

## Oklahoma job gains point toward improving labor market

Unemployment rate drops across 75 of 77 Oklahoma counties

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Suggesting widespread modest improvement in the job market, unemployment in November fell in 75 of 77 state counties and in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, as it did in three-quarters of U.S. cities, according to state and federal statistics released Wednesday.

The jobless rate in Oklahoma City's metro area slipped to 5.5 percent from 5.8 percent in October and 6.3 percent in November last year. In Tulsa and Lawton, November unemployment was 6.4 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively, down from 7.5 percent and 6.7 percent a year ago.

The report by the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission showed Oklahoma City gained 3,200 jobs from October to November, and 17,800 over the past year, including a collective 5.6 percent year-over-year increase in mining, logging, construction and manufacturing jobs. Conversely, information and government jobs since November 2010 have fallen by 4.8 percent and 0.3 percent, respectively.

Only two Oklahoma counties edged up in unemployment in November: Adair, 6.9 percent, up from 6.8 percent in October; and Ottawa, 5.8 percent from 5.6 percent.

The highest unemployment rates again were concentrated in the southeastern part of the state. Latimer County, at 10.1 percent, followed by Okmulgee at 9.1 percent and McCurtain at 8.8 percent. The lowest were among western counties, including Roger Mills, 2.5 percent; Dewey and Ellis, both at 2.8 percent; and Harper, at 3.1 percent.

Commission economist Lynn Gray said the monthly decline in metropolitan Oklahoma City's unemployment is good news for the local economy because it was caused by a large increase in employment.

“This was the best gain in employment for November that Oklahoma City has seen since before the recession,” Gray said.

Nine of the past 10 months have seen job gains, which he said is a “clear and evident” trend of an improving labor market.

Steven Agee, dean of the Meinders School of Business at Oklahoma City University, said the real positive is manufacturing has started to improve.

“All in all, it looks good,” Agee said. “Of course, our very vibrant energy sector helped cushion the downtown from a few years ago.”

Agee thinks job seekers returning to the labor market may put an upward pressure on subsequent unemployment rates.

“They may have dropped out of the market because they were frustrated,” he said, “but, now that they see things are improving, are coming back in.”

Job seekers who dropped out aren't considered part of the labor force, Agee said. If they return, they'll be counted among the unemployed, he said.



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