Year’s resolution is to find work.

“I hope that things turn around in 2014 and I find a job. But I’m pretty much hopeless, in despair, discouraged, ashamed.”

Lawmakers have extended unemployment payments legislation 11 times. President Obama says Congress must do so again.

“I think we’re a better country than that. We don’t abandon each other when times are tough.”

This week, the United States Senate has been debating such a proposal. But experts say it could be difficult to pass.

Support for extended unemployment benefits has weakened as the economy has improved. But even with recent employment gains, the number of Americans without jobs for more than 27 months is the highest it has ever been. These people represent about 40 percent of the total unemployed in America.

You are listening to As It Is on the Voice of America.

Last week, people around the world celebrated the New Year with new hopes and dreams for 2014. One state celebrated with a hope that became law: Colorado began legal sales of recreational marijuana.

Here's Christopher Cruise with our report.

People gathered at a marijuana industry party in Denver to celebrate the New Year last week. The group was also celebrating the legalization of recreational marijuana sales. In other words, people in Colorado may now purchase the drug to use for fun. And sales took place at the party.

"It's eight a.m."

The first buyer was Sean Azzarti.

“Sean, your total is 59 dollars and 74 cents. Thank you very, very much.”

Mr. Azzarti is an Iraq war veteran. He suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. He bought marijuana to help control the effects of the disorder.

“How does it feel to finally do it?”

“I get to use recreational cannabis to help alleviate my PTSD. It’s a stepping stone for other states to help other veterans as well.”

A similar measure in the northwestern state of Washington is set to take effect later in 2014.

Last month, Uruguay became the first country to legalize the production and sale of marijuana.

Cynthia Johnston was another celebrant and buyer at the party in Denver.

“We have won. And I am so proud of Colorado for being first in the country, first in the world. Prohibition is over.”

Another man said all he needed to buy marijuana -- sometimes called “pot” or “weed” -- was money and a personal identification card. Other supporters of the sale of recreational marijuana are excited about the same opportunity.

“I got some legal weed.”

I’m Christopher Cruise.

And that’s it for As It Is today.

I’m Caty Weaver.



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