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More mixed messages:

Welcome news on unemployment but the jobs survey shows weakness

October brought a welcome drop in the Ohio unemployment rate, to 5.3 percent from 5.6 percent the month before, according to data released today by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). The figure was based on a regular survey of households that showed the number of unemployed declined by 14,000 and the labor force increased. However, a separate ODJFS survey of employers showed job growth of just 1,000 last month, a meager gain in a state with 5.3 million jobs.

It is not uncommon for these two surveys to produce different pictures of our economy. The surveys measure jobs and employment differently. They have different sample sizes, with the employer survey (Current Employment Statistics) including a far larger share of employment. They also survey different groups. The survey that is responsible for the unemployment rate (Current Population Survey) covers households and the survey responsible for the job growth numbers covers employers. The CES is more widely used to measure employment levels and trends, while the CPS tracks unemployment.

“Today’s report underscores the variability inherent in the monthly numbers,” said Hannah Halbert, workforce researcher with Policy Matters Ohio. “The monthly numbers are always preliminary and subject to revision and benchmarking. Longer trends are more reliable indicators and Ohio’s job growth trend is one of underperformance.”

Ohio’s 12-month job growth rate did not break 1 percent (0.7 percent), including the 1,000 jobs gained in October and an upward revision of the gain previously reported for September. Over the same time, the national growth rate (1.9 percent) was more than double the state’s. While the country has recovered the jobs lost during the recession and has grown by an additional 1 percent, Ohio still needs 110,900 jobs (2 percent), just to get back to our pre-recession job count.

“The monthly jobs data continue to send mixed messages but the overall trend is clear,” said Halbert. “Ohio is not keeping pace with the nation and we are nowhere near robust job growth.”

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*Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute
with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.*