

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## **U.S. Economy Recovering at Moderate Pace, Likely to Pick Up**

By MacKenzie C. Babb  
Staff Writer

Washington – Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke says the U.S. economy is recovering at a moderate pace “from both the worst financial crisis and the most severe housing bust since the Great Depression.”

In remarks prepared for the International Monetary Conference on June 7 in Atlanta, Bernanke said U.S. economic growth in 2011 has been slower than expected, partially due to supply chain disruptions associated with the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. He said also that prices for many commodities have risen sharply during the past year, resulting in significantly higher consumer prices for food, gasoline and other energy products.

“That said, with the effects of the Japanese disaster on manufacturing output likely to dissipate in coming months and with some moderation in gasoline prices in prospect, growth seems likely to pick up somewhat in the second half of the year,” the central banker said.

Bernanke added that while the recovery appears to be continuing at a moderate pace, it is “both uneven across sectors and frustratingly slow for the millions of unemployed and underemployed U.S. workers.”

He said indicators suggest a loss of momentum in the labor market in recent weeks and that the Federal Reserve is monitoring developments closely. The group has noted signs of gradual improvement during the past several months that may lead to an increase in hiring during the second half of the year. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported overall payroll employment was up by 54,000 in May, while the jobless rate of 9.1 percent remained essentially unchanged from the April figure.

Bernanke said the business sector is improving, with capital spending on equipment and software expanding, reflecting an improving sales outlook and the increasingly strong growth of demand in foreign markets.

However, he said, the construction industry and the housing sector remain troubled, and called on U.S. leaders to seek long-term solutions to the nation’s fiscal problems.

“Although it is moving in the right direction, the economy is still producing at levels well below its potential. Consequently, accommodative monetary policies are still needed,” Bernanke said.

He commended the Federal Reserve’s actions in recent years as having “doubtless helped stabilize the financial

system, ease credit and financial conditions, guard against deflation and promote economic recovery.”

The chairman said the group would continue to work to support the recovery through maintaining price stability, supporting measures to increase employment and ensuring inflation rates remain at levels consistent with the Federal Reserve’s mandate.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner told the conference June 6 the United States is “in the midst of a fundamental reshaping” of its financial system, adding that recent reforms will help the country emerge from the crisis “not only transformed, but in much stronger shape.”

## **Ambassador Nominee Will Work for Shared U.S.-Afghan Vision**

By MacKenzie C. Babb  
Staff Writer

Washington – Ryan Crocker, President Obama’s nominee to be the next U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, says that if confirmed by the U.S. Senate, he will work toward the U.S.-Afghan shared vision of an Afghanistan that “can stand on its own feet and plot its own course toward its destiny.”

He said the core U.S. goal in working with Afghanistan toward a brighter future is “to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaida” and to deny the terrorist group a safe haven within Afghan borders. Crocker told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee June 8 that U.S. efforts to pursue this goal are focused on three mutually reinforcing surges – military, civilian and diplomatic. He called the killing of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden by U.S. forces May 1 an important step, but said much work remains to be done.

Crocker also commended the more than 1,100 U.S. civilian experts serving alongside U.S. and Afghan troops to establish the conditions “for a sustainable and irreversible transition of security responsibility” from international forces to the Afghan government. Crocker said supporting this transition is a key U.S. priority and, if confirmed, he will work to continue the “responsible, conditions-based transfer to Afghan security lead.”

He said the process is set to begin in July with the transition of lead security responsibility to the Afghan national security forces in seven provinces and municipalities, which contain about 25 percent of the Afghan population. The transfer is planned to be complete by the end of 2014.

“As transition proceeds and Afghan leadership strengthens across the country, a process of political reconciliation will become increasingly viable,” Crocker

said. "In turn, successful reconciliation will reduce the threat to the Afghan government, making transition more sustainable."

He said the United States supports the peace effort launched by the Afghan government to reconcile insurgents who renounce violence, abandon ties with al-Qaida and abide by the constitution of Afghanistan.

"If former militants are willing to meet these red lines, they would then be able to participate in the political life of the country under their constitution," Crocker added.

He said he would maintain efforts to support the country's long-term reconstruction, sustainable economic development and the strengthening of key Afghan institutions "critical to ensuring the transition is sustainable and irreversible."

Crocker emphasized the United States and its allies will continue to support the Afghan government through an enduring commitment outlined in the Strategic Partnership Declaration, to "provide a road map for our long-term political, economic and security cooperation."

Crocker previously served as ambassador to Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Kuwait and Lebanon before his April nomination to serve in Afghanistan.

### **U.N. Expert Calls Internet Freedom Fundamental but Often Violated**

By Jeff Baron  
Staff Writer

Washington – When the young United Nations adopted a declaration of universal rights in 1948, it included the freedom "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media."

A new U.N. report says that in the 21st century that has to include freedom on the Internet – a freedom it says many countries are increasingly failing to honor.

The report was written by Frank La Rue, the special rapporteur, or investigator, on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council. With 2 billion people online, La Rue writes, the Internet has become "one of the most powerful instruments of the 21st century for increasing transparency in the conduct of the powerful, access to information, and for facilitating active citizen participation in building democratic societies."

But instead of doing everything they can to promote Internet access for their citizens, La Rue says, many

governments are setting up increasingly strenuous efforts to block Internet content, track its users and punish them for what they say. He says the governments go far beyond the internationally accepted standards for restricting Internet freedom – such as to protect national security from imminent threats and to protect individuals, as in child pornography – and they impose restrictions without following the rule of law.

The "unique features of the Internet, which allow individuals to spread information instantly, to organize themselves, and to inform the world about situations of injustice and inequality, have also created fear among governments and the powerful," the report says.

Governments have reacted with a variety of controls that violate freedom of expression, the report says, including filters on broad areas of Internet content, blocking access to many sites, and the wholesale shutdown of the Internet "to prevent users from accessing or disseminating information at key political moments, such as elections, times of social unrest, or anniversaries of politically or historically significant events."

The report also notes the rise in various types of cyberattacks on dissidents and activists, apparently by governments, to deny them the use of the Internet, and efforts to strip away the anonymity of people who use the Internet for politics.

People who exercise their right to express themselves are suffering because "legitimate online expression is being criminalized," La Rue says. He notes that in 2010, Reporters Without Borders counted 109 people worldwide who were imprisoned for what they had posted on their blogs.

Among his recommendations, La Rue calls upon countries that block websites to provide "full details regarding the necessity and justification for blocking each individual website." He also says Internet providers should not be held liable for what users post – an approach that forces the Internet providers to become censors.

Sanja Kelly, a senior researcher and editor at advocacy group Freedom House, says her group's research supports La Rue's conclusions.

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