



13 October 2016



SENT TO LSU AGCENTER/LOUISIANA FOREST PRODUCTS DEVELOPMENT CENTER - FOREST SECTOR / FORESTY PRODUCTS INTEREST GROUP

To all:

Another lackluster month for housing, both starts and resales. As you will note in the attached Powerpoint, I'm not too confident regarding the economy or job market. Incomes are starting to improve, but not by much. We have a dysfunctional government, and that is the main reason why the economy is stuck at 2%. And, the rest of the world is using central bank policies to jump start their economies - unfortunately, we're all headed in similar direction that Japan has gone over the past 20 years - low growth and minimal inflation. That means housing will not return to the "good old days" anytime soon. Low interest rates are not the problem --- see the Porter study (see below). Productivity drives GDP, but productivity has been trending lower now for the past 60 years (with exception of a few ups and downs). Solutions include fixing the tax code; immigration reform; more infrastructure investment; regulatory reform; create a sustainable federal budget; ...
Main problem, however, is political dysfunction. Until we address that issue, we can't make much progress on the suggested solutions.

In order for housing to "return to normal", we need to fix the economy, and that means fixing the political system. A real challenge, but we can start this November. We need politicians who aren't afraid to do their job and make the tough decisions-- akin to our 1st responders and military who put their lives on the line everyday. Do you think the 1st respondents on "9/11" asked themselves " should I enter the tower"; will I get a promotion if I save lives?; will I die?; what's in it for me? -- there was no hesitation because they believed in what they were doing. They had a job to do; they had to save as many lives as they could, period!!!!

I want to mention several reports that you may be interested in: compliments of Urs Buehlmann 1. Michael Porter, et.al.(see slide #3 in my housing report for the hyperlink) has a new report on competitiveness - problems and solutions.

Two reports on wood use in housing -

Wood Use in Housing - Jack Lutz, Forest Research Group, Vol 13, No. 1, Qtr 1, 2016.
here is the hyperlink - (<http://www.forestresearchgroup.com/Newsletters/Vol13No1.pdf>)

Wood Use in Housing - Hardwood Review, Sept 2016, Vol 31, issue 51. You may have to contact Hardwood Review for this (<http://www.hardwoodreview.com/Main.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f>) - an excellent summary of the Lutz article.

Regards,

Al Schuler
USFS (Retired)



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President, Forest Products Society; President-Elect, WoodEMA i.a.



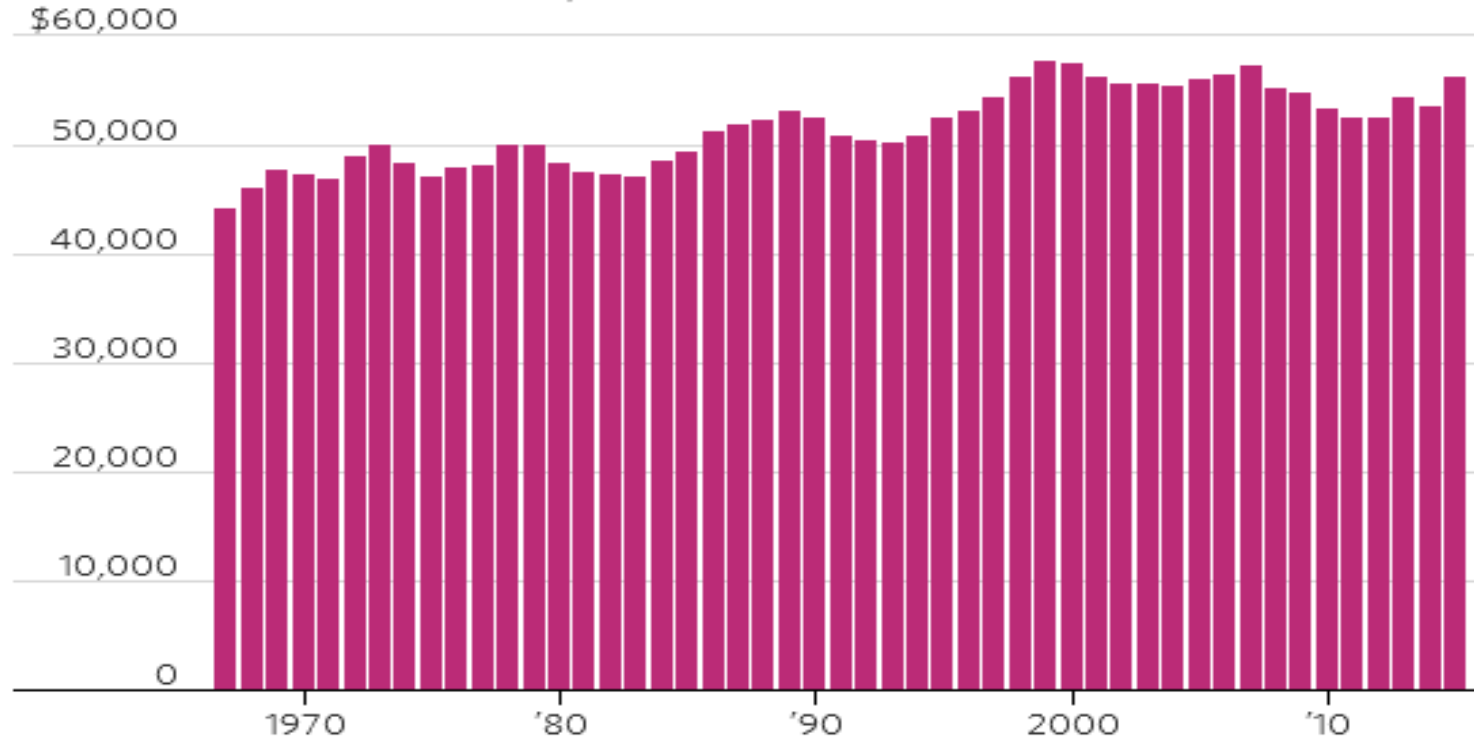
Housing comments – September 2016

- *August starts were down 5.8% to 1.14 (SAAR) - SF at 722,000 (SAAR) – down 7% - MF 37% of total –*
- Home ownership rate fell to 63.5% in QTR1 2016 – **lowest ownership rate in 50 years!!!!** Financing problems; changing preferences (to renting); and rising home prices - problem for 1st time buyers
- Resale market dropped 1% - 5,330,000 (annual rate) – low inventory (4.6 months) driving prices higher – major impediment to sales
- **Latest jobs report was disappointing +151,000 - unemployment remained at 4.9%** - – furthermore , 51% of all workers make less than \$30,000/year – can't buy a house on that!!!
(<https://www.ssa.gov/cgi-bin/netcomp.cgi?year=2014>)
- The Fed doesn't know what to do, so they do nothing. Looking for more confirmation for tightening or reasons to wait. In their defense, they are trying to do the job the Congress and President refuse to do. We have a dysfunctional political system at a time in this country when we need strong leadership and cooperation. We need politicians who aren't afraid to do their job and make the tough decisions– akin to our 1st responders and military who put their lives on the line everyday. Do you think the 1st responders on “9/11” asked themselves “ should I enter the tower”; will I get a promotion if I save lives?; will I die?; -- there was no hesitation because they believed in what they were doing. They had a job to do; they had to save as many lives as they could.

Finally, some good news on incomes – Census reported that U.S. Household Incomes Surged 5.2% in 2015, First Gain Since 2007, And largest % gain in recorded history!!! Also, the poverty rate fell to 13.8%. It appears that Steady job growth over past 6 years is - having an impact!!! This is a resilient economy for sure. We still have problems But, I'll take this as a sign things are getting better.

Incomes in the Long Run

Median household income, in constant 2015 dollars



Source: Census Bureau
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OK – let's get back to reality ---

Want to Fix the U.S. Economy? Start With the Broken Political System – new report from M. Porter, et. al.
(we can start this November)

Political dysfunction has become the biggest economic stumbling block for the U.S., according to a Harvard report.

Here is the hyperlink to the Porter study

(<http://www.hbs.edu/competitiveness/Documents/problems-unsolved-and-a-nation-divided.pdf>) .

Interesting report from experts on competitiveness. Slow reading, but lots of good analysis, charts, and Recommendations from some of America's leading Thinkers on competitiveness.

Here are suggestions from the Porter study on how to Fix America's economy – **however, to accomplish this, we need A functioning government which we don't have.**
We can begin to fix the problem this November – make the effort
To vote!!!!

FIGURE 1: THE EIGHT-POINT PLAN FOR WASHINGTON

1	Simplify the corporate tax code with lower statutory rates and no loopholes
2	Move to a territorial tax system like all other leading nations
3	Ease the immigration of highly skilled individuals
4	Aggressively address distortions and abuses in the international trading system
5	Improve logistics, communications, and energy infrastructure
6	Simplify and streamline regulation
7	Create a sustainable federal budget , including reform of entitlements
8	Responsibly develop America's unconventional energy advantage

Source: Michael Porter and Jan Rivkin. "An eight-point plan to restore American competitiveness." *The Economist: The World in 2013*. (Nov 2012).

MY Comments on the economy – it continues to sputter – propped up by low interest rates, compliments of the FED -
But, business investment remains weak as Washington gridlock
And uncertainty discourages investment needed to create jobs.
Also, businesses don't invest when they see excess capacity –
i.e., they don't invest into a weak economy that shows little
Sign of improving beyond 1% - 2% GDP growth.

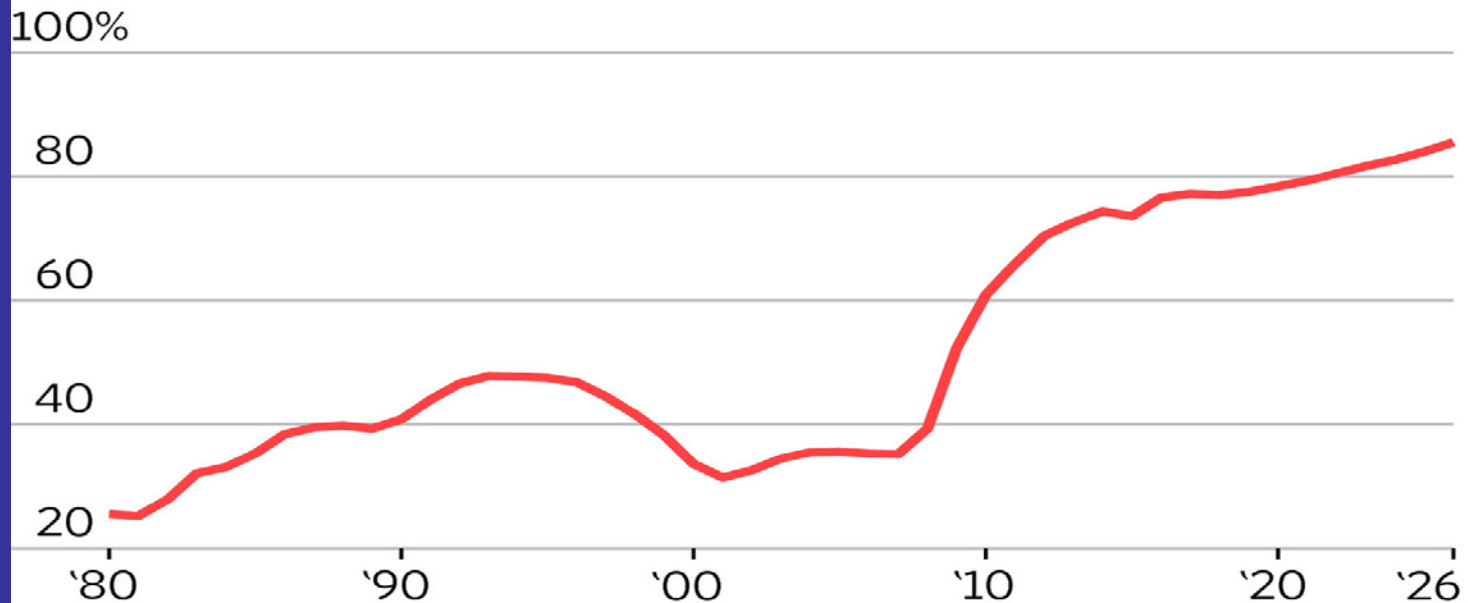
I believe we, Europe, and many other countries are following Japan into a prolonged period of weak growth, low inflation, and low interest rates. Central banks can't Fix our problems – when will we learn??

Debt - Innovation – Productivity

Huge problem facing this country is public debt – that’s the debt that has to be Repaid. Total debt today ~ \$20 trillion, of which \$14 trillion is “public debt”. The \$6 trillion (“borrowed”) by the Treasury from the Social Security, Medicare, And highway trust funds is gone/spent. Here is link to real time debt clock (<http://www.usdebtclock.org/>) scary picture!!!! PS. Public debt now equals 75% Of GDP – we’re getting very close point of no return – where principal plus Interest payments exceed our capacity to pay, and lenders refuse to lend – that’s when “the shit hits the fan” – the USA of Greece!!!

The Obama Debt Legacy

Federal debt held by the public as a share of the economy, 1980-2026 (2016-2026 estimated)

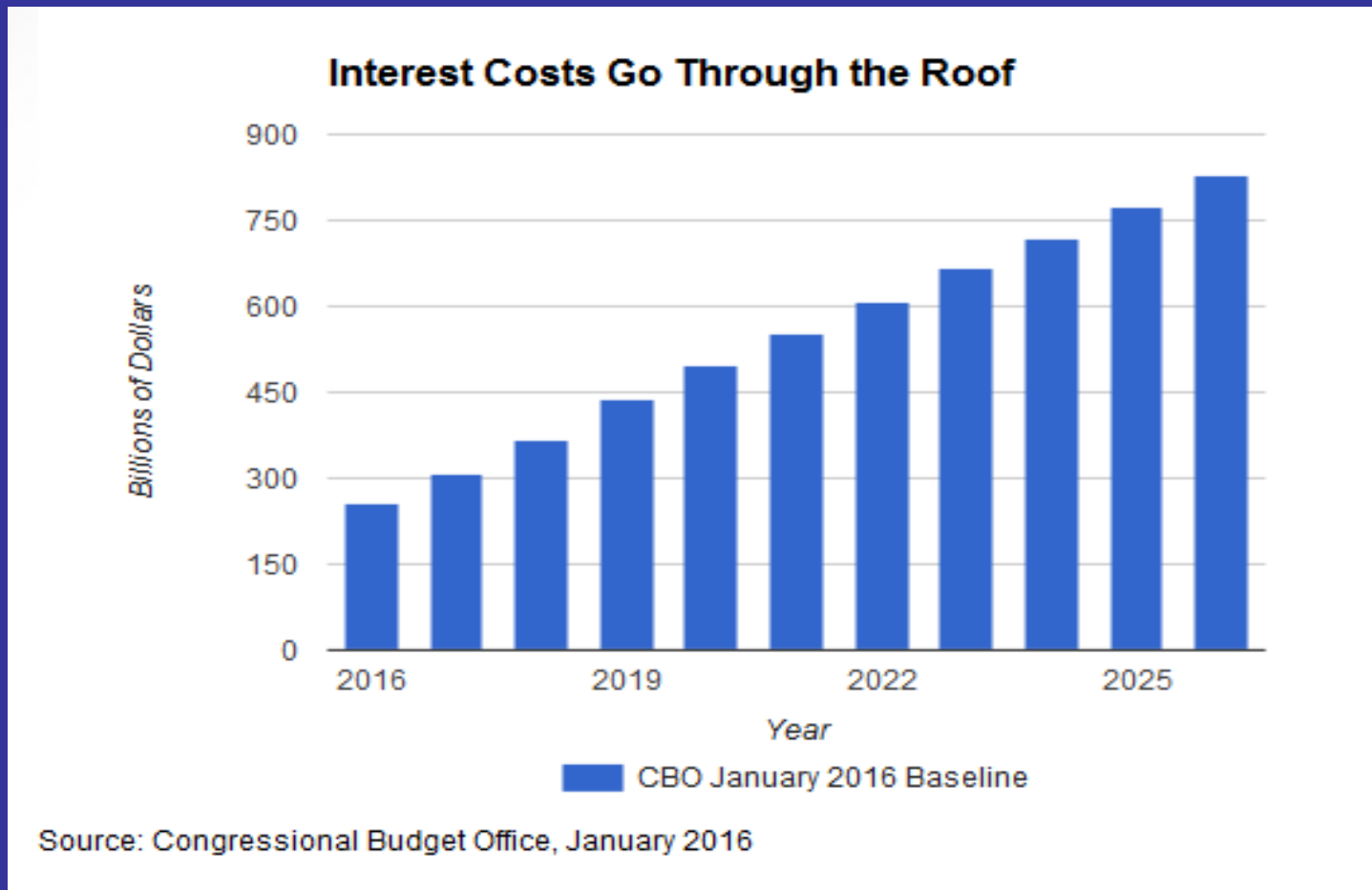


Source: Congressional Budget Office

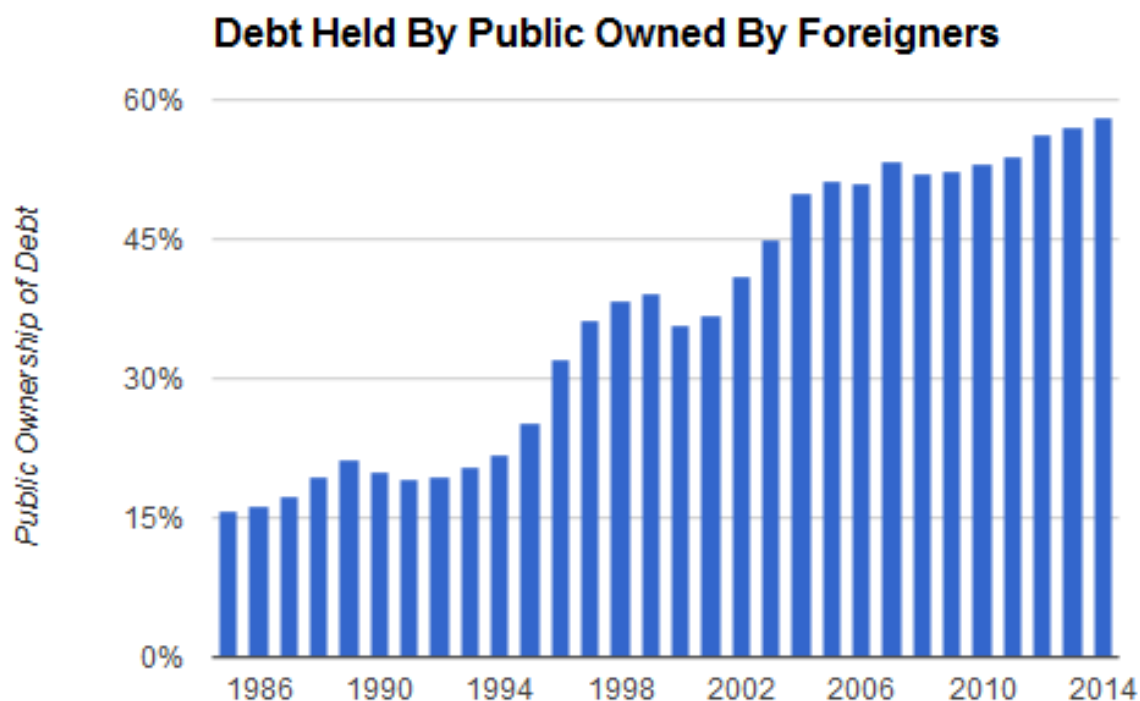
Main problem with \$20 trillion debt is that paying down that debt (including interest) will reduce government Spending on social programs , including Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid, housing allowances for the poor, food stamps,..... Furthermore, investments in technology, research/development, education, infrastructure, will suffer, hurting productivity even more. And, defense spending will suffer as well. These investments and social programs are critical to future growth, GDP, standard of living, and security of our nation. And, yes, a return to a healthy Housing market.

Not sure why we don't see this as a major threat to our future – Probably because we don't understand the magnitude of the Problem. Also, the politicians do a great job in “passing the Buck” – i.e., delaying the ‘day of reckoning, promising that we'll tax the Rich, the banks, etc. – i.e., someone else will Pay for the fixes!!!! Guess what – that won't work – they are not main problem – as a country, we consume too much, save too little, and don't invest enough in our future. We are the Problem, and we are the ones who must fix the problem. This November, we can begin the process by electing people Who understand the issues, and offer sensible solutions.

Problems with too much debt – servicing costs will squeeze social programs (Social Security, Medicare Medicaid, food stamps, ..), R&D, education spending, Infrastructure investments,



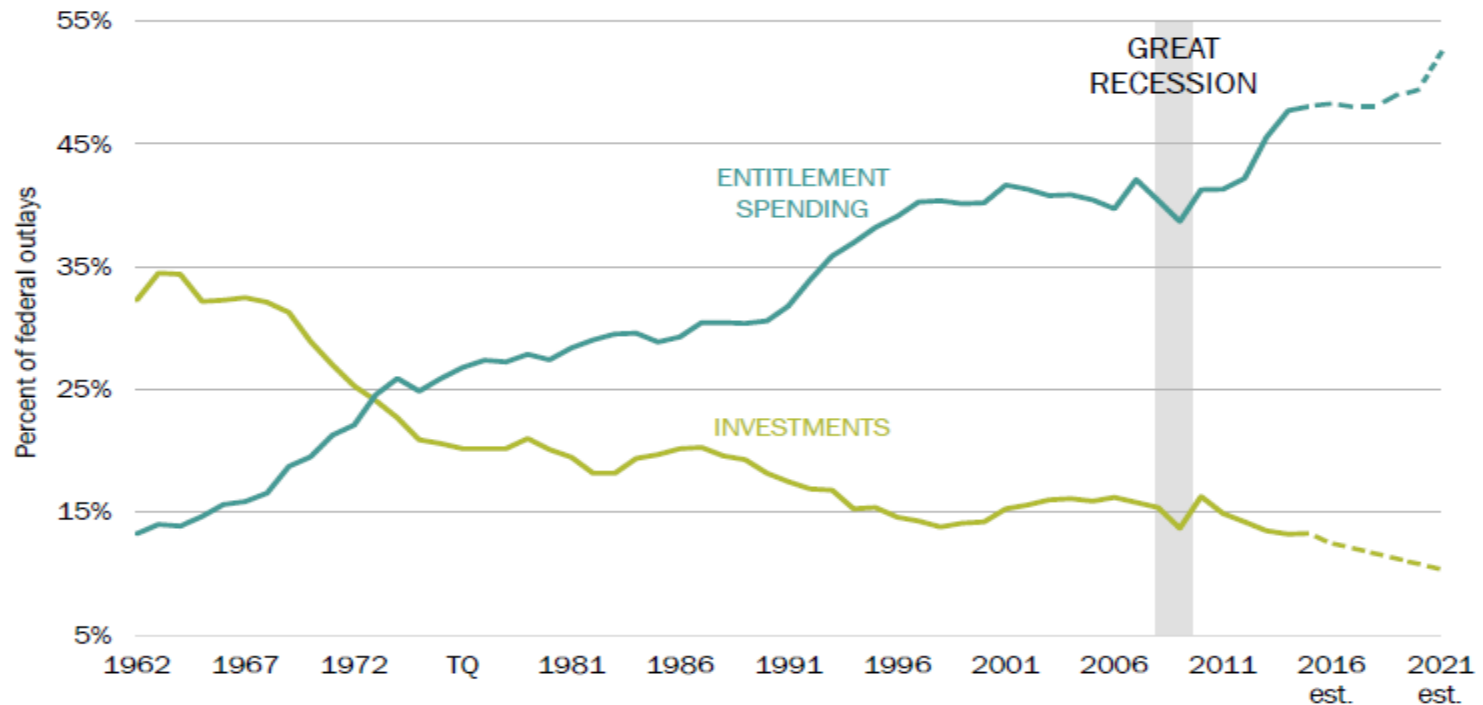
Big problem when foreigners question our ability to repay
Our debts – they will demand higher rates, etc., and eventually, refuse
To buy our debt. When the proverbial “shit hits the fan”.
Total debt = \$20 trillion, of which \$14 trillion is public and \$ 6
Trillion Is intergovernmental debt (i.e., what government owes itself).
Foreigners hold about \$8.5 trillion of our debt which is 60% of the public debt



Source: United States Treasury Department, Treasury Bulletin, Table OFS-2, December 2015.

Going into debt is OK if you're investing for the future - - but, we're not. For decades, we, as a nation, have been living a fantasy life. Entitlement spending is now approaching 50% of the federal budget. While investment spending (critical to maintain our competitiveness) - Has been declining for the past 60 years. (from Porter study)

FIGURE 9: SHIFTING COMPOSITION OF FEDERAL SPENDING



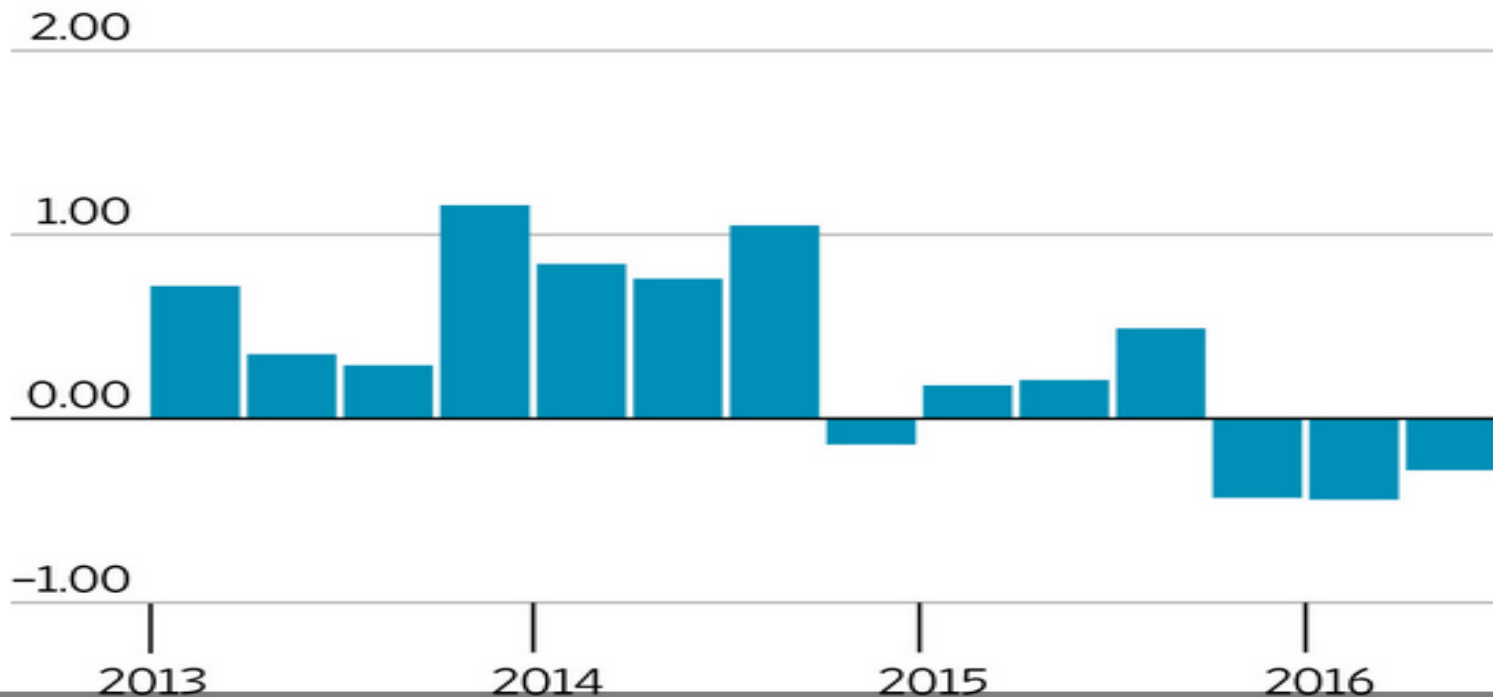
Note: Entitlement spending includes outlays for Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, and Affordable Care Act Subsidies. Investments includes outlays for infrastructure, R&D (both defense and non-defense), and education. 2016-2021 figures are Office of Management and Budget estimates. TQ refers to the Transition Quarter from July 1, 1976 to September 30, 1976, after which the federal government changed its fiscal year. Dotted line is a forecast based on previous Office of Management and Budget estimates. Shaded area indicates the recession of December 2007 to June 2009 as defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Source: Office of Management and Budget; author's calculations.

Business isn't investing either --- has been trending Lower for the past several years. That's why GDP growth remains weak. That means income growth will remain weak and housing will continue to underperform, and creation of good Paying jobs will remain an elusive goal.

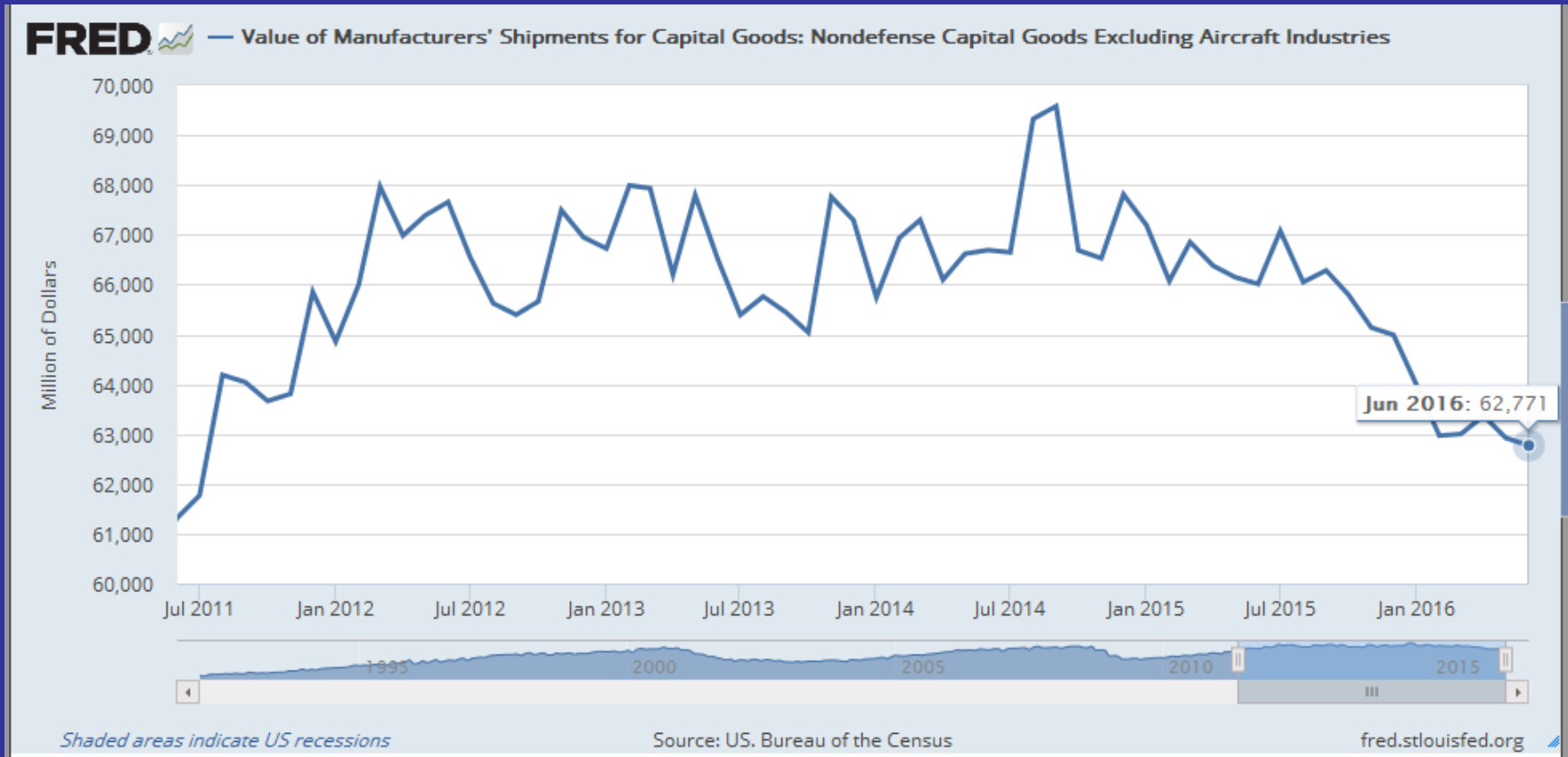
Business Isn't Investing

Contribution to quarterly GDP, in percentage change, from fixed nonresidential investment, 2013-July 2016

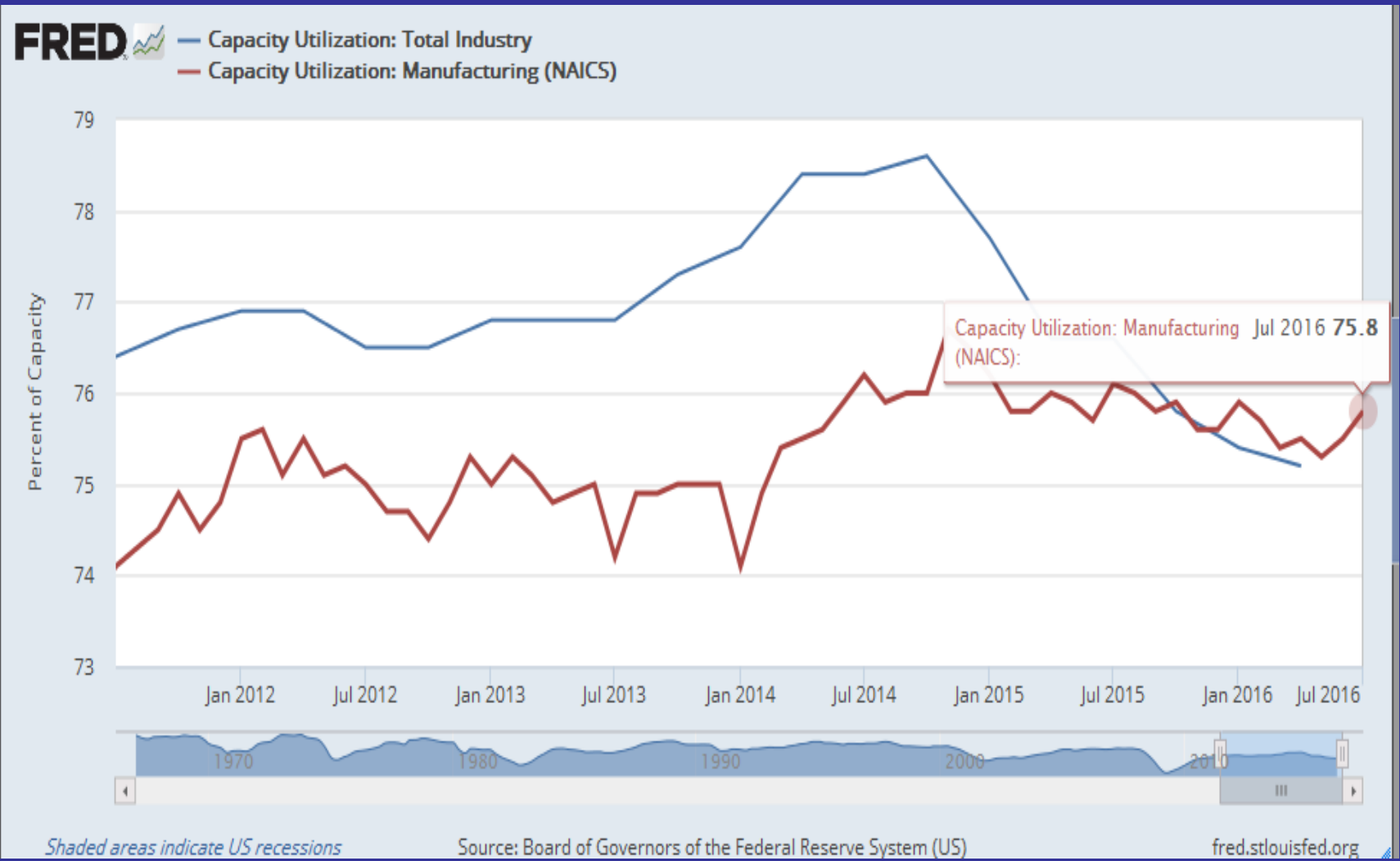


Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

Capital spending has been trending lower for past 4 years
Why? Companies not confident of future – uncertainty re:
Tax code, regulations; Washington grid lock!!!



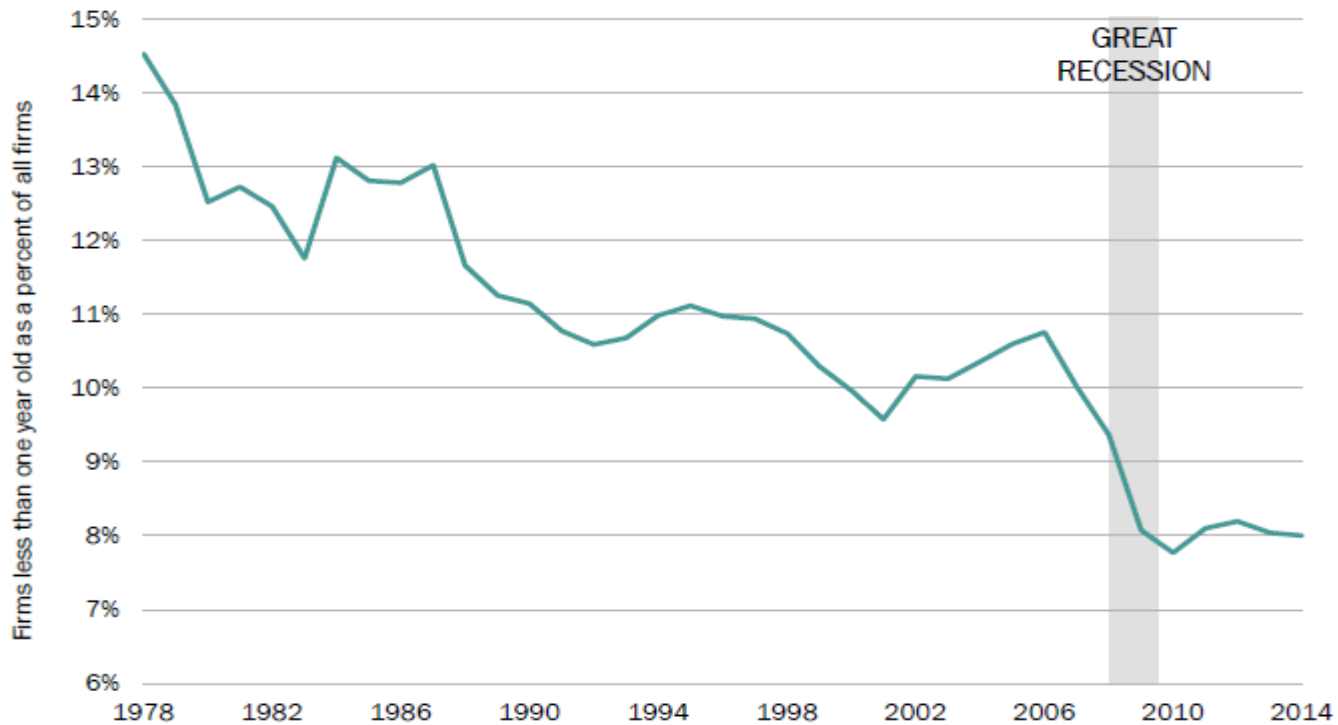
Business won't invest (and create jobs) when there is excess capacity – Capacity Utilization below 80% suggests “excess capacity” exists – we've Had 2 years of falling capacity utilization – my guess the culprit is the weak Economy!!!



Another structural problem – new business formations are down
Significantly – (from the Porter study) – why job creation is slow

FIGURE 12: SLOWDOWN IN NEW BUSINESS FORMATION

Start-ups as a portion of all U.S. firms, 1978–2014



Note: Shaded area indicates the recession of December 2007 to June 2009 as defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Business Dynamics Statistics. Chart adapted from Ian Hathaway and Robert E. Litan, "Declining Business Dynamism in the United States: A Look at States and Metros," Economic Studies at Brookings, May 2014.

What happens when innovation is missing!!!

Dismal productivity growth - - worst Performance for US economy since the 1980's when we experienced Back to back recessions.

(PS - I understand that productivity measurement is a problem as new products/services quality is difficult To measure so maybe we are underestimating real productivity?)

Plunging Productivity

Gains in U.S. worker productivity have slowed dramatically since the early 2000s, a trend that could restrain the economy's future growth.

Labor productivity (output per hour)

Percentage change from previous quarter at annual rate, 5-year moving average



Note: Figures are seasonally adjusted
Source: Labor Department

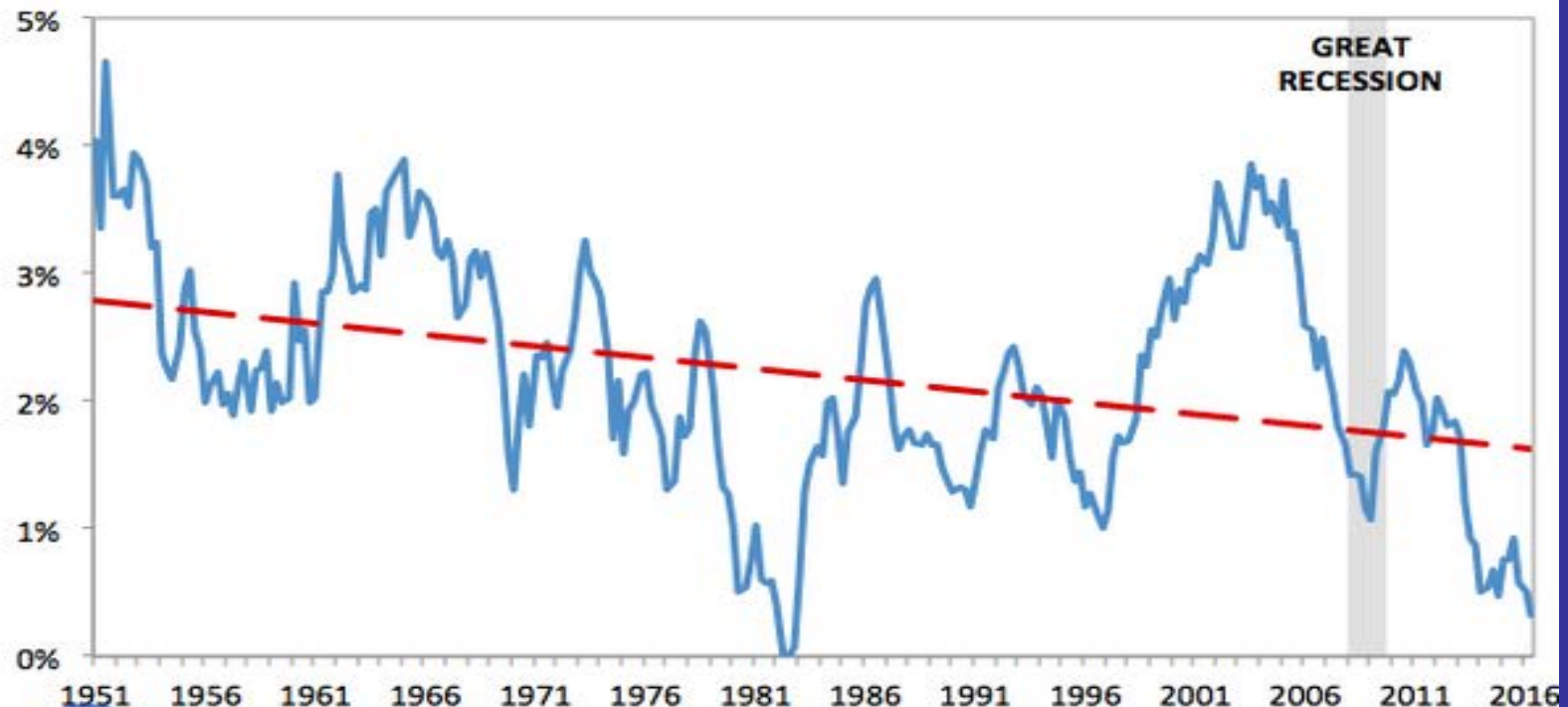
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Source: WSJ (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-productivity-dropped-at-0-5-pace-in-the-second-quarter-1470746092>)

Waning productivity is major cause of our economic problems. Weakening trend over past 60 years needs to change if wages/standard of living are to improve. According to recent study by M. Porter, et.al., competitiveness is key. Solution is infrastructure reform, tax reform, and immigration reform. Political paralysis Keeps us from implementing the right solutions according to Porter.

FIGURE 2: U.S. PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH

U.S. NON-FARM BUSINESS LABOR PRODUCTIVITY, 4-YEAR ROLLING AVERAGE OF ANNUALIZED QUARTERLY GROWTH, 1951-Q2 2016



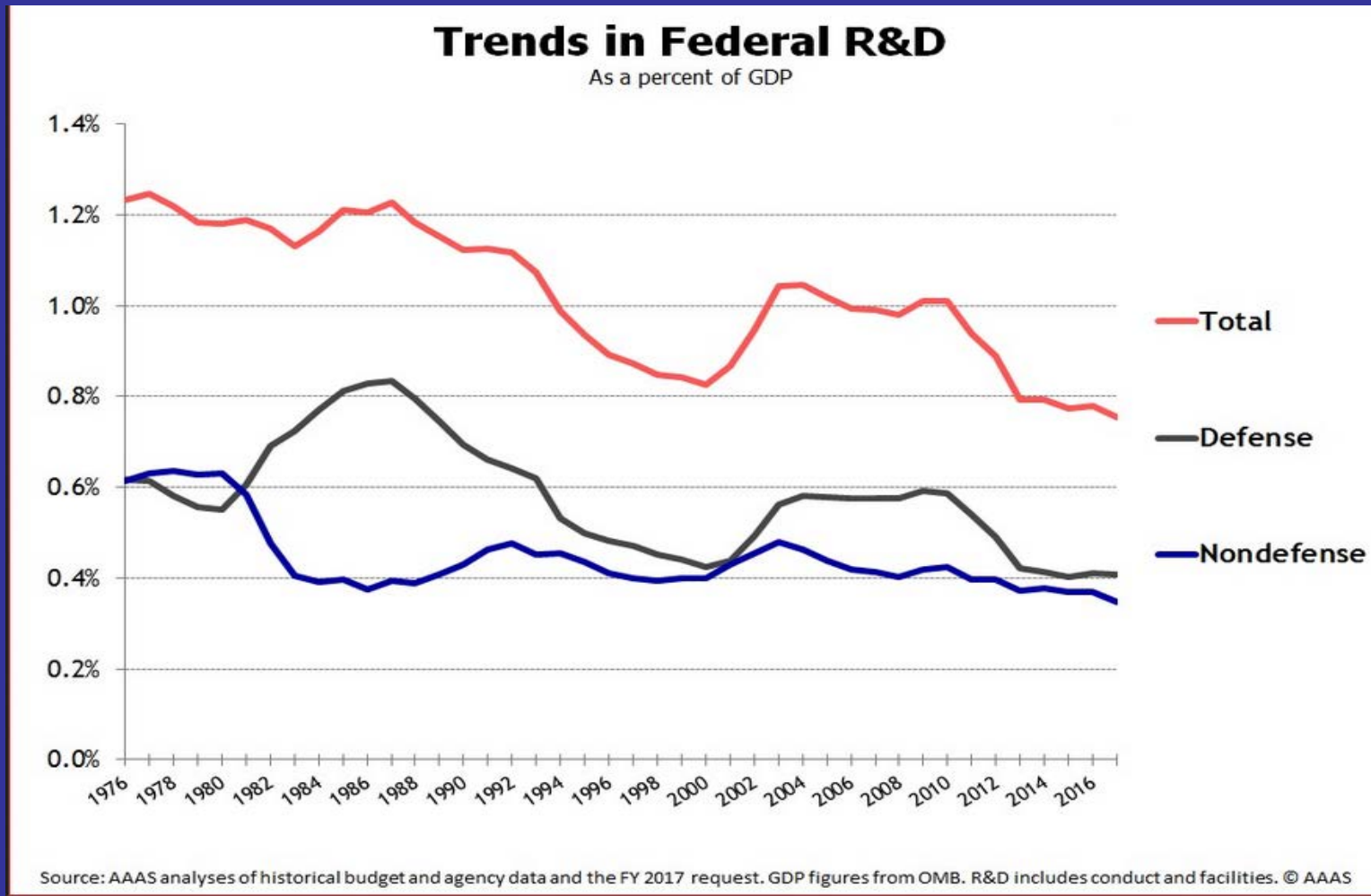
Note: Shaded area indicates the recession of December 2007 to June 2009 as defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research.
Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics; author's calculations.

Source: Harvard Business School US Competitiveness Project

(<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/us-competitiveness-project-harvard-business-school-hbs-michael-porter-030021739.html>)

Falling R&D - - Not a good trend -----

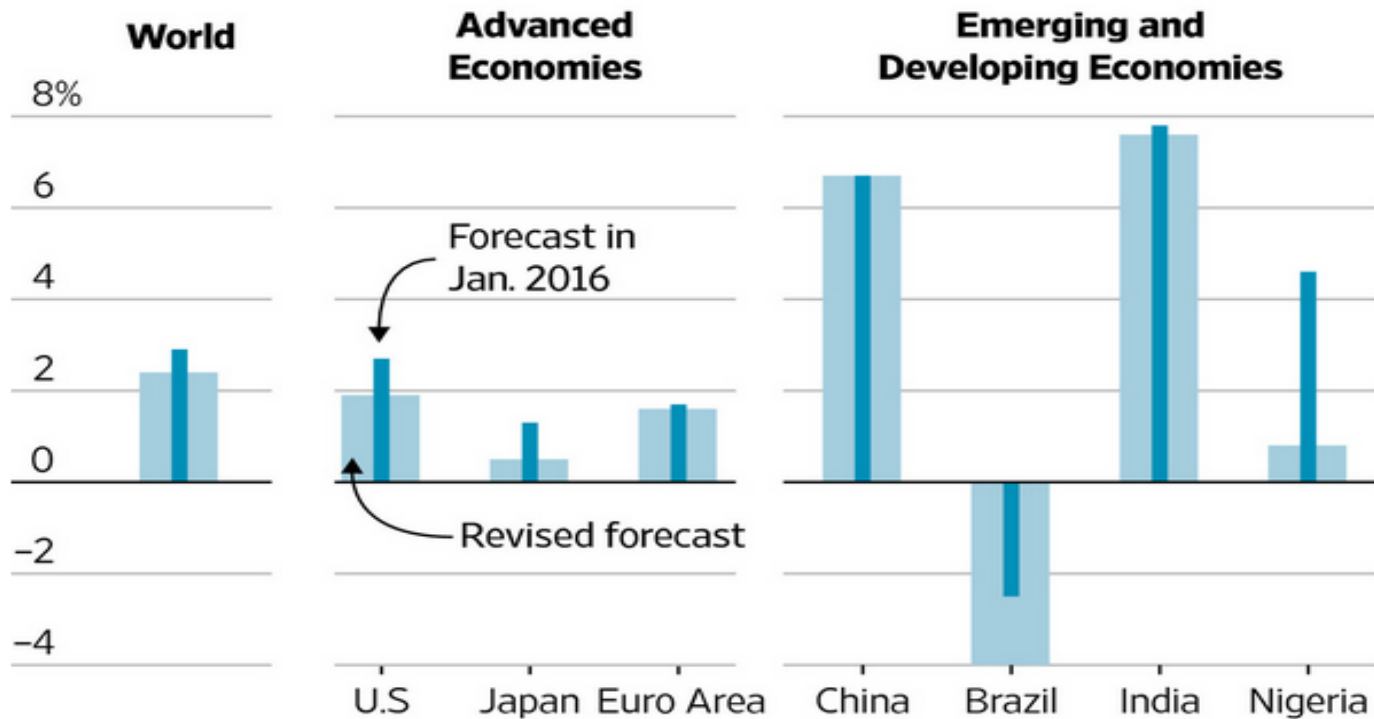
Currently, Federal R&D is .78% of GDP – non defense spending is .36%
Federal government Funds basic research – which is critical to development of new technology and innovation in science and engineering - critical to economic and job growth, and productivity



World Bank downgrades growth (again) in 2016 to 2.4% as problems in developed and developing world mount

Souring Outlook

The World Bank revised down its forecasts for the global economy, warning that the weaker outlook raised the risk of a sharp slowdown ahead.



Source: World Bank

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U.S. 2nd Qtr 2016 Economic growth a dismal 1.1% - since last September, the economy has averaged meager 1% growth!!!!

- (1) Slowing world economy (weaker China , European, and South American growth)
- (2) Stronger dollar will reduce exports and increase imports – negative impact on manufacturing jobs which is key to income growth in USA
- (3) Political stalemate/weak leadership, terrorism, currency wars, growing national debt, ...
- (4) Weak income growth and continuing high “real unemployment”

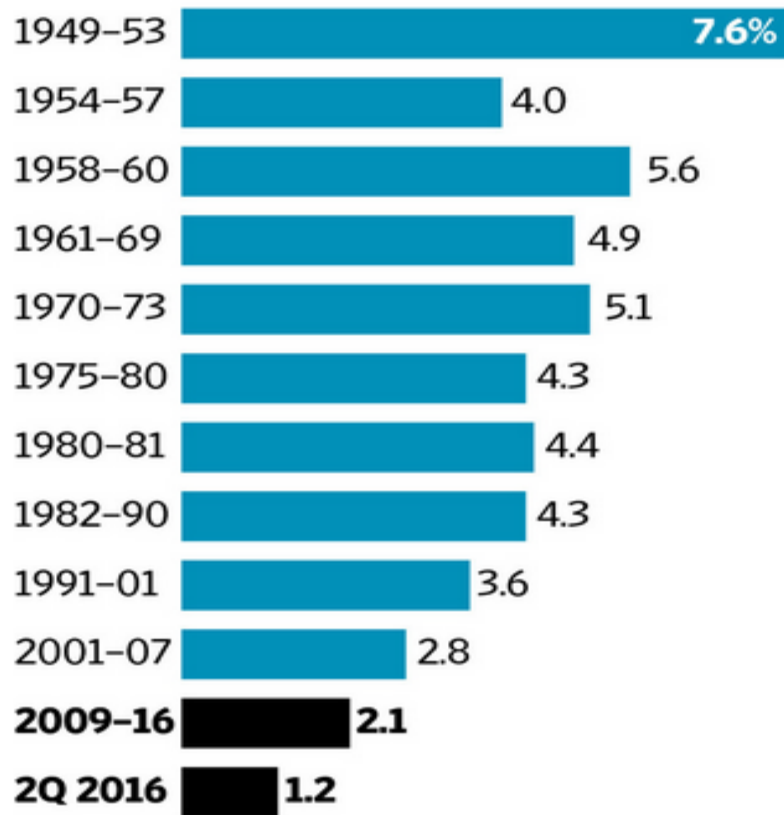


U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Weakest recovery since WWII

Underwhelming Growth

Average GDP growth during each expansion, at an annualized rate



Note: Figures are adjusted for inflation and seasonality

Source: Commerce Department

Notable contributions to Q2 growth

CONSUMER SPENDING
+2.83 pct. pts.

NET TRADE
+0.23 pct. pts.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING
-0.16 pct. pts.

RESIDENTIAL INVESTMENT
-0.24 pct. pts.

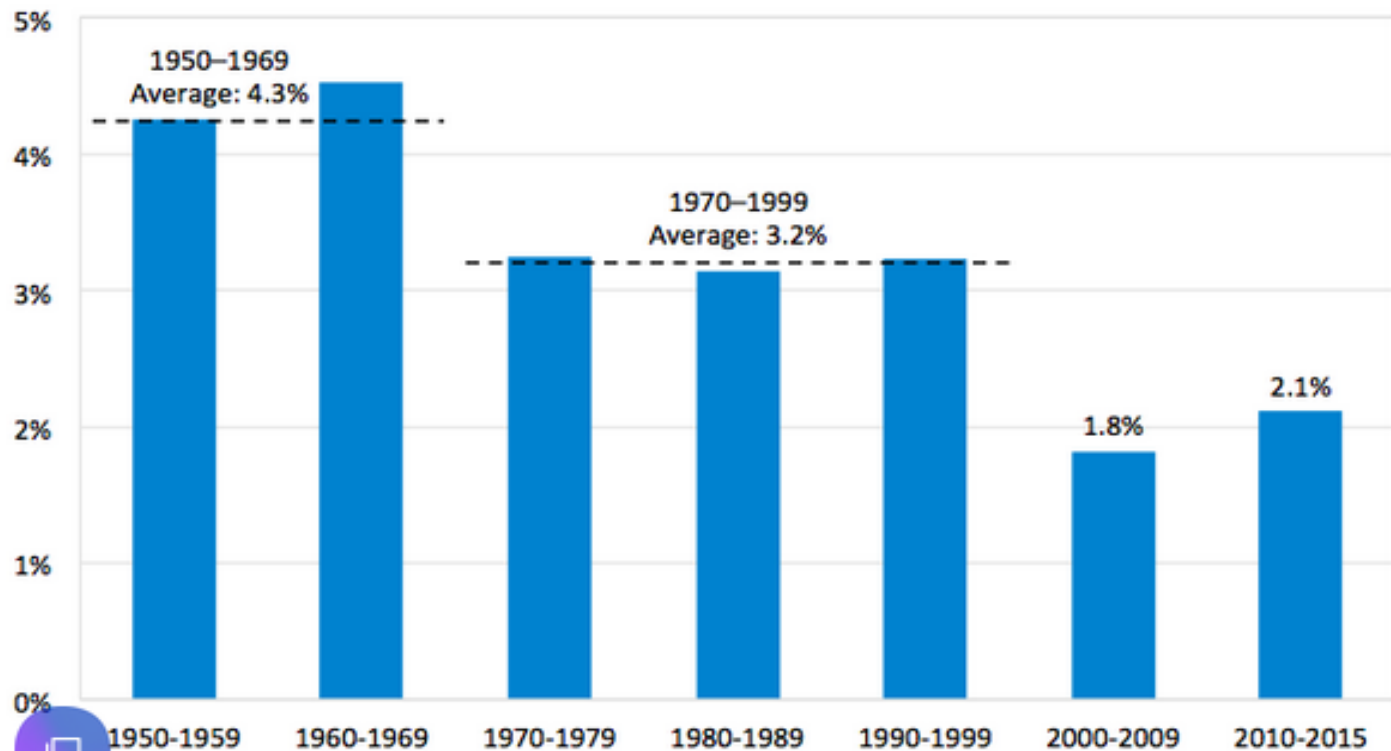
BUSINESS INVESTMENT
-0.28 pct. pts.

CHG. IN PRIVATE INVENTORIES
-1.16 pct. pts.

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Weak growth means weak incomes
And weak housing numbers in the future unless we address
Our competitiveness issues.

FIGURE 1: SLOWDOWN IN ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE BY DECADE
COMPOUND ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF U.S. REAL GDP BY DECADE, 1950-2015



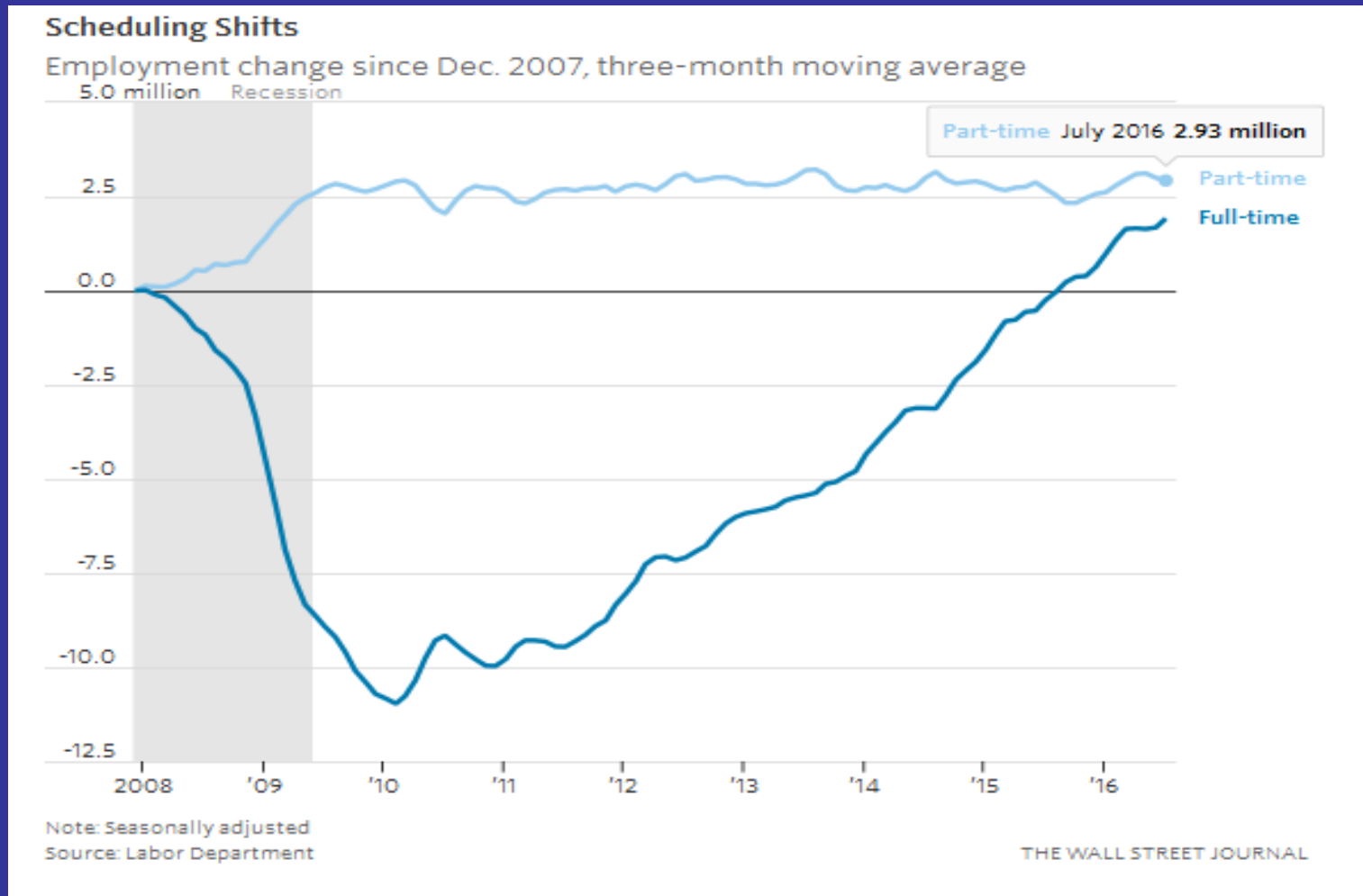
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis; author's calculations.

Source: Harvard Business School US Competitiveness Project

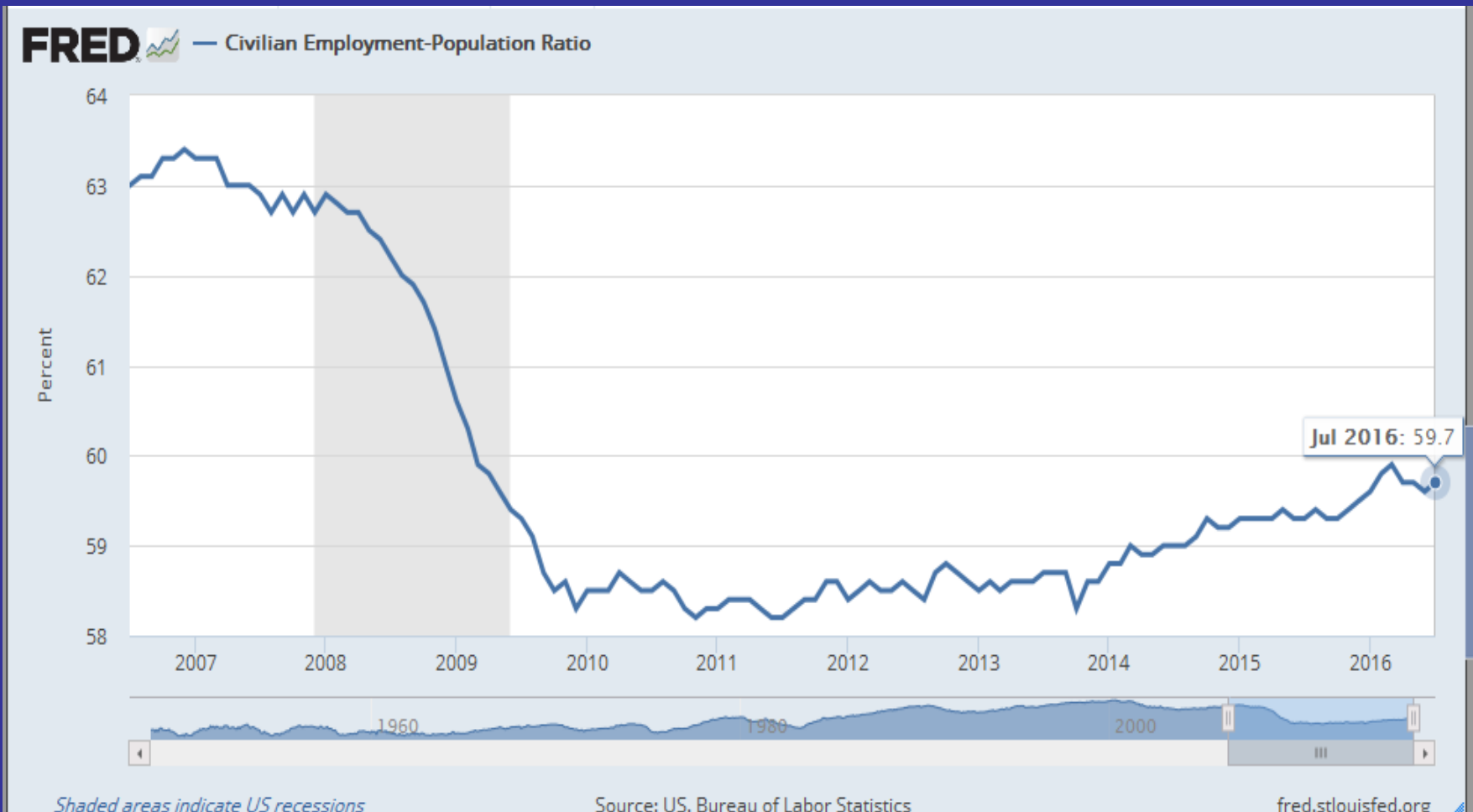
(<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/us-competitiveness-project-harvard-business-school-hbs-michael-porter-030021739.html>)

Here are a few slides on labor market conditions – problems
Persist, but there are solutions

New part time jobs still Outnumber full time by 1 million since the recession – also, 51% Of workers make less than \$30,000/year
Key reason why housing starts remain weak!!!!



Not a good trend for the economy – employment
Population ratio keeps decreasing – my opinion – too
Much welfare, plus many people don't have the required job skills



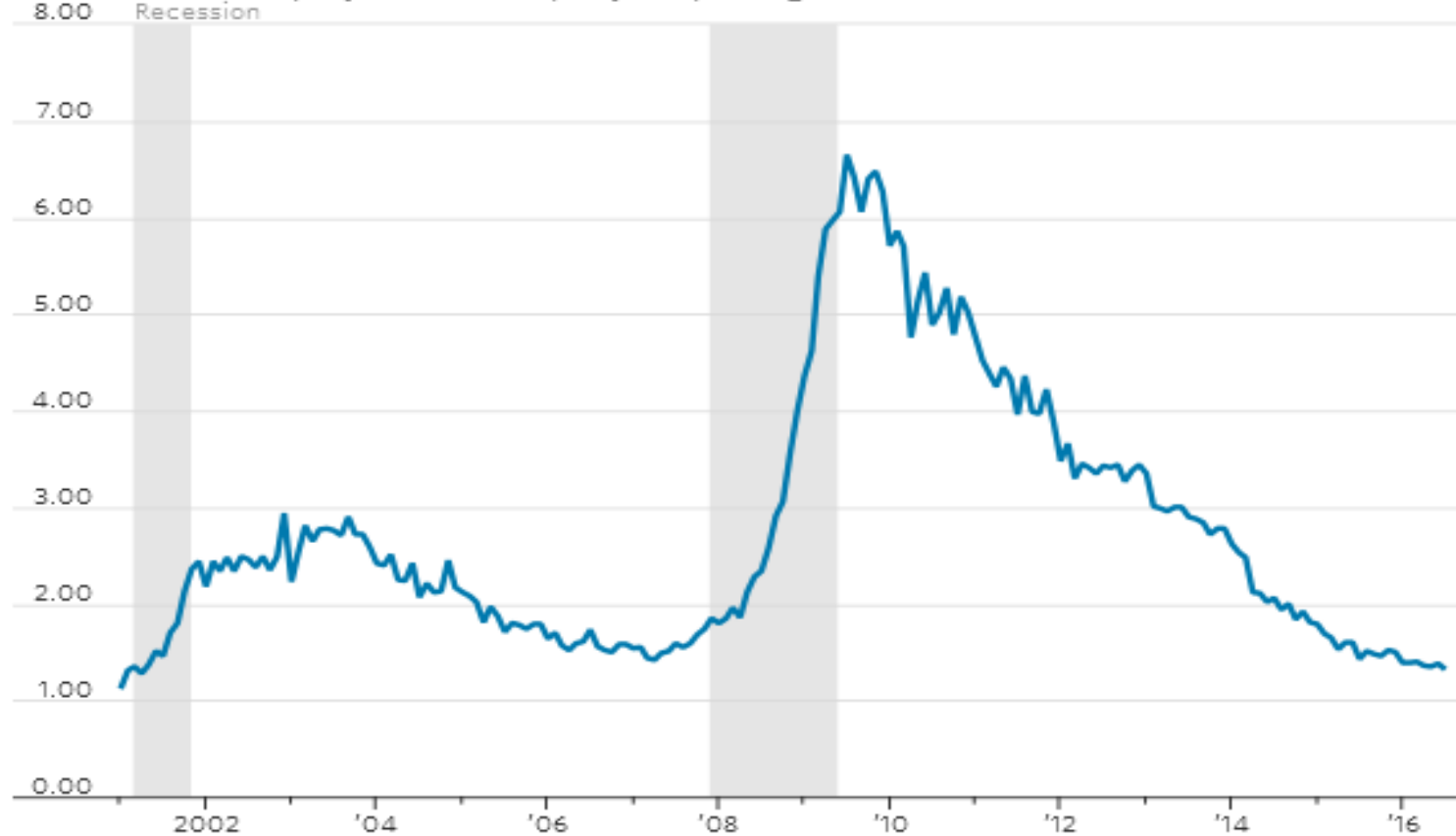
(<http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-idle-army-americas-unworking-men-1472769641>)

Here's the problem – there are lots of jobs, but
Too many job seekers don't have the required skills!!

(<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2016/09/07/a-new-record-for-job-openings-deepens-mystery-over-lack-of-hiring/>)

Job Seekers

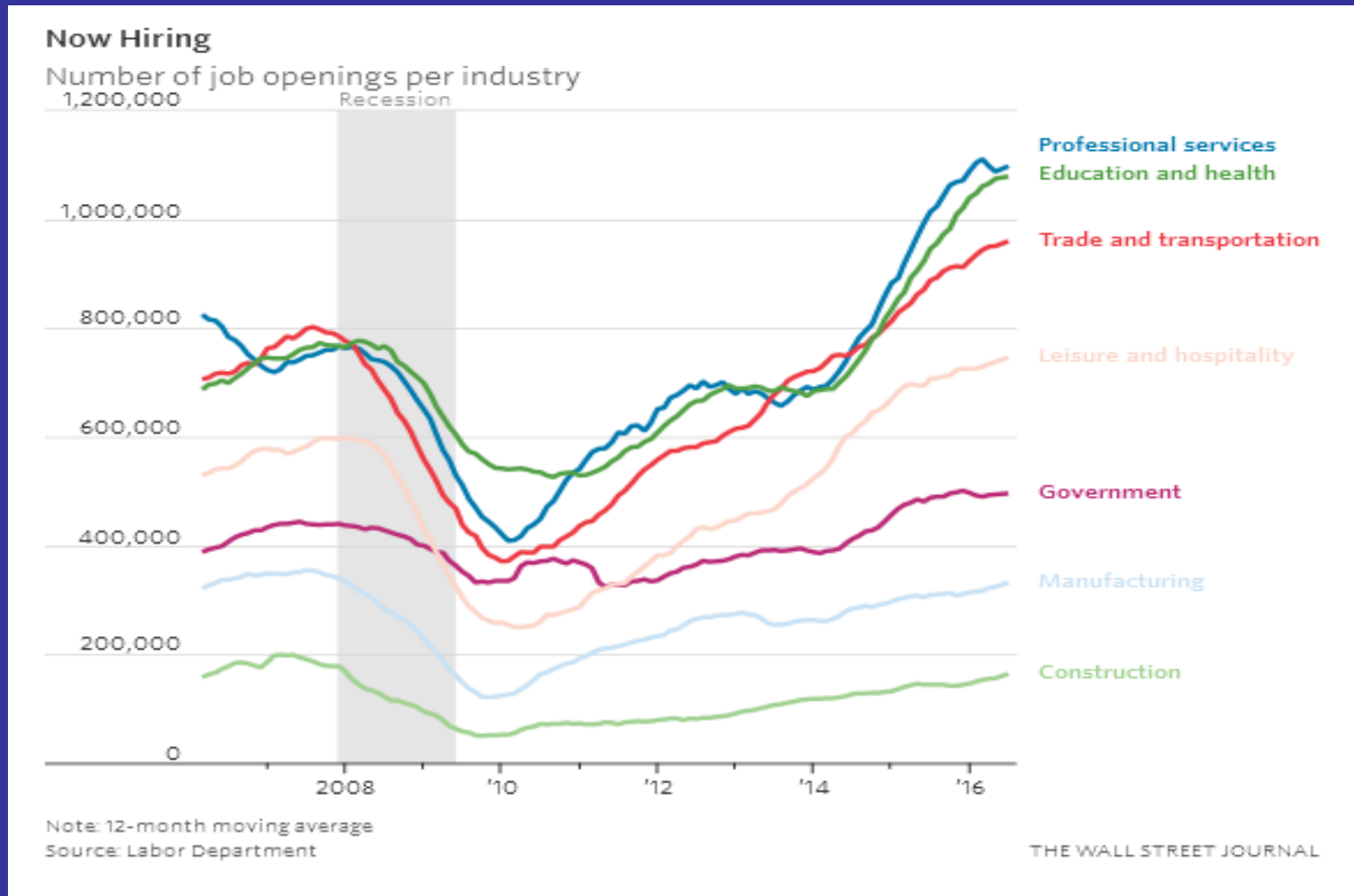
Number of unemployed workers per job opening



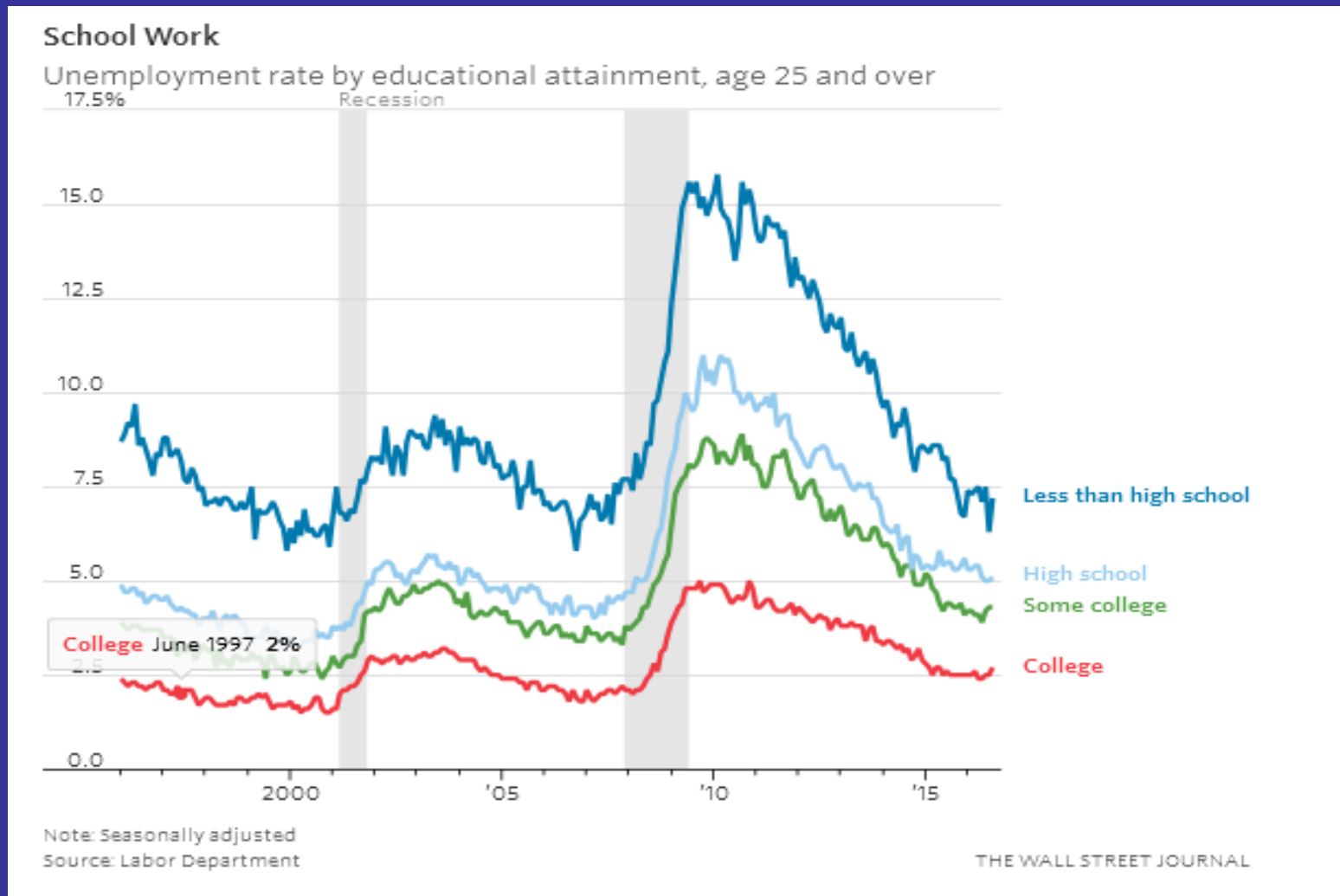
Note: Seasonally adjusted
Source: Labor Department

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Here's where the jobs are - but, again, lack of skills
Means many of these positions go unfilled!!!



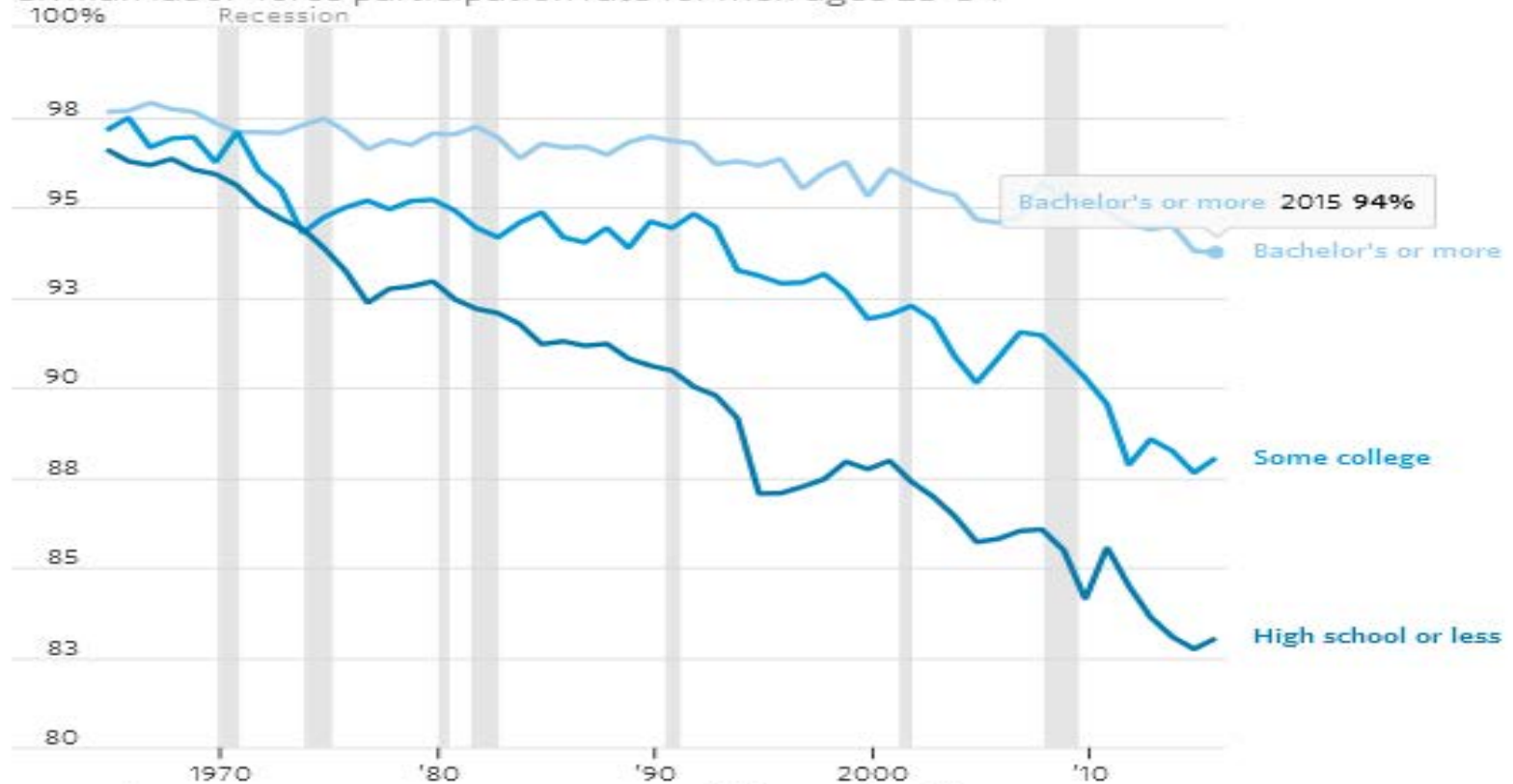
Education will help keep you out of the unemployment line



Getting an education will get you back into the labor force

School's Out

Civilian labor-force participation rate for men ages 25-54



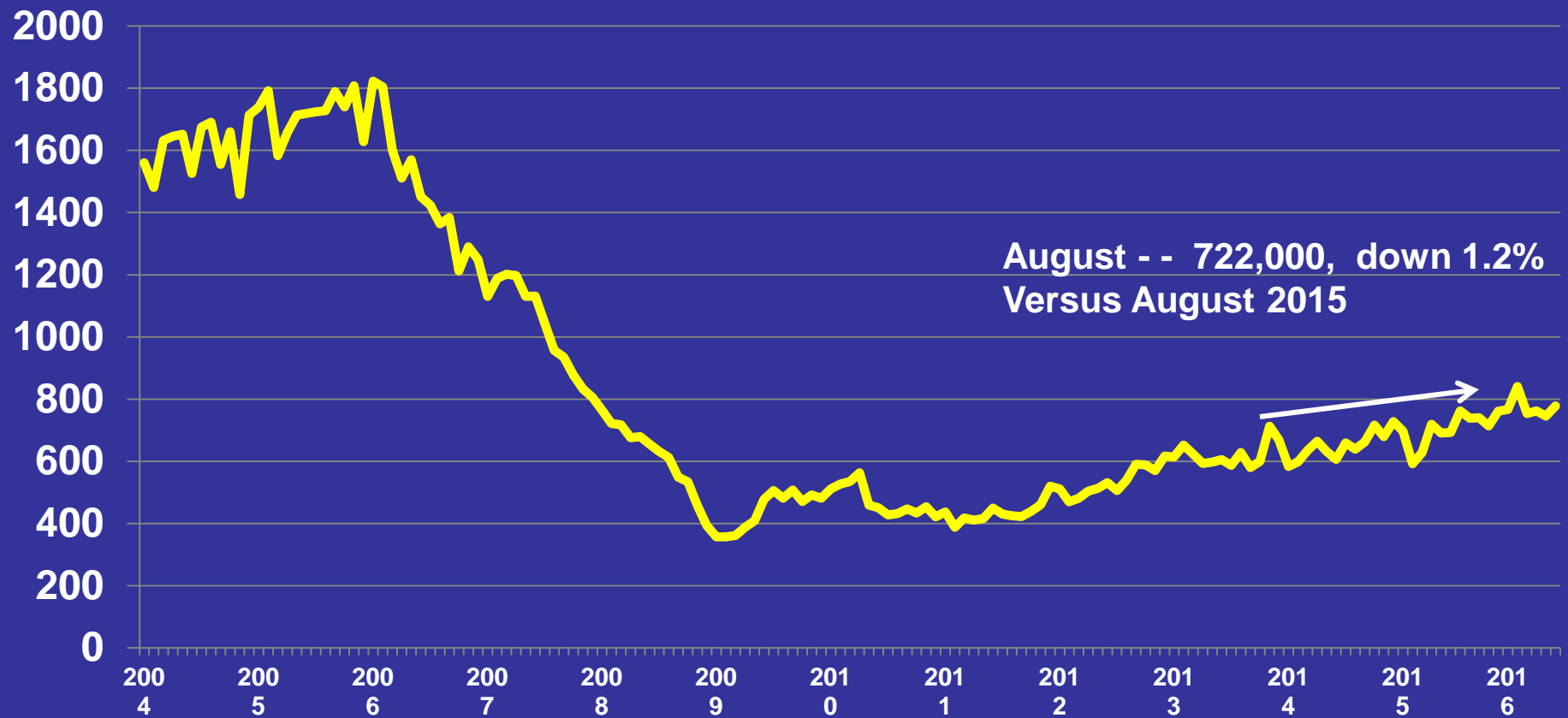
Source: Labor Department, Commerce Department, Council of Economic Advisers

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Additional housing comments

Starts are inching forward – But, Low Interest rates can't fix housing!!! this is basically a two tiered market – healthy upper end versus weak entry level housing - - not sustainable

Single family starts, Thousand units, SAAR



August - - 722,000, down 1.2%
Versus August 2015

Source: Census (<http://www.census.gov/const/www/newresconstindex.html>)

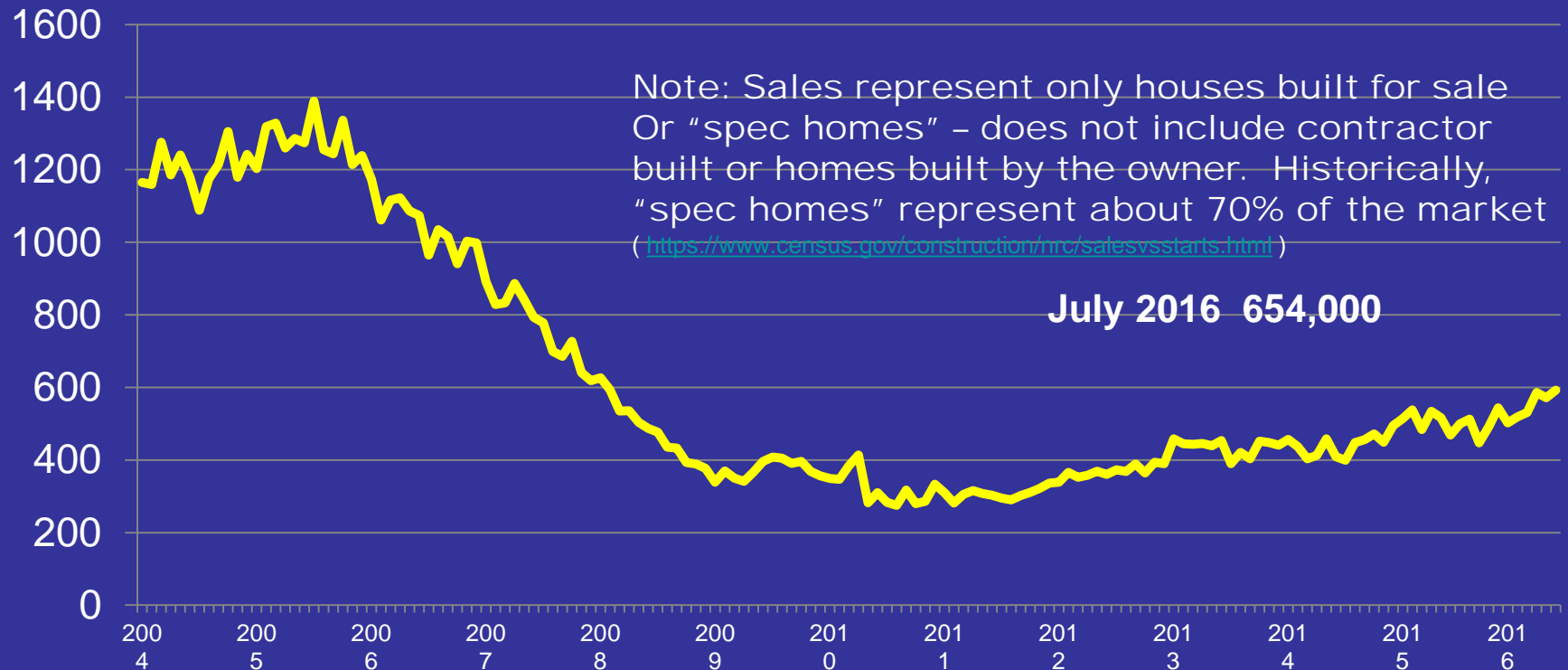
New Single Family Home sales are the key statistic to watch for wood Products demand – Sales drive housing starts – this drives demand for wood products!!!

up 31% versus July 2015

OK. We're making progress, but still

Just 42% of the 2006 peak

Thousands, SAAR



Source: Census (<http://www.census.gov/const/www/newressalesindex.html>)

Resale market continues to improve - however, tight Supply (which drives prices), currently at 4.7 months, remains a problem. Healthy market is about 6 months supply. Median prices are up 5.3%, annual basis - 53rd consecutive Monthly increase.

Single family (incl condos), Monthly, Thousand units, SAAR

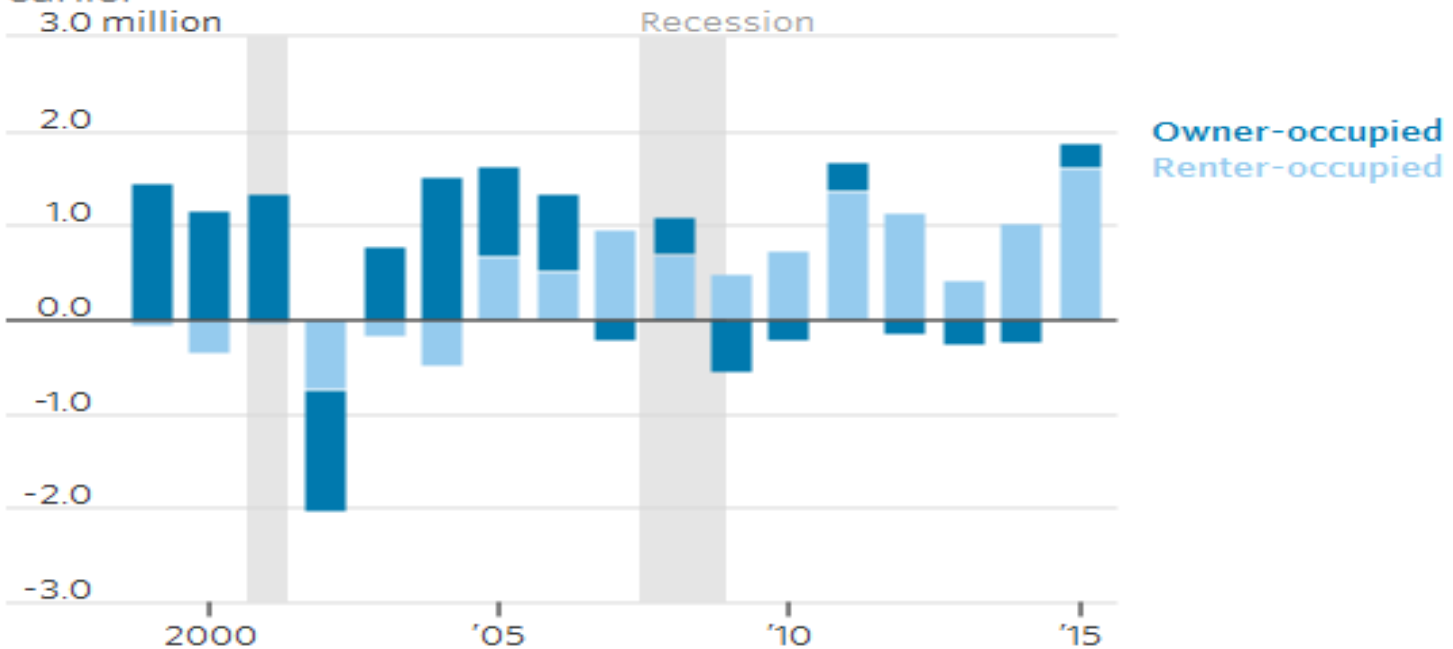


Source: NAR (<http://www.realtor.org/news-releases/2015/06/existing-home-sales-bounce-back-strongly-in-may-as-first-time-buyers-return>)

Household formations (HH) are starting to pick up, but since 2007 The bulk of new HH are renting!!

Household Formation

The number of occupied housing units, change from one year earlier

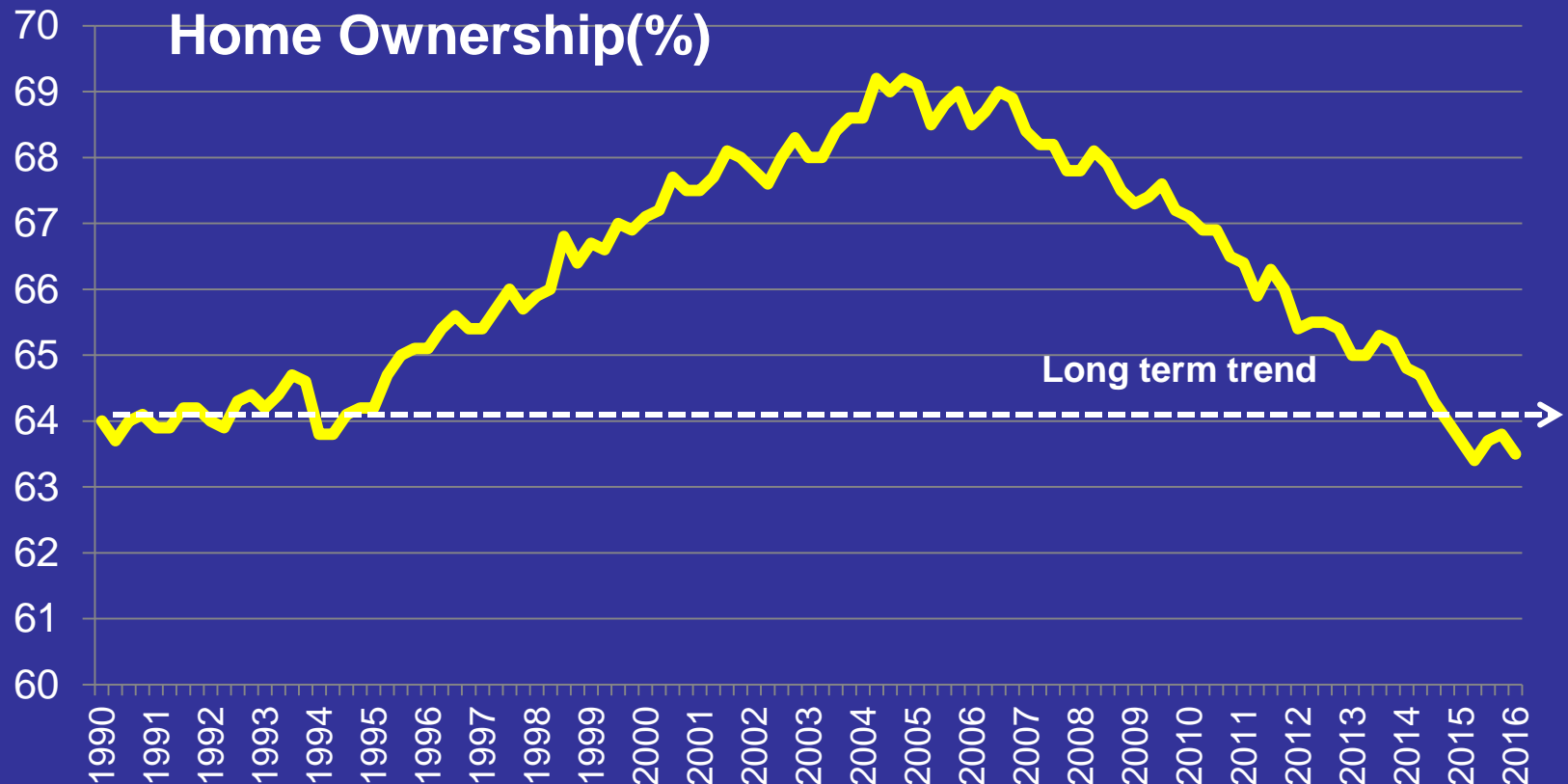


Source: Census Bureau
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Household formations and shift to renting - - Falling Homeownership Rate for millennial's - use to be 43% - now it is 33% - young people are renting

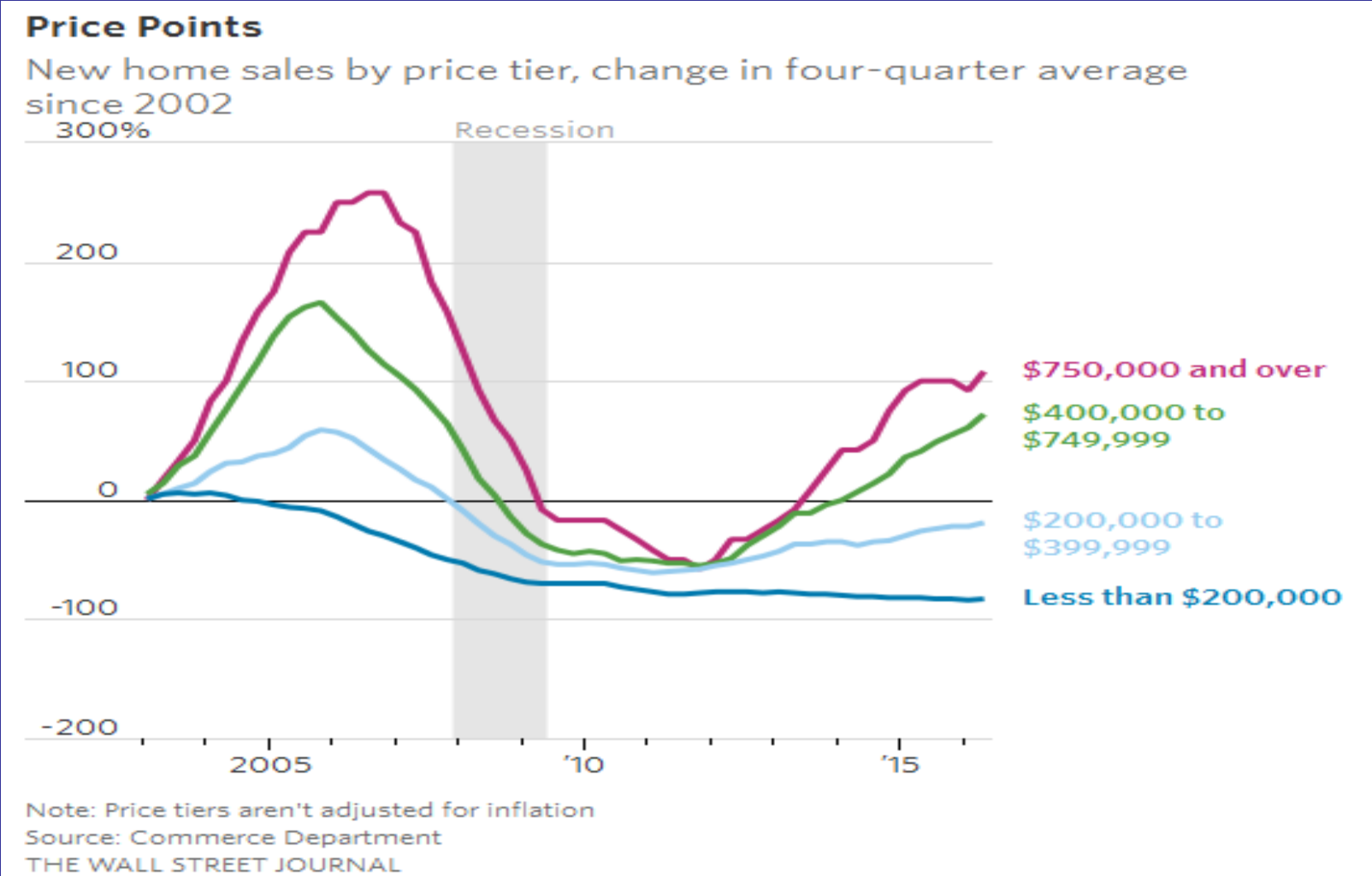
Recent study shows that people with college degree takes 5 years to save Enough for down payment for starter home (with student debt - 10 years), No college - 16 years (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/homeownership-elusive-for-young-adults-without-college-degrees-1463909402>)

Homeownership lowest in 50 years



Source: Census (<https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/data/q413ind.html>)

The supply of new homes is only 4.3 months – 6 months is considered healthy .
The median price in July was \$295,000 – but the chart below shows this is Heavily skewed to larger homes. 1st time buyers are missing so builders are Building larger, more expensive homes



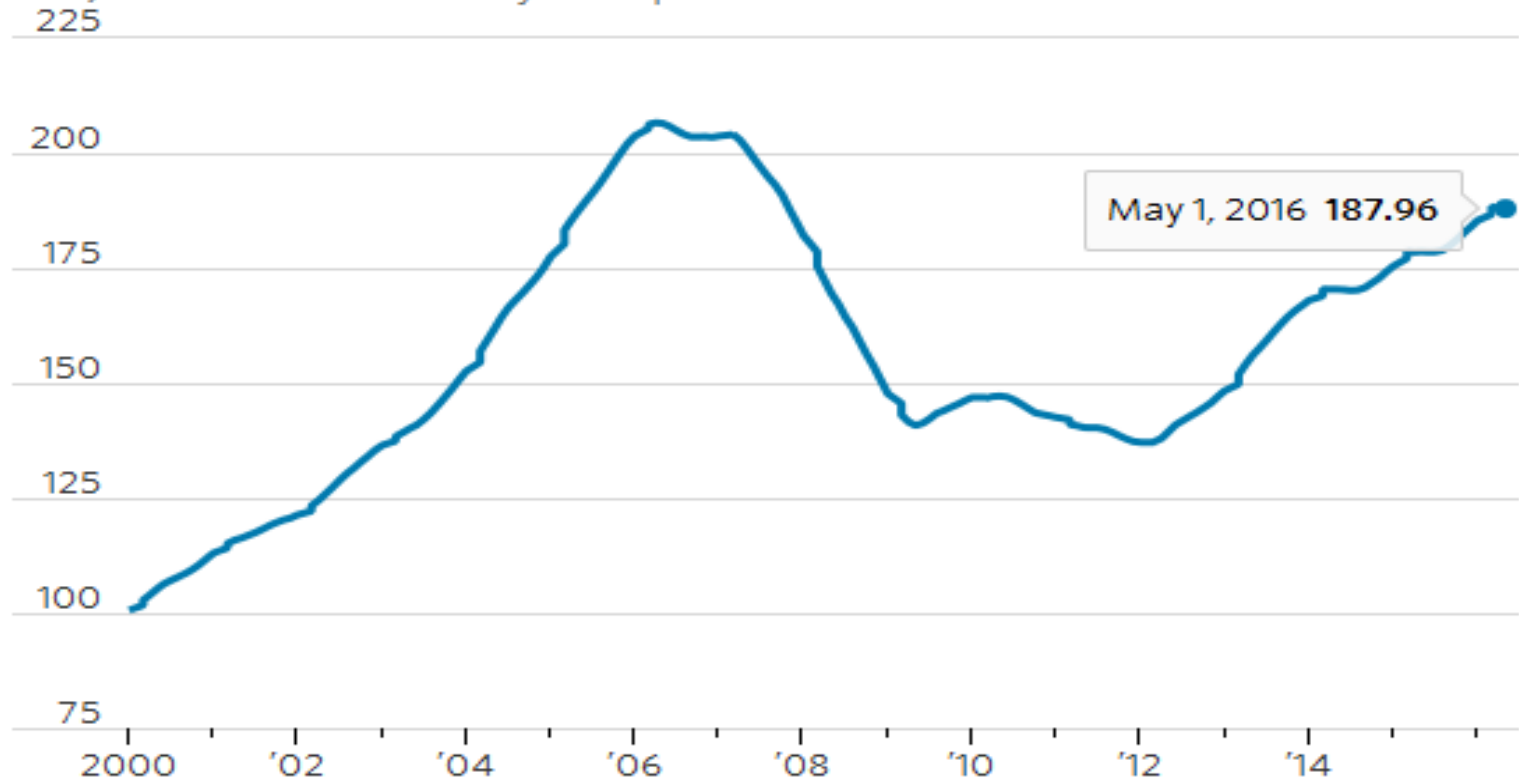
Builders are building bigger homes in response to weaker Demand from millennials who buy starter homes



Existing home prices almost back to pre recession levels
Good for existing homeowners, but a deterrent to millennial's and other potential buyers

Rational Exuberance

S&P/Case-Shiller 20-City Composite Home Price Index



Source: S&P Dow Jones Indices
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Rental demand versus single family housing ---

Rental demand will continue to increase for years – a recent study by the Urban Institute suggests it may continue for another decade or two

(<http://www.wsj.com/articles/new-housing-crisis-looms-as-fewer-renters-can-afford-to-own-1433698639>)

Why - - demographics; growing minority population; student debt; weak income growth; E.g., Minorities (nonwhite) will make up 75% of net household growth over the next 10 years, and 85% during 2020- 2030. They are less likely to own homes (lower incomes is main reason) so home ownership continues to fall toward 60% by 2030. During this time, rental demand will increase dramatically. Although this is just one study, it provides food for thought. One potential question with the study, however, is other studies show that although immigrants, for example, rent initially, but, over time they purchase homes at a rate equal to or higher than native born Americans. Why – people come to the U.S. to improve quality of life, and for most, this means homeownership. This suggests that the U.S. has to find solutions to immigration issues like “illegal immigrants” while encouraging legal immigration. This country was founded by immigrants seeking a better life, and they are key to our future. **And, incomes for all Minorities has to improve if home ownership is to return to “good old days”**

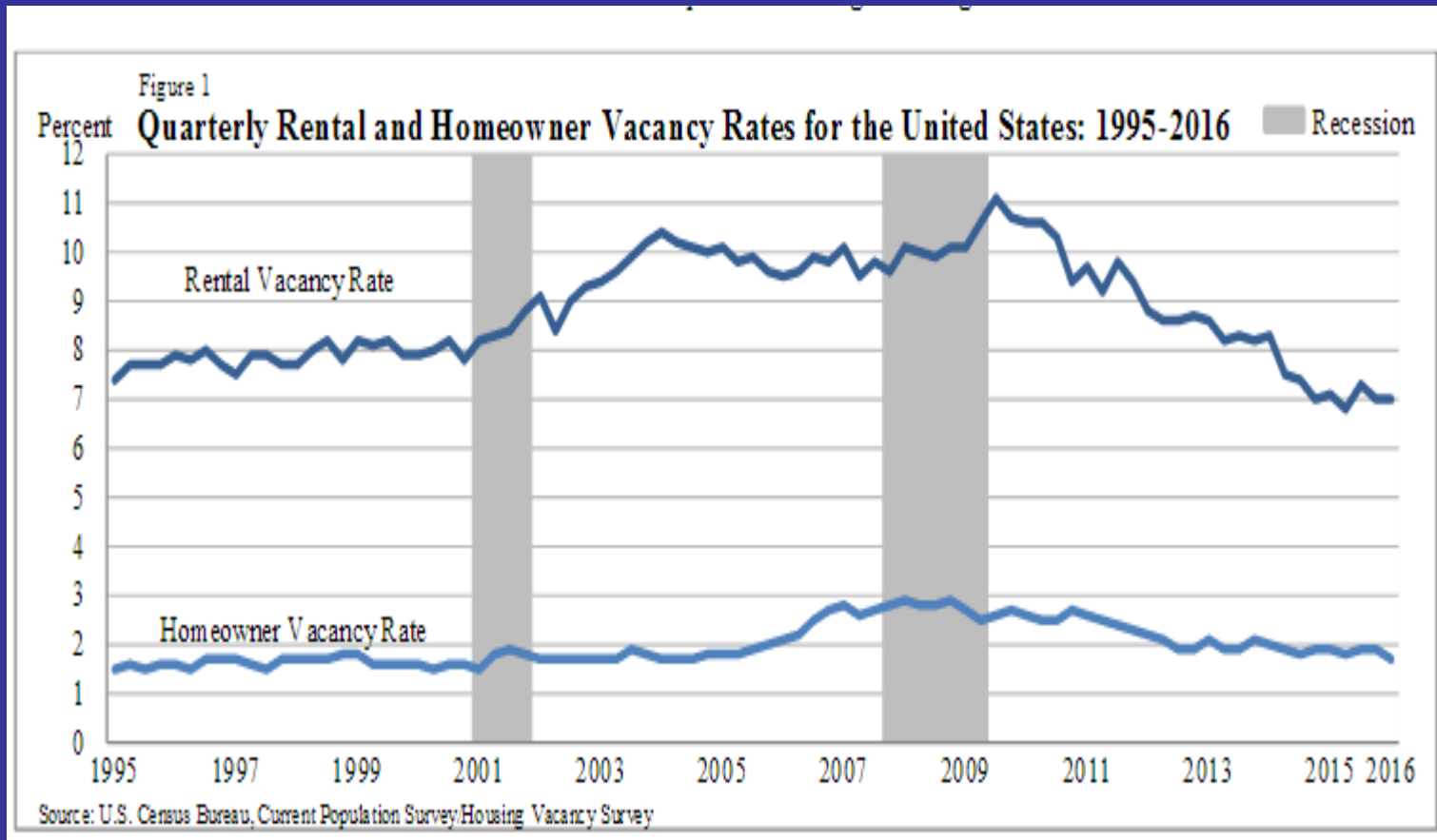
(http://www.engineeredwood.org/Data/sites/3/documents/EngWoodJournal/EWJ_Spring2010.pdf)

Anyway, this has potential implications for home ownership; single family construction; and demand for wood products – lots of variables and scenarios.

Rental vacancy rates lowest in 20 years

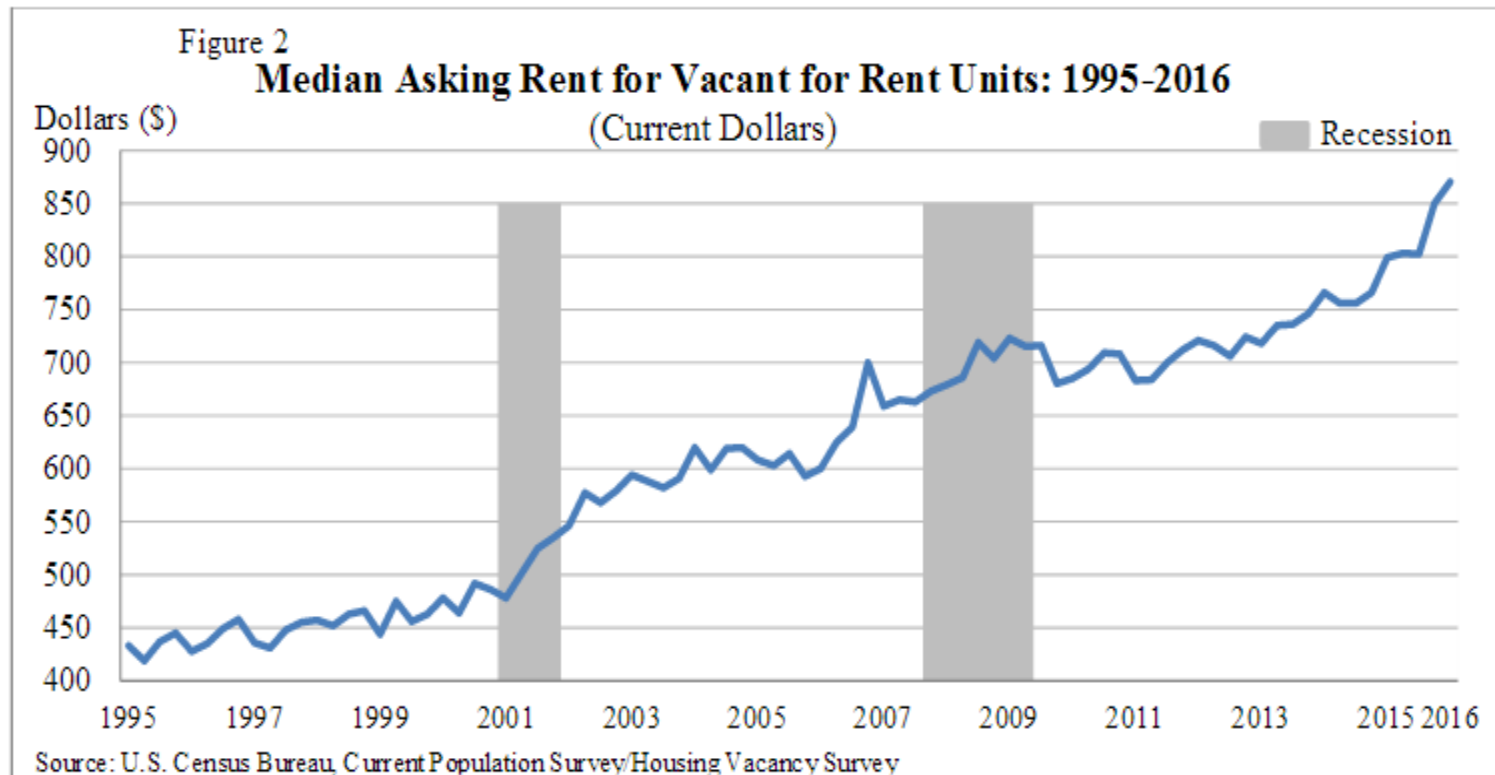
Falling rental vacancy rates will drive rental prices higher

And this will drive multi family construction – Economics 101 – *if I were a Builder, I would focus on rental construction*

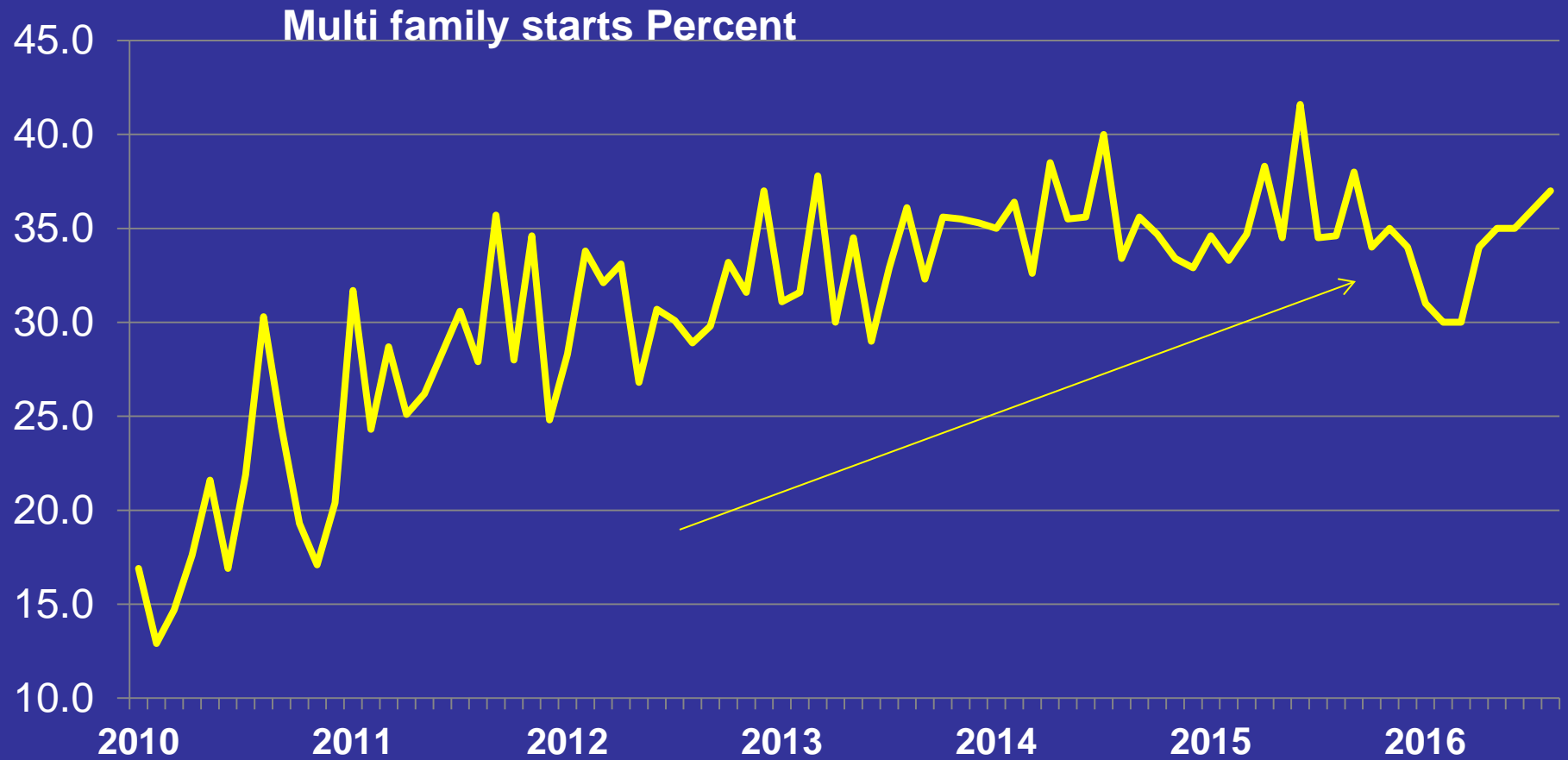


Increasing rents are slowing housing starts - -
more difficult for renters to save for down payment for house purchase

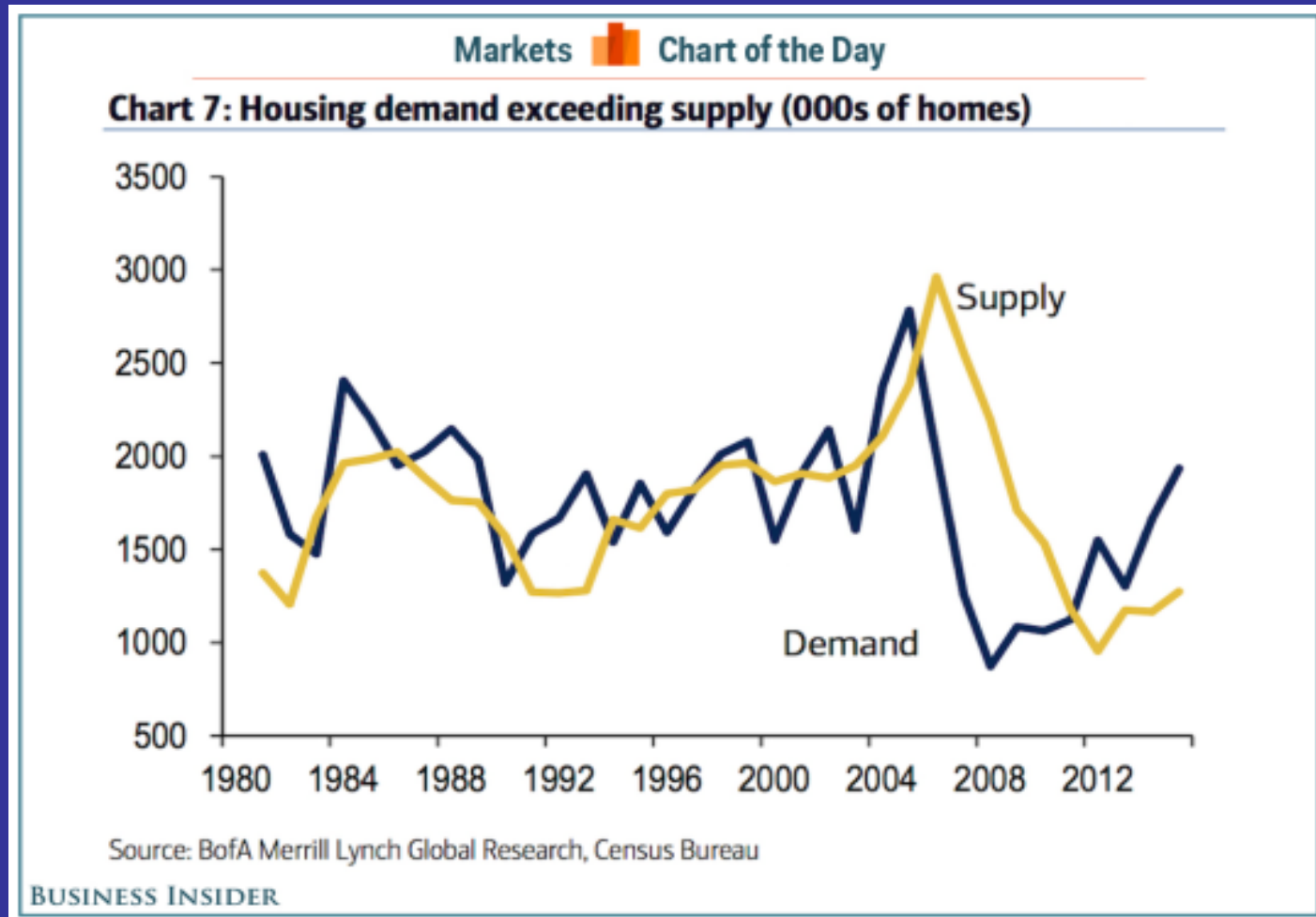
In the first quarter 2016, the median asking rent for vacant for rent units was \$870.



Multi family share of housing starts – upward trend expected to continue for Some time. Also, since the housing crash in 2008, **Single family rentals** have now reached 13% of overall housing stock, up from 9% in 2005 (<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2015/07/20/signs-of-overheating-in-the-single-family-rental-market/>)

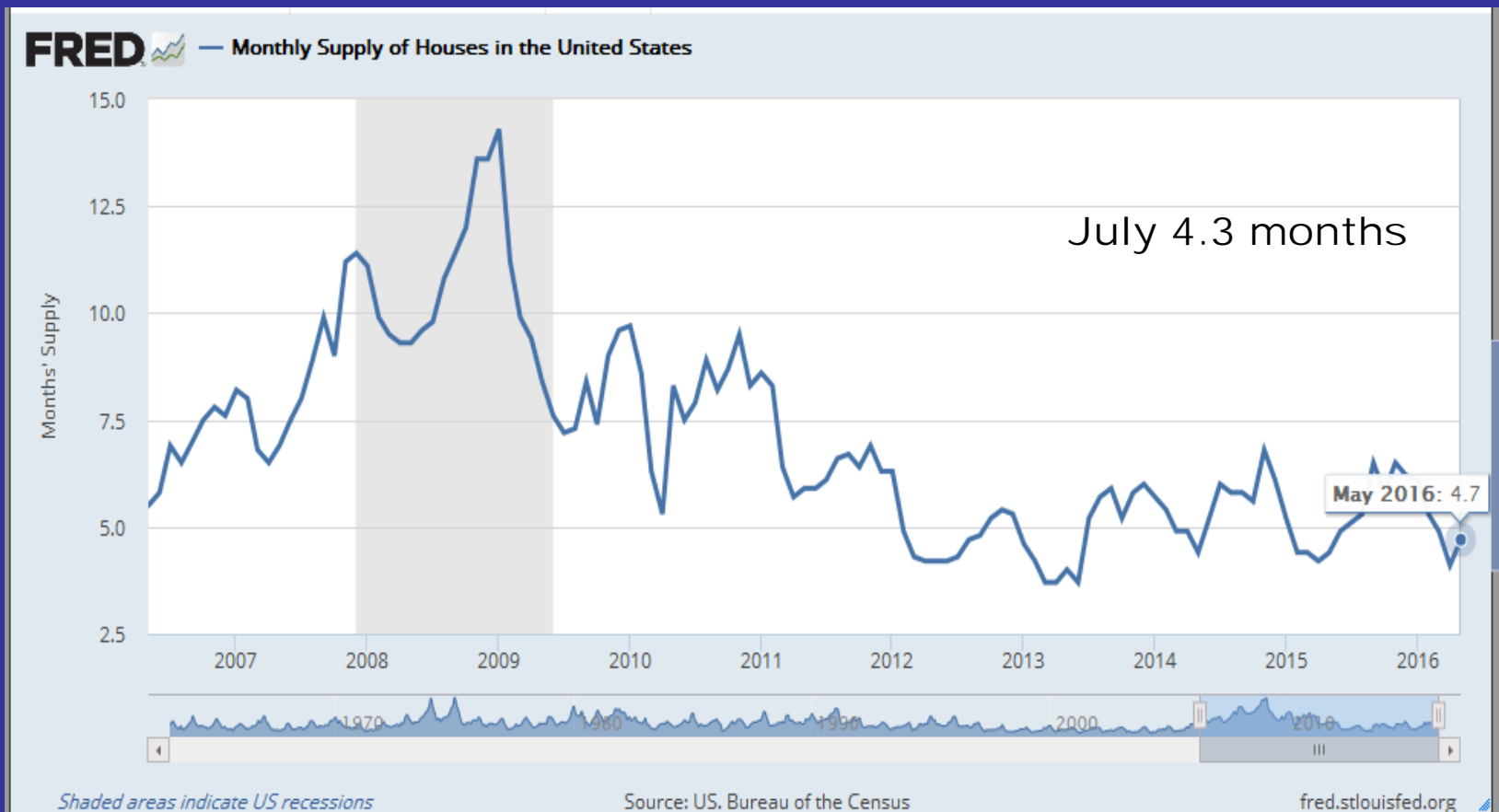


Tight supply drives up prices – existing homes
At 4.7 months supply – normal supply is 6 months



Low new home inventory drives prices higher And out of reach to most 1st time buyers

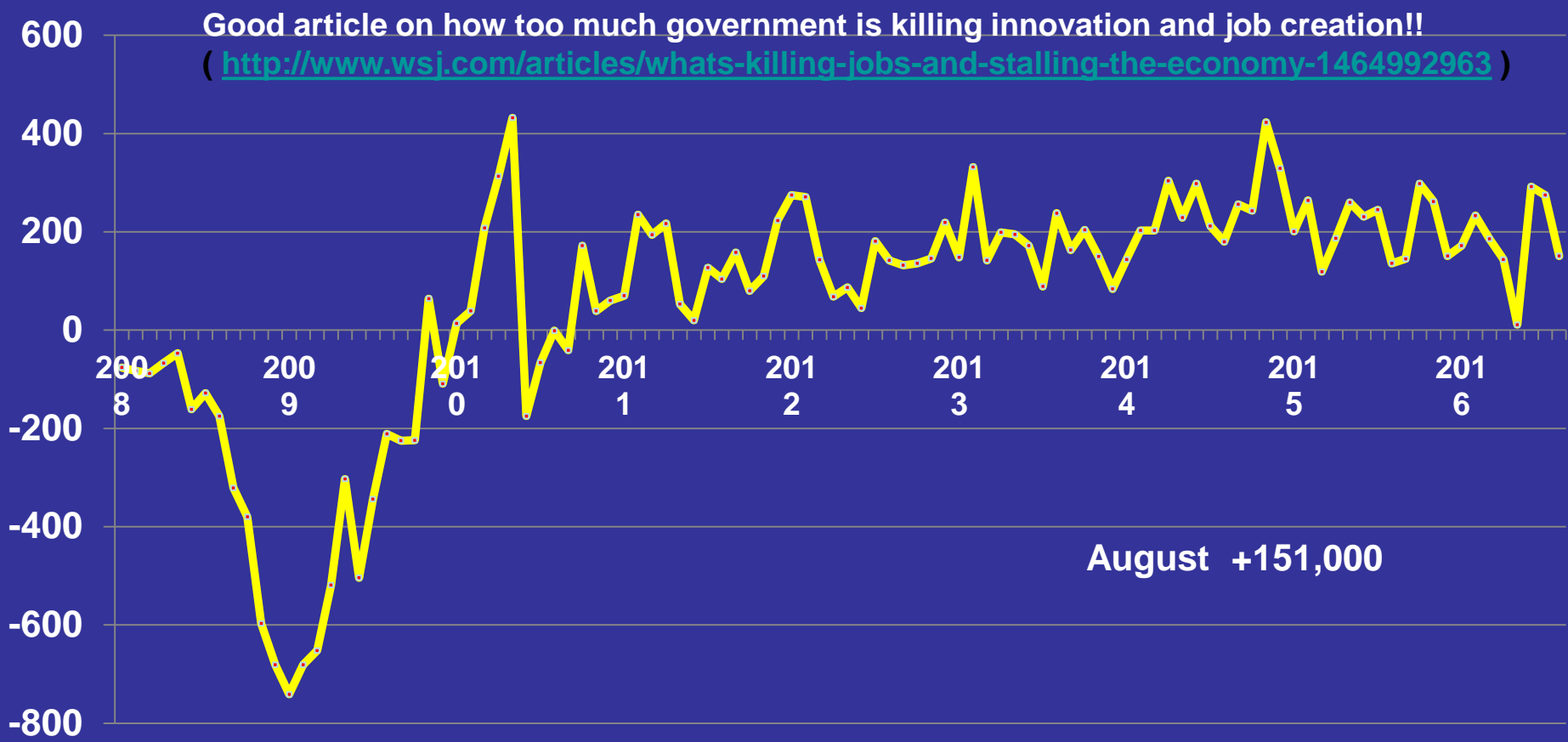
But, builders can't find enough carpenters, masons, electricians, etc.
So construction costs keep escalating = this exacerbates the inventory
Problem – also, land shortages in parts of the country drive costs higher!



More News on the labor front

Employment situation - our biggest problem – stuck near 200,000, and many of these jobs are part time with little or no benefits – not conducive to Driving housing demand higher - need to encourage innovation and investment in future - that means less government

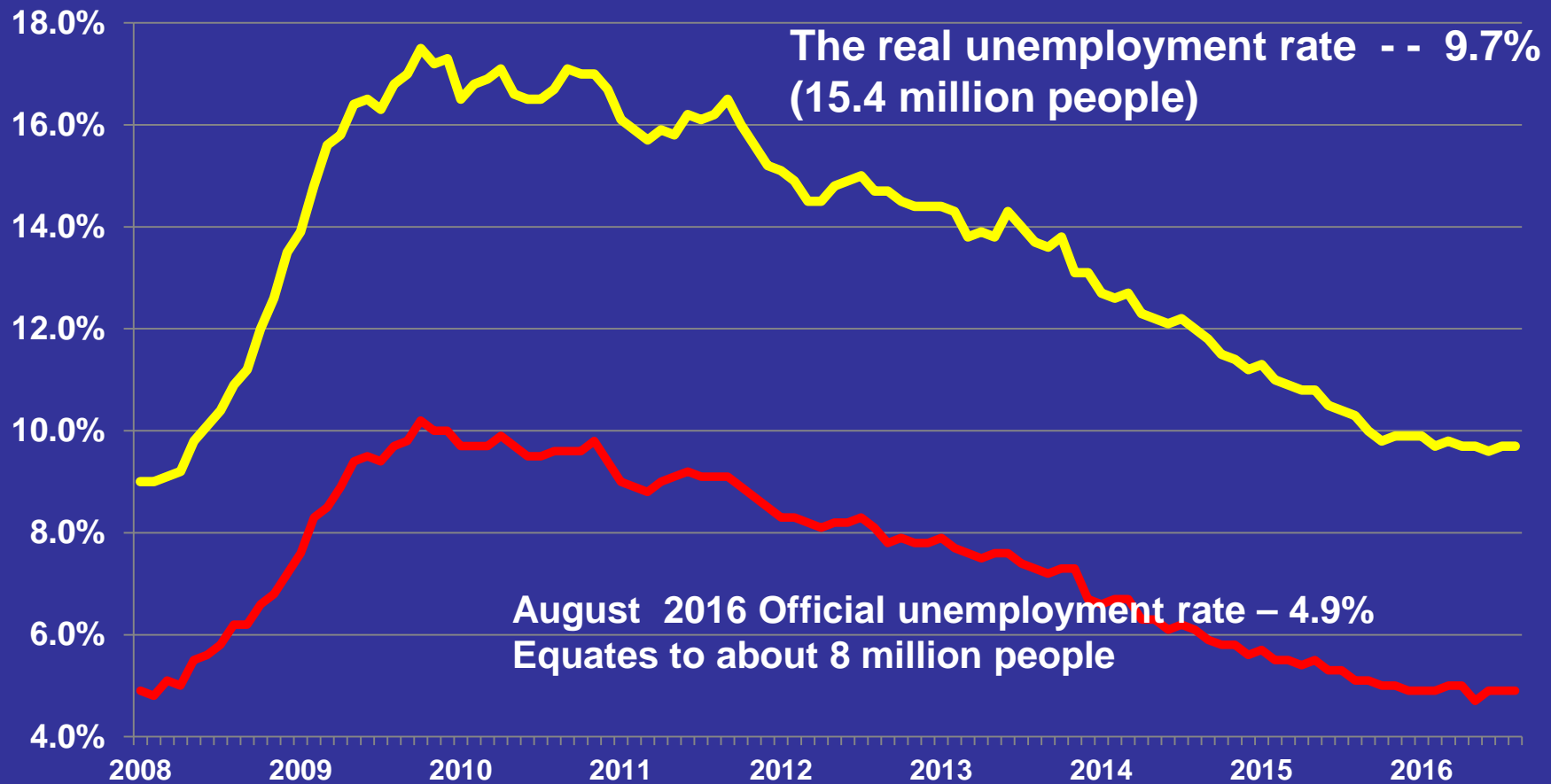
Net change in non farm payrolls – monthly, thousands



Source: U.S. BLS (www.bls.gov)

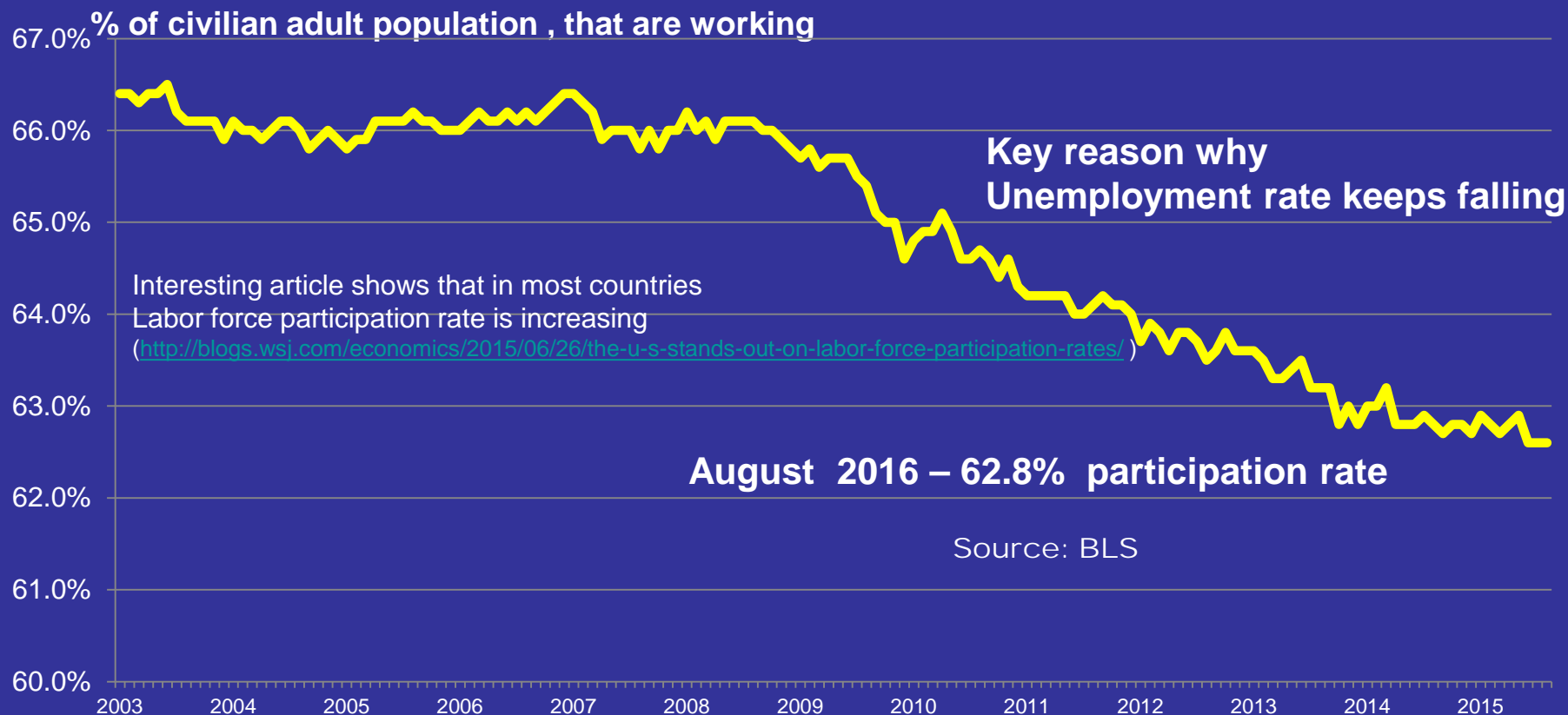
Unemployment rate keeps coming down – but, nearly 7 million remain “underemployed” – working part time, but want full time jobs

There are about 16 million people either unemployed, underemployed, or stopped Looking – **Key reason why wage increases are stagnant!!!



Labor force participation rate is shrinking – demographics is one reason –
Another reason – bloated welfare system – 130 million people on some form of
welfare (food stamps, long term disability, housing allowances, Medicaid, ...) - -
we'll see skilled labor shortages increase over the next decade - we're already
seeing construction related shortages with brick layers, masons, electricians,
plumbers, etc.

Excelent article (<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/should-i-go-to-a-trade-school-162413337.html#>)



Some conclusions – housing continues to improve albeit very slowly
And this will not change soon for the reasons listed below:

- (1) Economy will continue to sputter -- **2016 growth expected to be about 2.0%**
- (2) Housing market not healthy - 1st time buyers (31% today) are below trend (45%) - household formations are improving, but more people will continue to rent
- (3) Productivity a major problem for U.S. economy – real GDP driven by population (number of workers) and real GDP/worker or productivity. During past 7 years, productivity has grown 1.7% annually whereas the average over previous 17 years was 2.4%.
- (4) “QE” not working – bulk of “printed money” hoarded by the banks to shore up capital positions – not being loaned out to the economy - GDP languishes - We need a new and more effective approach to our competitiveness problems!
- (5) ***Weak/no leadership from current administration and Congress, - our biggest problem – neither Hillary nor “the Donald” will fix our problems***
- (6) The fed can't make decisions – doesn't know what to do – confused – soon, the U.S. will Join Europe and Japan with negative real interest rates. Negative rates are a clear sign of weak demand. Innovation, investment, tax reform, is the solution, but that will be challenging with \$20 trillion (and counting) federal debt and 41% of the population on some form of welfare. Many business leaders have lost confidence in where the country is headed so they are not investing.