

Stocks Climb as Economic Data Again Top Forecasts

NEW YORK (AP) — Investors are returning to Wall Street after getting fresh signs that their doomsday forecast for the economy might have been overdone.

The government says February brought unexpected increases in demand for big-ticket manufactured goods and sales of new homes. Economists had expected both readings would add to an extended slump.

Many traders are relieved to see even modest signs that the economy could be halting its slide. Better-than-expected reports on retail sales, housing starts and inflation have helped propel a two-week rally in stocks.

In midday trading, the Dow Jones industrial average is up 145 points at 7,805. The Standard & Poor's 500 index is up 14 at 820, while the Nasdaq composite index is up 26 at 1,542.

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