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NEW LEADING ECONOMIC INDICATORS IN U.S. CLIMB

 In October, the index of U.S. leading indicators climbed more than forecast, signaling the world's largest economy will keep growing in early 2012. A New York-based research group said today that the Conference Board's gauge of the outlook for the next three to six months rose 0.9 percent, the biggest jump since February, after a 0.1 percent September increase. The median forecast of the 56 economists that were surveyed by Bloomberg News projected the gauge would advance 0.6 percent. Gains in consumer spending, homebuilding and manufacturing, combined with fewer job losses, all point to an economy that is weathering the turbulence in financial markets caused by the debt crisis in Europe. But nonetheless, a 9 percent jobless rate and political gridlock over deficit-cutting have hit confidence, which might be a big hurdle to a further pickup in the pace of growth. ''The economy looks to be getting better despite the continued drumbeat of negativity in financial markets,'' said Joseph LaVorgna, who is the chief U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank Securities Inc. in New York, who also correctly forecasted the gain. ''That speaks to U.S. resiliency. If we can put some of these fiscal issues behind us, even for a short period of time, we might be able to come back.'' Stocks rose as yields on Italian and Spanish bonds fell after the European Central Bank bought the securities to ease the fallout from the debt crisis. At 10:10 a.m. in New York, the Standard & Poor's 500 Index increased 0.1 percent to 1,217.25. Late yesterday evening the Treasury securities dropped, pushing the yield on the benchmark 10-year note up to 1.99 percent from 1.96 percent. The estimate in the Bloomberg survey ranged from no change at all to an increase of 1 percent. The index ''is pointing to continued growth this winter, possibly even gaining a little momentum by spring,'' said Ken Goldstein, who is an economist at the Conference Board, in a statement. ''The lack of confidence has been the biggest obstacle in generating forward momentum.'' In October, nine of the ten components of the leading index contributed to the increase, led a jump in building permits. the spread between short- and long-term interest rates, a longer factory work week and a drop in claims for jobless benefits. A surge in stock prices contributed to the increase in the gauge from last month, reversing September's plunge. In October, the Standard & Poor's 500 Index rose 11 percent in October, its best month since December 1991. The measure dropped 17 percent over the last five months as the concern over a default in Europe intensified. An improvement in household sentiment has already given the leading index a boost earlier this month. In November, the University index of consumer expectations for six months from now climbed to 56.2 in November, a five-month high, from 51.8 in October. Nonetheless, the measure remains below the 80.5 average of the previous expansions that ended in December 2007.