UNITED PERFORMANCE METALS
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Market Informer

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U.S. payrolls unexpectedly fell by 92,000 in February; unemployment rate rises to 4.4%—The U.S. economy lost jobs in February, a month marred by severe winter weather and a strike at a major health care provider, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported March 6.

Nonfarm payrolls fell by 92,000 for the month, compared to the estimate for 50,000 and below the downwardly revised January total of 126,000. February marked the third time in the past five months that payrolls declined, following a sharp revision showing a drop of 17,000 in December.

At the same time, the unemployment rate edged higher to 4.4% as jobs declined across key areas. A broader measure of unemployment that includes discouraged workers and those holding part-time positions for economic reasons moved lower, at 7.9% or 0.2 percentage point below the January level.

Health care, the primary growth driver in payrolls, saw a loss of 28,000 due largely to a strike at Kaiser Permanente that sidelined more than 30,000 workers in Hawaii and California. Though the strike has since been resolved, it occurred during the BLS survey week so it subtracted from the jobs total.

While the jobs picture was weak, wages rose more than expected. Average hourly earnings increased 0.4% for the month and 3.8% from a year ago, both 0.1 percentage point above forecast.

Full Story *Source: CNBC, 3.6.2026*

Why Metal Price Forecasting Is Broken, And How to Fix It—If you sit in a U.S. C-suite or finance chair, you've probably had the same experience: metal prices move faster than your planning cycle does, and your "forecast" feels more like wishful thinking than a decision tool.

From our vantage point, working with U.S. manufacturers and industrials, the problem isn't that metals are "unpredictable." It's that the way most organizations forecast metals isn't built for how you actually buy, budget, and manage risk.

Let's unpack where things go wrong and how we've designed MetalMiner and Sage to address those gaps in a practical, non-theoretical way.

Why Do Traditional Metal Price Forecasts Fail?

Most forecasts start with the news cycle: tariffs, central bank moves, geopolitical shocks, strikes, and headlines out of China. Those factors matter, but they rarely map cleanly to when hot-rolled coil, aluminum, or copper will move enough to justify changing your purchasing strategy.

Full Story *Source: MetalMiner, 3.2.2026*

Prices surge to highest level since 2022 as Middle East conflict escalates: PMI

Prices jumped to their highest levels since June 2022 as manufacturers navigate tariff and inflationary costs, according to the Institute for Supply Management's latest Purchasing Managers' Index report. Despite this surge manufacturing continued to expand last month, driven by new order and backlog growth.

ISM's index registered at 52.4% in February, a decline of 0.2 percentage points from January. A PMI index below 50% generally shows an industry in contraction.

Three of the organization's four demand indicators — new orders, backlog of orders and new export orders — have been expanding since the start of 2026. New orders expanded across U.S. manufacturing in February, most notably in four of the "big six" sectors: computer and electronic products, chemical products, machinery and transportation equipment.

At the same time, customers' inventories continued to be "too low," according to the report. This is often a trigger for more orders and a signal for positive growth, Susan Spence, chair of ISM's Manufacturing Business Survey Committee, said on a call with reporters March 2.

That is "what we believe happened this month," Spence said about February's results.

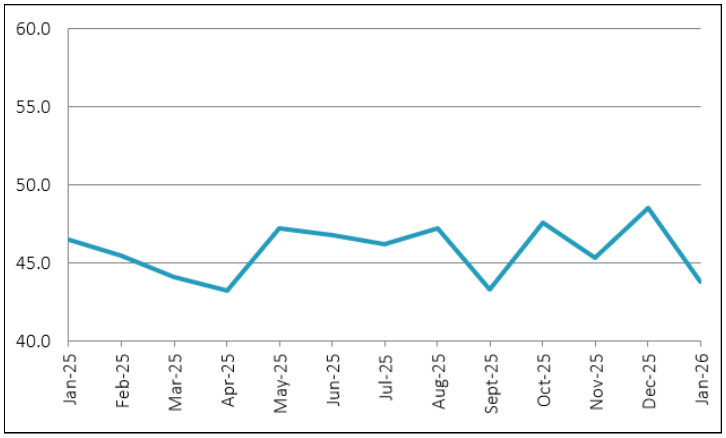
Image: Adobe Stock

Demand sentiment has also improved among manufacturing executives surveyed for the report. For every two positive comments, there was one negative comment, Spence said. January had the same ratio, which is "certainly encouraging" following months of volatility fueled by tariffs.

Panelists' comments around hiring versus headcount reduction also improved to a ratio of 1-to-1.4. While many executives are still citing tariffs for why they are not filling open roles, Spence said "it's a more positive trend than we have seen" and the best ratio since May 2025.
Full Story *Source: Manufacturing Dive 3.2.2026*

Key Economic Indicators

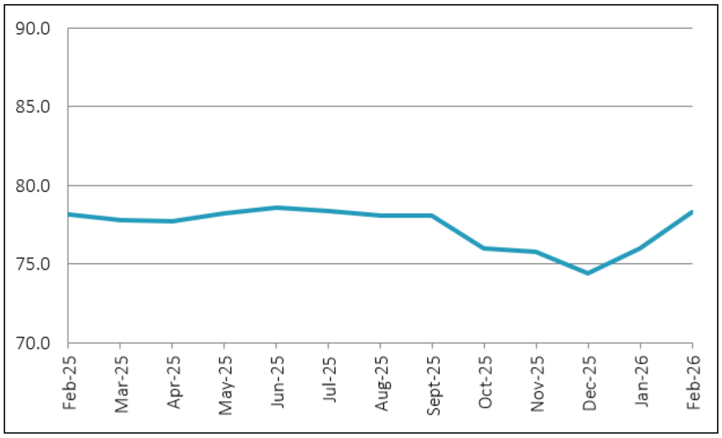
Architecture Billings Index (ABI)



The AIA/Deltek Architecture Billings Index® (ABI) score for the month declined to 43.8 from 47.1 last month, indicating that more firms saw a decline in billings in January than in December. In addition, inquiries into new projects declined for the first time since April 2025, and the value of newly signed design contracts also softened. There remains uncertainty among clients about starting new work, and the new projects that do get started tend to be smaller than in the past.

Billings declined at firms across all regions of the country in January, except in the South, where they were essentially flat. While firms located in the Midwest saw some growth in late 2025, that growth has now receded, and firms in that region are seeing declines again. Business conditions also remained soft at firms of all specializations in January, although the pace of the billings decline has slowed in recent months at firms with a multifamily residential specialization. However, these firms have still not seen any billing growth since mid-2022.
Source: American Institute for Architects, 2.18.2026

Steel Capability Utilization



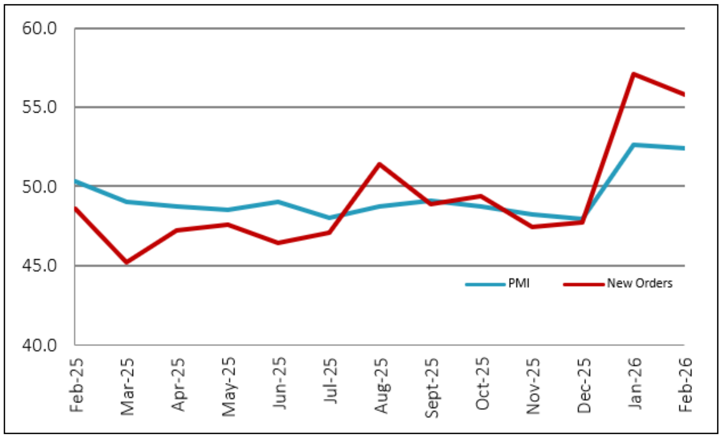
In the week ending on February 28, 2026, domestic raw steel production was 1,811,000 net tons while the capability utilization rate was 78.3%. Production was 1,705,000 net tons in the week ending February 28, 2025, while the capability utilization then was 76.5%. The current week production represents a 6.2% increase from the same period in the previous year. Production for the week ending February 28, 2026 is down 0.3% from the previous week ending February 21, 2026 when production was 1,817,000 net tons and the rate of capability utilization was 78.5%.

Adjusted year-to-date production through February 28, 2026, was 15,048,000 net tons, at a capability utilization rate of 77.2%. That is up 5.0% from the 14,332,000 net tons during the same period last year, when the capability utilization rate was 76.4%.

Broken down by districts, here's production for the week ending February 28, 2026, in thousands of net tons: North East: 131; Great Lakes: 515; Midwest: 290; Southern: 811 and Western: 64 for a total of 1811.
Source: AISI, 3.5.2026

Purchasing Managers Index (PMI)®

The Manufacturing PMI® registered 52.4% in February, a 0.2-percentage point decrease compared to the reading of 52.6 in January. The overall economy continued in expansion for the 16th month. (A Manufacturing PMI® above 47.5%, over a period of time, generally indicates an expansion of the overall economy.) The New Orders Index expanded for the second straight month after four straight readings in contraction, registering 55.8%, down 1.3 percentage points compared to January's figure of 57.1%. The February reading of the Production Index (53.5%) is 2.4 percentage points lower than January's reading of 55.9%. The Prices Index remained in expansion (or 'increasing' territory), registering 70.5%, an 11.5-percentage point jump from January's reading of 59% and its highest reading since June 2022 (78.5%). The Backlog of Orders Index registered 56.6%, up 5 percentage points compared to the 51.6% recorded in January and its highest reading since May 2022 (58.7%). The Employment Index registered 48.8%, up 0.7 percentage point from January's figure of 48.1%.



The Supplier Deliveries Index indicated a further slowing for the third month in a row after one month in 'faster' territory. The reading of 55.1% is up 0.7 percentage point from the 54.4% recorded in January. (Supplier Deliveries is the only ISM® PMI® Reports index that is inversed; a reading of above 50% indicates slower deliveries, which is typical as the economy improves and customer demand increases.)
Source: Institute for Supply Management, 3.2.2026

Industry Articles

Rolls-Royce raises outlook, plans up to $12 billion share buyback as engine demand boosts growth

Image: Adobe Stock

Rolls-Royce said on February 26 it expects profits of over £4 billion ($5.42 billion) this year as the aero engine and power systems maker promised another year of robust growth.

The aerospace giant is targeting underlying operating profit of between £4 billion and £4.2 billion in 2026, above the midpoint of £3.65 billion as expected by analysts polled by FactSet. It expects free cash flow of between £3.6 billion and £3.8 billion this year, also above expectations.

It also announced that £2.5 billion of share buybacks would be completed this year as part of a multi-year buyback program of between £7 billion and £9 billion ($12 billion) for 2026 to 2028, above what earlier media reports had suggested.

Shares rose as much as 7% in early trading on February 26. The stock last traded up 4.5% and was on track for a record high after already reaching new highs multiple times this year.

Based on the bullish outlook, the company now expects to deliver profits within the prior mid-term guidance range two years earlier than planned, CEO Tufan Erginbilgic said.

"Our transformation continues with pace and intensity," he said in a statement.

The British company upgraded its 2028 targets to £4.9 billion to £5.2 billion in underlying operating profit, an operating margin in the range of 18% to 20%, and free cash flow of £5 billion to £5.3 billion. Beyond the mid-term, Erginbilgic said he expected his company to benefit from AI, the energy transition, and increased defense spending.

Rolls-Royce shares have been on a tear over the past few years amid growth in all three of its businesses: civil aerospace, defense, and power systems. Over the past 12 months, the stock has more than doubled as the company has thrived amid a transformation plan launched by Erginbilgic, which has boosted investor confidence. The plan includes cutting costs and prioritizing its core businesses.

In 2025, underlying operating profits jumped over 40% to a record £3.46 billion, beating FactSet estimates of £3.32 billion. Underlying revenue in the year rose 12% to £20.1 billion.

Full Story Source: CNBC, 2.26.2026

No slowing on data center builds

There will come a time when the data center build-out follows the path of so many other red hot markets, but that time is not yet here. That was the assessment of many of the participants at last week's FMA Annual Meeting.

CEOs from O'Neal Manufacturing Services, Mayville Engineering Co. and Dane Manufacturing Co. all expressed enthusiasm about these structures and their companies' role in supporting them. "It's a three-to-five-year cycle, if not longer," said Jag Reddy of MEC. "It's going to be a cyclical end market, but at least for the next three-to-five years we will see significant growth."

"2025 would not have been a profitable year [without data centers]," added O'Neal's Kent Brown. "Hopefully it lasts until ag comes back."

And Michael Murdock of Goldman Sachs noted that spending on data centers in 2026 is projected to increase 62% from the previous year. However, he acknowledged that number could be overly ambitious, with supply constraints for materials, labor and energy all potential curbs to that kind of ramp up. Even so, the market will remain on the upswing."

Full Story Source: Metal Center News 3.2.2026

AI is accelerating activity. Is it improving thinking?

More connected systems are forcing manufacturers to reckon with their production layouts to stay competitive. Afzal, who has spent 10 years working on warehouses and facilities, said he sees increased congestion and repeat impact areas, with infrastructure "taking more hits than it was designed for" due to increased automation.

"If the physical environment does not evolve at the same pace, pressure will rise quickly," Afzal said. "AI can improve workflows, but it cannot fix a layout that has existing friction."

Automation is expected to more than double across manufacturing by 2030, according to a survey of hundreds of executives conducted by PwC. The competitive edge, however, will go to the companies that can effectively integrate AI into their systems and have their workforces buy in to the transformation, said Ryan Hawk, a global and U.S. industrials and services leader at PwC and author of the recently published report.

"As automation becomes ubiquitous, the advantage shifts from who has tools to who can orchestrate them across the enterprise," Hawk said in an email.

Full Story Source: Manufacturing Dive 3.4.2026

Trade

Tariff refunds: Court provides first step with liquidation order

Image: JHVEPhoto - stock.adobe.com

The procedural gridlock surrounding refunds for now-defunct Trump administration tariffs has started to loosen following an order from the Court of International Trade.

Senior Judge Richard Eaton on March 4 ordered Customs and Border Protection to liquidate unprocessed entries on U.S. imports and reliquidate those that have been processed but not finalized "without regard" to the levies President Donald Trump instituted last year under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. The Supreme Court struck down those levies last month.

Liquidation, essentially the finalization of the total tariff amount owed, occurs following a roughly 300-day stretch during which companies can provide revisions to information related to a good's entry into the U.S.

The court's order means that CBP must issue refunds to shippers who paid IEEPA tariffs on imports that have not been finalized via liquidation, according to James Kim, an international trade partner at ArentFox Schiff.

"This is the most significant development on IEEPA refunds since the Supreme Court ruling itself," Kim said in a LinkedIn post.

Meanwhile, for goods for which the tariff amount was estimated upon entry but not yet paid, CBP will simply remove the IEEPA charge upon liquidation, according to Pete Mento, director of global trade advisory services at Baker Tilly.

However, despite this critical step, there remains a great deal of uncertainty around what happens next.

"The real complexity — and where the real money sits — is with entries that already liquidated with IEEPA duties," Mento said in a LinkedIn post. "That's where protests, court orders, and whatever refund mechanism ultimately emerges will matter."

Furthermore, despite the court's ruling, the federal government could appeal the decision, further delaying any potential action by CBP until the Federal Circuit issues a ruling, according to Kim.

An appeal is all the more likely because authority to grant universal relief for entries subject to IEEPA duties is not clear, according to Gregory Husisian, a partner at Foley & Lardner. He added that the court could run into legal hurdles, including last year's Supreme Court ruling that federal courts lack the authority to issue nationwide injunctions.

"As such, we believe there is a 100% chance that this will be appealed," Husisian said in an email to Supply Chain Dive.

As the situation develops, Kim said that shippers should continue to monitor liquidation dates and deadlines to submit protests and register to qualify for electronic refunds via CBP's Automated Commercial Environment.

"When refunds do start flowing, importers set up for ACH will receive their money faster and with less friction," Kim said.

Less friction doesn't mean no friction, however, as CBP has indicated that it plans to review entries before issuing any refunds, Mento said in another LinkedIn post.

"In other words, refunds may be coming, but they are not going to be automatic or instantaneous," Mento said.

Full Story Source: Supply Chain Dive, 3.5.2026

Trade

European Union halts trade deal with United States in wake of new tariffs

Image: Adobe Stock

The fallout from the U.S. Supreme Court's decision that overturned Trump administration International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) tariffs continued last week.

As Connecting the Dots reported previously, in the wake of the decision President Trump issued Section 122 tariffs totaling 15% on most imports into the U.S. The president immediately exempted products from Canada and Mexico from the penalties and, a few days later, omitted products from Britain and the European Union (EU) as well. The move was not enough for policymakers on that continent, however. On February 23, the European Parliament froze ratification of the EU's trade deal with the United States.

Speaking with U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, U.K. trade chief Peter Kyle "underlined his concerns about further uncertainty for business" and reinforced "the need to honor the U.K.-U.S. deal," which was agreed to in May 2025.

The debate over how to issue refunds for the tariffs struck down by the Supreme Court also continued last week. As The Associated Press reported, more than 1,000 companies, including FedEx, have already filed lawsuits seeking tariffs refunds.

President Trump responded to the lawsuits by stating on social media that his administration would oppose moves to refund the payments. Indeed, shortly after that statements was posted, the U.S. Department of Justice submitted a request to federal courts where the suits had been filed asking judges in those jurisdictions to wait up to four months before taking a procedural step to start refund proceedings. The pause would "allow the political branches an opportunity to consider options," the DOJ argued.

Full Story Source: Supply Chain Dive, 3.5.2026

Aluminum price jumps as Iran conflict puts Middle East supply at risk

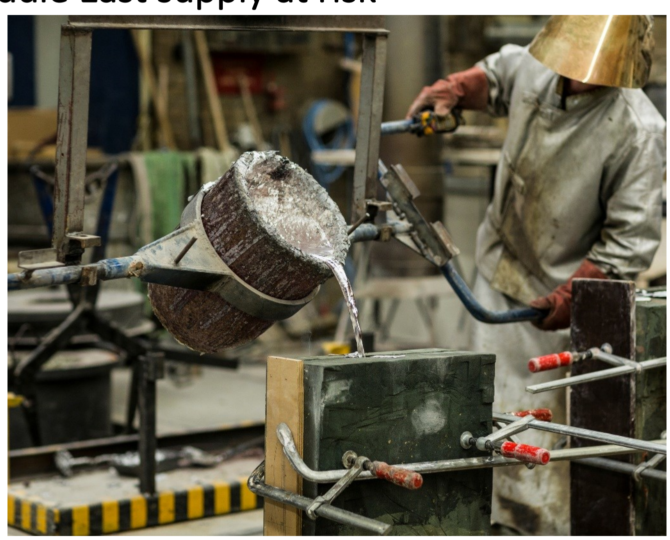


Image: Adobe Stock

Aluminum rallied on concerns that a critical supply route for Middle Eastern producers will be disrupted by conflict in a region responsible for a significant chunk of global output.

The metal advanced 1.7% to the highest since January on the London Metal Exchange. The Strait of Hormuz — a trade chokepoint off the coast of Iran — is used by many of the area's major aluminum producers to ship out metal and bring in raw materials.

Conflict in the Middle East spread over the weekend after the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran, and Tehran retaliated with strikes on multiple countries. The region accounts for about 9% of the world's aluminum production capacity, according to consultancy AZ China Ltd., and prices typically have been sensitive to spikes in regional tensions.

Emirates Global Aluminum, the UAE's top producer, operates smelters in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, while Aluminium Bahrain runs one of the world's largest single-site smelters. The UAE confirmed over the weekend that debris from an aerial interception caused a fire at one of the berths at Jebel Ali port in Dubai, several kilometers from EGA's facility.

Potential disruptions to bauxite or alumina flows that feed smelters in the Middle East present a very significant risk, said Li Xuezhi, head of research at Chaos Ternary Futures.

Aluminum price spreads also tightened March 2, with spot contracts rising to trade at a premium to later-dated futures on the LME, a condition known as backwardation that signals spot demand is exceeding supply. Rio Tinto Group also suspended negotiations with Japanese clients over second-quarter aluminum supply, citing U.S. and Israeli strikes against Iran.

Full Story Source: Mining.com 3.2.2026

UPM Updates

UPM Advanced Solutions: your one-stop shop for additive manufacturing

UPM Advanced Solutions is your one-stop shop for additive manufacturing solutions. Our team of experts supports cutting edge industries with tailored solutions and streamlined logistics support to ensure quick delivery and value-added services that meet exacting standards.

Build Plate Design & Fabrication

Constructed from durable materials, UPM Advanced Solutions' build plates ensure stability and compatibility with various printing materials. These plates feature treated surfaces to optimize adhesion and prevent warping, offering customizable options for size, shape, material, and finish. These plates are fully machined to spec and are engineered to seamlessly integrate into your workflow.

Build Plate Refurbishment

As build plates are used and exposed to heat and stressors, the plate may begin to thin and become prone to distortion. UPM Advanced Solutions' build plate refurbishment program checks for plate thickness, flatness, parallelism, surface finish, and true position on holes and counter bores. Our in-house grinding machine is able to restore plates back to exacting standards for continual usage, saving you money on replacement costs and minimizing disruptions to your printing workflow.

Build Plate Inventory Management

UPM Advanced Solutions' build plate inventory management system helps record important data for your build plates and manages inventory supply chain and logistical operations. With this

program, each plate is given a unique barcode that can be integrated with your MES/ERP system. This system allows you to pull historical records for every build plate, including reuse count, measurements, and more. To continue reading about UPM Advanced Solutions' suite of additive manufacturing solutions, please click here.

United Performance Metals: inventory management and processing services

United Performance Metals is more than just your specialty metals and alloys provider. UPM provides unparalleled value, with custom supply chain solutions and in-house FIRSTCUT+® Processing Services.

Just-In-Time Inventory Programs

UPM offers JIT & Vendor Managed Inventory solutions to reduce inventory carrying costs, eliminate waste, and keep operations moving efficiently. Just-in-time inventory ensures low on-hand inventory for customers, with frequent small deliveries and tight coordination to minimize excess inventory. UPM's Vendor Managed Inventory program has customers provide data and consumption statistics, allowing UPM to forecast demands and replenish stock as needed. This process helps prevent stockouts and increase supply chain efficiency and reliability.

Sourcing Solutions for Non-Standard Items

Non-standard items usually include hard-to-find grades, custom chemistries, unusual sizes, or products requiring special processing. Because these materials involve longer lead times and limited mill availability, specialized sourcing strategies are essential. United Performance Metals is your specialty metals solutions center, with access to niche alloys, customizable solutions, and processing capabilities.

Kanban Program Management

Kanban Program Management is a

visual, pull-based inventory and workflow control system used to ensure materials are replenished only when needed. The program works by establishing a predefined inventory level. To continue reading about United Performance Metals' inventory management solutions and FIRSTCUT+® Processing Services, please click here.