Lower retirement age proposed to boost openings

A BILL seeking to lower the retirement age for workers in both the public and private sectors was filed in the House of Representatives last week, aiming to allow Filipinos to retire in better health while creating more job opportunities for younger workers.

House Bill No. 6954 proposes lowering the mandatory retirement age to 60 from the current 65. It also seeks to reduce the optional retirement age for government employees to 55, provided they have rendered at least 15 years of service.

"This reduction offers a structural solution to help alleviate the country's persistent labor market challenges by encouraging the retirement of older workers," Camarines Norte Rep. Nelson S. Legacion, who filed the bill on Dec. 17, said in the measure's explanatory note. "A substantial number of vacancies will be created for younger job seekers."

The proposal comes as labor market conditions softened in recent months. The number of unemployed Filipinos rose by about 570,000 to 2.54 million in October from a year earlier, pushing the unemployment rate to 5% from 3.8% in September and 3.9% a year earlier.

Underemployment, which refers to workers seeking additional hours or better-paying jobs, eased to 12% in October from 12.6% a year earlier, but increased from 11.1% in September.

"Lowering the mandatory retirement age will directly open more positions, which is projected to boost economic activity," Mr. Legacion said, adding that the entry of younger workers would help both government agencies and private companies adopt new technologies and improve workplace efficiency.

The bill also directs the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) and the Social Security System (SSS) to conduct actuarial studies to assess the impact of an earlier retirement age on the sustainability of their funds.

"A lowered retirement age can reduce the fund's life due to shortened contribution periods and prolonged payout periods," Mr. Legacion said. "There must be actuarially sound principles to protect the long-term viability of the Social Insurance Fund."

Under existing laws, retirees may stop paying contributions and begin receiving monthly pensions, with benefits sourced from the SSS for private-sector workers and the GSIS for government employees.

The measure also highlights the social benefits of earlier retirement, allowing retirees to enjoy life while they are still physically fit.

"Earlier retirement provides the precious time and opportunity for retirees to engage in activities long deferred: traveling, spending quality time with families... or simply enjoying much-needed rest and relaxation," Mr. Legacion said. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

OPINION

Community relations won't stop a labor union

IN THE WORKPLACE
REY ELBO

We have a strong community relations program that prefers hiring workers within the vicinity of our factory. Our human resources (HR) manager says it's a strategy to prevent people from organizing a labor union. Is that correct? — Arctic Owl.

Contrary to the belief of your HR manager, there's no assurance that having a "strong" community relations could prevent workers from organizing a union. Besides, that statement coming from an HR manager crosses into union avoidance and therefore, an illegal strategy.

But then, how strong is "strong," exactly? Do you have an attractive scholarship for deserving college students? Do you have a medical mission for the residents or a feeding program for its malnourished children?

How about funding a self-managed cooperative to augment the income of the workers' families? Does the program include the construction of a basketball court or the repainting of the barangay hall? The list is endless.

On paper, those interventions could help organizations be endeared to the residents but not enough to prevent unions from coming in. At its best, your program could only merit regular standing ovation from barangay officials, the parish priest, and grateful residents, but not to labor officials.

The hard truth is that those "strong" interventions may not be enough. They can't be used to solve the issues of an unhappy workforce that may even think that hiring locals is best suited to solve their commuting woes and ensure the success of the perfect attendance award.

Indeed, a community relations program is good public relations, but they don't substitute for genuine and strong employee relations. A company may build goodwill outside its gate, but if massive discontent brews inside, union organizers will find it easy to talk to willing ears.

TWO WORLDS

Many HR executives proudly speak of a "strong" community relations making the company visible and admired. That reflects an overly narrow mindset. They create a sense that management cares about its social footprint without realizing that their employees live in two worlds — one outside the factory where they're part of the local community.

And another world inside the factory where they must dutifully clock in like robots, reluctantly follow toxic supervisors, earn their minimum wage while working in an unsafe and dirty environment. Or even wait for the late release of their 13th month pay.

That means if their inside world feels unfair, unhealthy, and managed by dismissive managers, the outside kindness loses its meaning no matter how HR perceives it to be "strong."

Labor unions don't appear out of thin air. They grow in the cracks of organizational neglect. When management ignores complaints, when supervisors bark orders more than they coach, when promotions seem unfair, and when wages lag behind — workers are bound to talk. And when they talk, they organize to protect their interests.

Joining a union is driven by frustration. Employees who feel powerless create collective power. If management thinks a "good image" in the community will immunize the company from this reality, then they're wrong because low morale takes precedence over a cosmetic community relations program.

One important caveat, unions are often supported by federations that target strategic employers and not the internally "neglected" workforce with few disgruntled people.

DUAL STRATEGY

Organizations can only progress if they fully understand that employee relations and community relations are two sides of the same coin. That means, but cannot replace, each other. If your organization wants to succeed in creating a high-morale and productive workforce, you should create a dual strategy where management is trusted inside and out its territorial boundaries.

One, treat employees as partners, not just payroll numbers. Offer fair wages, have a proactive two-way communication and participative decision-making process. Create a grievance system that works — not one that buries or ignores complaints. Celebrate small wins publicly and solve problems privately before they escalate.

Two, strengthen authentic community partnership. Support local schools, health programs, and small businesses. Be transparent about environmental practices. Then require, if not allow volunteer opportunities for employees so that the company's goodwill includes them as active participants, not passive observers.

When both fronts are aligned, employees take pride in where they work — and the community respects where they work. That's how a company builds genuine loyalty, not a faint applause.

The lesson is clear: you can't outsource industrial peace by doing community projects.

ALIGNING THE TWO

For community relations to help indirectly with labor stability, it must include employees in the narrative. That means designing community relations and employee relations as one basic program making workers feel proud contributors, not passive bystanders. A good example is when employee volunteers lead school outreach programs.

Then, publicly recognize their participation, not just the company's donation. This approach blurs the artificial wall between "inside" and "outside." When employees see that their employer walks the talk, the relationship becomes more authentic.

In today's business landscape, goodwill has two addresses: one in the community and one on the factory floor. Ignore either, and you'll end up in deep trouble.

Consult REY ELBO for free. E-mail elbonomics@gmail.com or DM him on Facebook, LinkedIn, X or via ***https://reyelbo.com***. Anonymity is guaranteed, if requested.

Dow, S&P 500 end at record highs on Santa rally

US STOCKS closed higher on Wednesday, as the Dow Industrials and S&P 500 registered record closing highs in a broad rally during a holiday-shortened session.

Indexes have been climbing in recent days, buoyed in part by a rebound in artificial intelligence (AI)-related names after last week's sell-off that was triggered by concerns about inflated valuations and high capital expenditures denting profits. Each of the major indexes recorded its fifth straight session of gains.

But recent data showed the economy remains resilient, and the market is still pricing in roughly 50 basis points of rate cuts from the US Federal Reserve next year, although expectations for a January cut are low, according to CME's FedWatch Tool.

Data on Wednesday showed new applications for US jobless benefits unexpectedly fell last week.

"Yields are behaving, volume is light, but the same issues remain in place — AI is strong, there is talk of some positives here, new OpenAI and Meta models, that will get the chatter up," said Tim Ghriskey, senior portfolio strategist at Ingalls & Snyder in New York.

"The Fed is unlikely to lower rates again, at least for a while. Who knows what happens when May comes and we get a new head of the Fed? But we have a very low probability of a January cut."

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 288.75 points, or 0.6%, to 48,731.16, the S&P 500 gained 22.26 points, or 0.32%, to 6,932.05 and the Nasdaq Composite gained 51.46 points, or 0.22%, to 23,613.31.

Trading volumes were thin. The US markets will remain shut on Thursday for Christmas.

Volume on US exchanges was 7.61 billion shares, compared with the 16.21 billion average for the full session over the last 20 trading days.

Micron Technology shares climbed 3.8% to end the session at a closing record of $286.68, continuing their rally after the company issued a strong forecast last week.

Bank stocks also supported gains, and financials were among the best-performing of the 11 S&P 500 sectors, with a 0.5% gain. The energy index was the only sector in negative territory on the day.

Recent gains in US stocks have spurred hopes of a "Santa Claus rally," a seasonal phenomenon where the S&P 500 posts gains in the last five trading days of the year and the first two in January, according to *Stock Trader's Almanac*.

That period began on Wednesday and runs through Jan. 5.

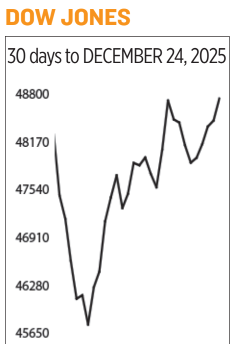
US equities have swung sharply this year as tariff-related headlines, concerns about high valuations in technology and AI companies, and rapidly shifting interest-rate expectations boosted volatility.

Wall Street's "fear gauge" was holding at levels not seen since December 2024.

Still, the bull market, which began in October 2022, stayed intact as optimism around AI, rate cuts and a resilient economy supported sentiment, with all three main indexes set for their third straight yearly gain.

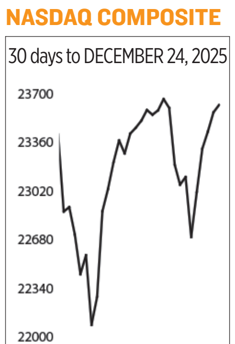
In the year ahead, global markets will be closely watching potential successors to Fed Chair Jerome H. Powell, after President Donald J. Trump said on Tuesday that anyone who disagrees with him would "never be the Fed chairman." — ***Reuters***

DOW JONES



OPEN:48,424.71 CLOSE: 48,731.16
HIGH: 48,771.32 NET: 288.75
LOW:48,386.59 PREV: 48,442.41

NASDAQ COMPOSITE



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HIGH: 23,621.72 NET: 51.46
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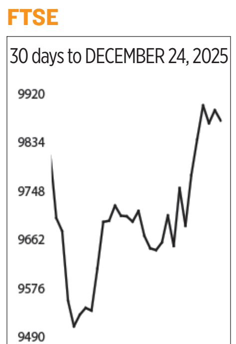
FTSE



OPEN:9,889.20 CLOSE: 9,870.68
HIGH: 9,893.15 NET: -18.54
LOW: 9,862.04 PREV: 9,889.22

Oil drops as investors weigh US data, supply fears

HOUSTON — Oil settled marginally lower on Wednesday, and prices were on course for their steepest annual decline since 2020 as investors weighed US economic growth and assessed the risk of supply disruptions from Venezuela and Russia.

Brent crude futures closed down 14 cents, or 0.2%, at $62.24 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude eased 3 cents, or 0.05%, to $58.29.

Both contracts have gained about 6% since Dec. 16, when they plunged to near five-year lows.

"What we've seen over the past week is a combination of position-squaring in thin markets after last week's breakdown failed to gain traction, coupled with heightened geopolitical tensions including the US blockade on Venezuela, and supported by last night's robust GDP data," IG analyst Tony Sycamore said.

US data showed the world's largest economy grew at its fastest pace in two years in the third quarter, fueled by robust consumer spending and a sharp rebound in exports.

Still, Brent and WTI prices are on track to drop about 16% and 18%, respectively, this year, their steepest declines since 2020 when the COVID pandemic hit oil demand, as supply is expected to outpace demand next year.

On the supply side, disruptions to Venezuelan exports have been the most significant factor pushing up oil prices, while Russian and Ukrainian attacks on each other's energy infrastructure have also supported the market, Haitong Futures said in a report.

More than a dozen loaded vessels are in Venezuela waiting for new directions from their owners after the US seized the supertanker Skipper earlier this month and targeted two additional vessels over the weekend.

"A choppy holiday trade looks to be the norm here with the Venezuela blockade being the focal point into the holiday weekend," said Dennis Kissler, senior vice-president of trading at BOK Financial.

Additionally, oil shipments from Kazakhstan via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium are set to drop by a third in December to the lowest since October 2024 after a Ukrainian drone attack damaged facilities at the main CPC export terminal, two market sources said on Wednesday.

US crude inventories rose by 2.39 million barrels last week, while gasoline stocks increased by 1.09 million barrels and distillate inventories rose by 685,000 barrels, market sources said, citing American Petroleum Institute figures on Tuesday. — ***Reuters***

SPOT PRICES

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2025

METAL

PALLADIUM free $/troy oz	1,693.17
PALLADIUM JMI base, $/troy oz	1,750.00
PLATINUM free $/troy oz	2,181.05
PLATINUM JMI base $/troy oz	2,285.00
KRUGGERAND, fob $/troy oz	4,423.00
IRIDIUM, whs rot, $/troy oz	4,490.00
RHODIUM, whs rot, $/troy oz	8,190.00

GRAINS (December 24, 2025)
(FOB Bangkok basis at every Thursday)

FRAGRANT (100%) 1st Class, $/ton	1,190.00
FRAGRANT (100%) 2nd Class, $/ton	1,157.00
RICE (5%) White Thai- $/ton	430.00
RICE (10%) White Thai- $/ton	428.00
RICE (15%) White Thai- $/ton	426.00
RICE (25%) White Thai- $/ton (Super)	426.00
BROKER RICE A-1 Super $/ton	394.00

FOOD

COCOA ICCO Dly (SDR/mt)	4,280.24
COCOA ICCO $/mt	5,869.10
COFFEE ICA comp '2001 cts/lb	289.77
SUGAR ISA FOB Daily Price, Carib. port cts/lb	14.93
SUGAR ISA 15-day ave.	14.59

LIFFE COFFEE
New Robusta 10 MT - $/ton

	High	Low	Sett	Psett
Jan.	4,018	3,973	4,012	3,970
Mar.	3,885	3,790	3,858	3,824
May	3,818	3,733	3,793	3,762
July	3,772	3,693	3,751	3,719

LIFFE COCOA
(Ldn)-10 MT-£/ton

	High	Low	Sett	Psett
Mar.	4,315	4,208	4,216	4,303
May	4,300	4,197	4,205	4,284
July	4,291	4,193	4,198	4,274
Sept.	4,272	4,179	4,181	4,256

COCONUT

MANILA COPRA (based on 6% moisture)

Peso/100kg		Buyer/Seller
Lag/Qzn/Luc	25	6,950.00/7,000.00

Philippine Coconut Oil - Crude

CIF NY/NOLA	116.50
FOB RAIL/NOLA	123.50

COCONUT OIL (PHIL/IDN),$ per ton,
CIF Europe

Dec./Jan.'26	0.00/2,250.00
Jan./Feb.'26	0.00/2,212.50
Feb./Mar.'26	0.00/2,212.50
Mar./Apr.'26	0.00/2,205.00

LONDON METAL EXCHANGE

LME FINAL CLOSING PRICES, US$/MT

	3 MOS
ALUMINUM H.G.	2,960.50
ALUMINUM Alloy	2,509.00
COPPER	12,162.50
LEAD	1,994.50
NICKEL	15,739.00
TIN	42,815.00
ZINC	3,090.50

Gold, silver and platinum take a breather after record rally

GOLD PRICES edged lower on Wednesday, taking a breather after surging past the key $4,500-an-ounce mark earlier in the session, while silver and platinum trimmed some gains following their record-breaking rally.

Spot gold was down 0.2% at $4,479.38 per ounce at 1:57 p.m. ET (18:57 GMT), after marking a record high of $4,525.18 earlier in the session.

US gold futures for February delivery settled 0.1% lower at $4,502.80.

The gold market is seeing some chart consolidation and mild profit taking after record highs, said senior analyst at Kitco Metals Jim Wyckoff.

Gold tends to do well in a low-interest-rate environment and thrives during periods of uncertainty.

US President Donald J. Trump said on Tuesday he wants the next US Federal Reserve chair to lower interest rates if markets are doing well. The US central bank has cut rates three times this year and currently traders are pricing two rate cuts next year.

On the geopolitical front, the US Coast Guard is waiting for additional forces to arrive before potentially attempting to board and seize a Venezuela-linked oil tanker it has been pursuing since Sunday, a US official told Reuters.

Silver hit an all-time high of $72.70 and was last up 0.7% at $71.94 an ounce.

"The next upside target for gold market is $4,600/oz and for silver is $75/oz by the end of the year. The technicals remain bullish," Mr. Wyckoff added.

Silver prices have surged 149% year to date on strong fundamentals, outpacing bullion's gain of over 70% during the same period. — ***Reuters***