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U.S. small business hiring increases in June: NFIB

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. small businesses increased hiring in June for the ninth consecutive month, adding to signs the labor market is strengthening.

The National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), which reported the figures on Wednesday, said that was longest stretch of increases since 2006.

"The rather substantial dent in first quarter growth did not have much of an impact on Main Street," the NFIB said in a statement.

The economy contracted at a 2.9 percent annual pace in the first three months of the year.

Earlier on Wednesday, payrolls processor ADP said private employers added 281,000 workers to their payrolls last month, up from 179,000 in May and the largest gain since November 2012.

The reports come ahead of the release on Thursday of the government's more comprehensive employment report for June. According to a Reuters poll of economists, nonfarm payrolls are expected to have increased by 212,000 after rising by 217,000 in May.

The NFIB survey of 672 small business owners found 12 percent of owners added an average of 3.3 workers per firm over the past few months, up one percentage point from May.

Fifty-three percent of owners hired or posted job openings in the last three months and 43 percent reported there were few applicants who qualified for the job.

Twenty-six percent of owners reported they could not find qualified workers for job openings, which could put pressure on the unemployment rate, the NFIB said.

The unemployment rate is forecast holding steady at a 5-1/2 year low of 6.3 percent in June.

(Reporting by Moriah Costa; Editing by Meredith Mazzilli)

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