

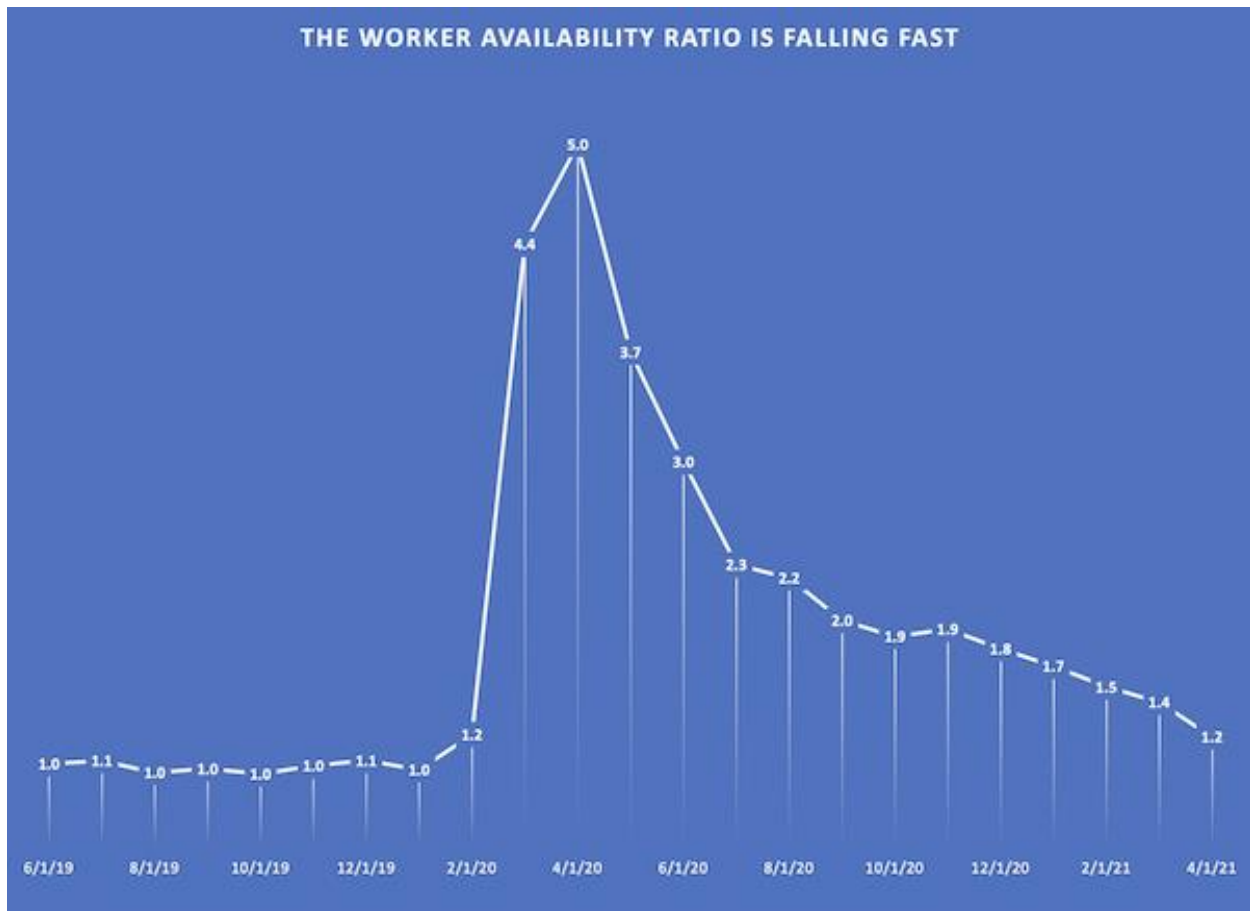
Data Shows Worker Availability Sinking Toward Historic Lows

Earlier this week, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released its job openings report, known as [JOLTS](#), for April. It showed what we have known to be the case for a while now: A lack of workers is a serious problem for the economy.

Job openings are at an all-time high at 9.3 million. Layoffs are at an all-time low, and quits are at all-time high. Clearly businesses are desperate for workers, and workers are confident they can land jobs.

The U.S. Chamber regularly conducts a further analysis of the JOLTS data that compares the number of available workers to the number of open positions. We refer to this as the Worker Availability Ratio, or WAR for short. Available workers are classified as unemployed workers plus those marginally attached to the workforce.

By the numbers: For April, the WAR stands at 1.2, meaning there are 1.2 workers for every open position. In April of last year, the WAR was 5. That was at the height of the COVID-19 lockdown. The ratio has fallen sharply since then, because of both a decline in unemployed workers and a sharp uptick in job openings. In April alone, businesses created 1 million new openings.



Before COVID, the WAR was hovering around 1. The labor market was tight then. We are almost back to that level of tightness. Pre-COVID, businesses were struggling to fill opening because the available workers lacked the skills businesses needed. That issue persists now, as evidence by multiple surveys of businesses looking to hire. Add on top of that the issues created by COVID (childcare, generous government benefits, and remaining fear of contracting the virus), and businesses are struggling even more to hire.

Bottom line: The worker shortage is the major issue in the economy right now and will continue until we can match workers’ skills to those businesses need. This is why the Chamber has launched our [America Works Initiative](#).

Read more in my [article on Above the Fold](#).

—Curtis Dubay, Senior Economist, U.S. Chamber of Commerce