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Economy and Business

Monday, September 05, 2011

Ohio unemployment is nearing historical highs

The state's decline in wages is even more dramatic.

by WKSU's STATEHOUSE BUREAU CHIEF KAREN KASLER



Reporter
Karen Kasler

A new report on the workforce in Ohio shows the state is hitting some historical highs. But while everyone can agree this is bad news, Ohio Public Radio's Karen Kasler has two different views on those figures.

Kasler on unemployment numbers

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Kasler on unemployment numbers

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This Labor Day is nothing to celebrate if you're looking at Ohio's jobless rate, says Amy Hanauer with Policy Matters Ohio.

"Male employment levels are the lowest they've ever been since they've been keeping track. Long term unemployment as a percentage of the unemployed is the highest it's ever been, and our wages in Ohio seem to be going down more quickly than in any other state."

Hanauer says median hourly wages declined more in Ohio than in any other state between 2000 and 2010. Overall, it's a report that Hanauer describes as dismal. "We're really getting away from making sure that every Ohioan can contribute to and benefit from our economy."

And a well known conservative economist agrees with Hanauer, at least about the statistics. Richard Vedder is a distinguished professor of economic at Ohio University. He says the report's claims that jobless among men and long term unemployment are at historical highs are on target, and he says while he hasn't checked it, it's entirely plausible that Ohio has seen the worst wage declines in the nation. But he has a different conclusion.

"The reason the numbers are so dismal is businesses lack confidence. They're scared, they're afraid of hiring workers because they don't know what the future would be because of federal policies and until fairly recently I think state policies."

As she looks over the numbers, Hanauer says she's most worried about the long term unemployed and the impact of that over time.

"We're finding that certain workers have lost their jobs and just cannot get back into the labor market – for six months, for a year, a year and a half. And that is really going to lead to communities and families falling apart."

But Vedder says time is the problem – he blames the extension of unemployment benefits to 99 weeks, and suggests it should go back to 26 weeks.

"When you pay people to be unemployed, more people will be unemployed. This

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