

OBAMA PLAN TO BOOST YOUTH JOBS WILL BE A BATTLE



Last Thursday, the White House began its campaign to get employers to increase their hiring of young people in the private sector. The initiative is called the 'Summer Jobs +' and it urges corporations, nonprofits, and the government to hire at least 250,000 teens come summer. The Obama Administration claims it has received confirmations from AT&T, Bank of America, and CVS/Caremark. These companies have pledged to hire close to 180,000 youth workers during the summer months. Also included in that hiring number is jobs offered by the Department of Interior, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services. Despite the commitments, those involved with youth employment say that the jobs are going to be tough to come by in the summer. There are budget problems that continue to plague states and cities. "This summer is going to be a real challenge for young people who want a decent job or any job," says Aaron Smith, the executive director of Young Invincibles. Young Invincibles is a nonprofit organization that represents the views of those between the ages of 18-34. "I am glad we have some employers stepping up, but we will have millions of teens applying for these jobs and not enough positions." The amount of teens that remain without jobs still remains high even though the national unemployment rate has dropped to 8.6 percent. Teenage unemployment hit 21.4 percent in November while it was at 20.8 percent back in November of 2010. The unemployment rate for teenagers peaked at 24.9 percent in August of 2009. Andrew Sum, the director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, said that the demand for teen jobs hit 3 million last summer. If you count those in their early twenties looking for jobs, the number increases to 5.5 million. "Every little bit helps but the magnitude of the problem is far greater," Sum said. "Quite frankly, the private sector is more demanding." It is tough for teenagers to find work during the summer because they do not have experience or much of a work history to show to employers. In the past couple of years, it has gotten even harder for teens as those 55 and older have begun to re-enter the workforce. "Employment has shifted dramatically to people over 55 years of age in the major areas that teenagers used to work – food preparation, the service sector, and retail," Anne Thompson, a policy analyst from the National Employment Law Project in Washington, said. "Older people just can't afford to retire – they need to make ends meet." Michael Saltsman, a fellow with the Employment Policies Institute in Washington, said: "I heard a restaurant owner in San Francisco, where the minimum wage is over \$10 an hour, say there was no way he was going to hire a teenager at that rate. I know some states have talked about a youth training wage," he says. "The point is, you try to make it as easy as possible to employ someone."