

CFOs are increasingly gloomy on economic growth

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PUBLISHED IN: ECONOMY

Another survey of corporate financial chiefs reinforces what's becoming a common refrain: The economic recovery is getting shakier.

CFOs' optimism has dropped, dampened by high energy prices, the ongoing housing slump and other factors.

That's also reduced expectations for hiring, according to a quarterly survey of 806 chief financial officers by Duke University and CFO Magazine.

Fears of slower growth have rattled world financial markets in recent days, and on Tuesday Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke said that the U.S. recovery is "frustratingly slow."

CFOs are considered good barometers of the broader economy because they oversee companies' books and help direct financial strategy, including hiring.

U.S. companies expect domestic employment to increase 0.7 percent during the next year, the latest Duke survey showed. That's down from last quarter and implies that, over the next year, the U.S. economy will average fewer than 100,000 new jobs created each month.

"CFOs are telling us we are stuck at 9 percent unemployment for the next year," Campbell Harvey, a professor of finance at Duke's Fuqua School of Business, said in a prepared statement. "One leg of the economy is shackled by extraordinarily high unemployment and the other by the housing market still in a free fall. Obviously, it is hard for the economy to move forward."

Last week, a survey of corporate CPAs by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants showed a similar decline in optimism about the economy.

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