

DAILY NEWS

Opinion

New York is creating jobs faster than the rest of the country, but not fast enough

New positions haven't brought down the unemployment rate and pay less than the old ones



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TIM BOYLE/GETTY IMAGES

Low-wage jobs, such as those in fast-food restaurants, have grown in the city even as middle- and upper-income positions have vanished.

New York City gained jobs at a faster rate than the nation as a whole since the end of the Great Recession and has more salary-paying positions today than it did back then. That's the good news.

The bad news is that job growth has not been nearly fast enough to drive down an astronomical unemployment rate.

The worse news is that the city has been shedding middle- and upper-income jobs while adding far more low-wage positions, such as work in restaurants and the home health care industry.

These are some of the key findings of the Fiscal Policy Institute's annual "State of Working New York" report, a document that raises alarms about the future of the city's labor force and economy.

The boom years that preceded the bust made it easy to overlook worrisome trends. Even in those good times, job growth was concentrated at the low end of the scale so that losses on Wall Street were offset by, say, gains in retail employment.

When the downturn hit, the phenomenon of the high end giving way to the low end kept up. Since 2008, the institute reports, the city lost 60,000 jobs that paid more than \$45,000 while adding 130,000 positions that paid less than \$45,000.

That computes to a gain of 70,000 jobs. The number means that more people are getting paychecks, so we'll grab it even while knowing that the wage scales are below levels necessary to maintain a vital middle class.

The movement toward lower-paying work helps explain the City Council's focus on measures to establish so-called living or prevailing wages and to require benefits like paid sick leave.

What the Council fails to understand — and should now come to see — is that it lacks the legislative power to reverse sweeping economic forces by fiat. The members should instead appreciate the city's job gains while encouraging a stronger middle class through projects like the expansion of New York University and the opening of the Cornell-Technion high-tech graduate school.

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