57 New Driver License Examiners to Help Improve Service at DMV Offices

The N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles has welcomed 57 new driver license examiners to their ranks as part of a biannual graduation ceremony that took place at the DMV headquarters. These 57 employees, following a five-week training program, will be deployed throughout the state to increase service levels at driver license offices. This class is in addition to 95 employees that graduated in 2022. An additional 49 examiners have been hired or are in the hiring process and will soon undergo training.

DMV Commissioner Wayne Goodwin remains focused on ways to increase the service levels at DMV offices across the state by shortening lines and wait times. The primary strategy to accomplish those goals is to add more driver license examiners. Like many industries across the country, DMV has faced a staffing shortage that has affected service levels.

"Since last June, we have added over 150 driver license examiners to offices across our great state," said Goodwin, "but that's not enough. We still have more work to do to attract, hire, train and keep our employees in this challenging labor market."

Last year, in an effort to attract new employees, the division increased the starting salary for driver license examiners while existing employees received a pay increase. DMV has also implemented additional hiring and retention bonuses.

All currently posted DMV jobs can be found here. New positions may be added daily and the application periods typically last for up to a week. In some cases, multiple people can be hired from a single posting.

"As we fill more examiner position vacancies, that helps DMV meet head-on my dual goals of shorter lines and shorter wait times," said Goodwin.

Tips to improve your DMV Experience The Division offers the following tips for an improved customer experience:

- Renew early – Don't wait until the last minute to renew your driver license or ID card. DMV sends a reminder card to the address on file six months before the expiration date. Customers can renew at any time during this six-month window.
- Renew online – In most cases, unless they renewed online last time, customers can renew their credential online at *ncdot.gov/dmv/license-id*.
- Office visit option 1 - Make an appointment – Customers with appointments are serviced at each full-time driver license office weekdays between opening and 12 p.m. Appointments can be scheduled up to 90 days in advance at *skiptheline.ncdot.gov*. Don't wait until the last minute. It is not uncommon for the earliest available appointment to be several weeks out.
- Office visit option 2 - Walk-in availability – Each full-time driver license office offers service for walk-in customers only weekdays from 12-5 p.m. Part-time and express offices only service walk-in customers.
- Saturday service hours – Beginning June 3, 16 driver license offices will offer services to walk-in customers only from 8 a.m.-12 p.m. through Aug. 26.
- Be prepared – Check the DMV website to make sure you bring the required documentation for your desired service. One frequently forgotten item is a printed document proving liability insurance.
- REAL ID – Customers have more time to get their REAL ID as the federal implementation date requiring a REAL ID to fly commercially or to visit federal, military, and nuclear facilities has been moved back to May 7, 2025.

You Decide: Is the Economy Good, Bad or Uncertain?

By Mike Walden: Clint Eastwood has long been one of my favorite actors, going all the way back to his TV series "Rawhide" in the 1950s and '60s. A movie that propelled him to stardom was "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly." With a slight change to "The Good, the Bad and the Uncertain" that title is a great description of today's economy. This is because there are some good aspects to the current economy, along with some bad parts, topped off with some uncertain features. In today's column, I'll try to provide some of each component but leave it up to you to decide which dominates.

There are plenty of "good" parts in today's economy. The broadest measure of the economy – Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – continues to increase. This means the aggregate size of the economy is expanding and generating more production and income. The rule of thumb definition for a recession is two consecutive quarterly declines in GDP, so by this definition, we've not been in a recession.

The labor market continues to gain. Although job growth is not as strong as immediately after the pandemic, jobs are being added at a healthy pace. The unemployment rate is now 3.4%, the lowest since 1953 (when I was 2 years old). A broader measure of the jobless rate, which also includes people who have stopped looking for work, has been trending downward. The job gains have led to a reduction in the labor shortage that appeared during and after the pandemic. There is now only one-half job opening per every unemployed person. This is down from almost five openings per jobless person at the height of the pandemic and down from over one opening per unemployed person two years ago.

The improvement in the labor shortage has been a tremendous help to those economic sectors that have had trouble finding labor in the aftermath of the pandemic. In recent months, we've seen big gains in employment in restaurants, manufacturing, government and health care, bringing some of these sectors back to pre-pandemic job levels.

But perhaps the biggest positive trend has been the moderation in price increases – aka, inflation. Don't get me wrong, average prices are still rising, but they are rising at a slower pace. For example, last summer, the year-over-year inflation rate reached 9.1%. The latest inflation reading, measuring the change in average prices from April 2022 to April 2023, shows the rate now at 4.9%. The moderation in the inflation rate means more workers are seeing their pay raises keeping pace with rising prices.

Now onto the "bad" part of the economy, and let me start with inflation. Although price increases are slowing, this doesn't mean prices are falling. Some are dropping, but most aren't. Don't expect most prices to return to their pre-pandemic levels of 2019. This means many people will continue to experience living standards lower than what they were four years ago.

While the overall economy continues to expand, there are some parts of the economy that are retreating. Construction and manufacturing have shown signs of significant slowing. The same is true for existing home sales. What these sectors have in common is the importance of interest rates. As interest rates on loans have risen, financing big projects and purchases has become more expensive.

Data show consumers are also experiencing some added stress. Retail sales have fallen in four of the last five months. Average household income – adjusted for inflation – is lower than it was prior to the pandemic. After pausing during the pandemic, the amount of consumer debt has recently accelerated. The savings that households accumulated during the pandemic have rapidly been diminishing.

Two big issues dominate the "uncertain" category – banking problems and a potential default on U.S. debt securities. The failure of three major banks this year shocked the economy and created worries this is only the start of a larger problem. My reading of the situation is that no widespread banking failure is imminent. Still, whenever any bank fails, it raises worries about the safety of our savings.

We've seen the drama over raising the debt limit many times before. Fortunately, compromises between competing views and policies have always occurred – although some have literally come at the last minute. This is still my expectation. But if I'm wrong and a debt limit plan isn't reached that prevents defaulting on U.S. debt payments, then we're in new territory. At the least, I would expect interest rates to jump.

So, now that I've given you my Clint Eastwood version of the economy, what should you expect? I think there are three options. The first is the best – a slowdown in economic growth but no stoppage in growth that results in a typical recession. Jobs are not lost. The slowdown causes more inflation moderation, and the Federal Reserve begins to reduce interest rates in the first half of 2024. This is the so-called "soft-landing" outcome.

The second option is the opposite of the first. The economy eventually slips into a standard recession by the end of 2023 or the beginning of 2024. Businesses pull back, and unemployment rises. The only good news is the recession is relatively short and shallow, with the jobless rate rising from 3.4% to a range between 5% to 5.5%. By the summer of 2024, growth resumes and the inflation rate is much lower.

The third option is a hybrid. Modest job growth continues, but the economy suffers on the "capital" side, meaning losses to investors in everything from buildings and equipment to stocks. This scenario could actually cause a bigger overall financial plunge than with the second option, but a mid-2024 recovery would still occur.

Hopefully, my economic version of "The Good, the Bad and the Uncertain" will have mostly a pleasing finale. Are we witnessing a script that turns out that way? You decide.

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Look Before You Lock Your Car

Prevent child and pet hot car deaths

On average, 38 children under the age of 15 die each year from heatstroke after being left in a vehicle. Here are some steps to prevent heatstroke in hot cars:

1) Never leave your child alone in the car, not even during a quick trip to the store.
2) Keep car doors and trunks locked and keep key fobs out of reach, so kids can't climb into cars on their own.
3) Create reminders. Place your phone, briefcase, or purse in the backseat when traveling with a child.
4) Take action. If you see a child alone in a car, call 911.

For more information, visit *safekids.org*.