

### The October Review

Kenneth V. Dalton and his co-authors focus most of our attention on the planned introduction of geometric mean formulae in calculating price changes among items that make up about 61 percent of the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This improvement is expected to reduce the annual rate of increase in the CPI by about 0.2 percentage point per year.

The context they set for this initiative is almost more interesting. Over the past few years, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has rapidly adopted a series of improvements in everything from sampling procedures to methods for measuring hospital prices. In addition, the report hints at further advances in quality adjustment, improvement in the treatment of utility rebates and other technical pricing issues, and plans to enhance the Consumer Expenditure Survey that is the source of the market basket weights for the CPI.

In an economy that increasingly generates service-sector employment and professional/managerial jobs—industries and occupations that are traditionally thought of as fixed-salary—one could ask how putting in longer hours affects hourly rates of earnings. Daniel Hecker finds that the key to understanding this is the occupation: for some occupations, such as managerial, sales, production, and mechanical, workers with longer workweeks earned higher hourly rates. For others—including computer specialists, engineers, and teachers—the opposite held true.

Two research summaries and two book reviews round out the issue. Keith G. Keel analyzes two key trends in auto retailing: the growth of leasing as a finance tool, and the emergence of the used auto superstore, itself often is stocked with the cars returned at the end of their leases. Joel Cutcher Gershenfeld and his coauthors present the results of a Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service survey of the is-

sues confronting collective bargaining today.

### Consumers spent more in 1996

Average annual expenditures per consumer unit rose 4.8 percent in 1996, the largest increase since 1989. Expenditures had risen 1.7 percent in 1995 and 3.4 percent in 1994. The 4.8-percent increase in expenditures from 1995 to 1996 was larger than the 3.0-percent rise in the annual average Consumer Price Index over the same period.

The largest increases were in expenditures for entertainment (13.8 percent), transportation (6.1 percent) and for food (4.3 percent). The transportation increase was driven by a 6.7-percent rise in consumer expenditures for vehicle purchases (specifically used cars and trucks), while increased spending on food away from home (7.1 percent) fed the rise in food expenditures. (For more information, see news release USDL 98-415, *Consumer Expenditures in 1996*.)

### Job tenure edged down in 1998

The median job tenure of wage and salary workers edged down to 3.6 years with the current employer in 1998 from 3.8 years in 1996. Among men, declines in tenure were widespread across most age groups. Among women, overall tenure changed little from 1996 to 1998.

Over a longer period, 1983 to 1998, job tenure of men had declined a total of 0.3 year despite an upward shift in the age of the work force. All other things being equal, this age shift should have been associated with an increase in tenure. However, median tenure for male workers declined within every age group over the 15-year period and offset the age effect. (For more information, see news release USDL 98-387, *Employee Tenure in 1998*.)

### New media news

On October 5, the Bureau of Labor Statistics launched its first Internet-specific publication, *Monthly Labor Review: The Editor's Desk*. This daily publication features a concise story based on any one of many printed products of the Bureau of Labor Statistics—this *Review*, *Compensation & Working Conditions*, news releases, *Issues in Labor Statistics*, and other BLS reports and bulletins. Each story focuses on one point, using 3-4 short paragraphs and one chart or table. Our goal is to extend the *Monthly Labor Review* brand to the Internet audience, provide a new outlet for the Bureau's products and services, and add value by filtering through the lengthy analyses to highlight the most relevant and interesting findings. In essence *Monthly Labor Review: The Editor's Desk* strives to move more of the mass of information that crosses our desk every day to you via the Internet than we ever could in a monthly print format. Introduce yourself to T.E.D. at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/tedhome.htm>.

The homepage for *Monthly Labor Review Online*, our very literal repurposing of the hard copy *Review*, has been redesigned. We now feature more titles on the first screen of the online version. In response to your feedback, we also revamped the online Current Labor Statistics department to include a downloadable .pdf file of the print edition's statistical tables department and links to hundreds of preformatted data tables available on the BLS Web site, as well as access to the Bureau's data access page. □

Communications regarding the *Monthly Labor Review* may be sent to the Editor-in-Chief at the addresses on the inside front cover, or faxed to (202) 606-5890.

News releases discussed above are available at <http://stats.bls.gov/newsrels.htm>.