

## **Two steps forward, one step back: March jobs report chips away at big February gain**

After making solid gains in February, Ohio reversed course in March, losing more than 4,000 jobs. The first quarter of 2017 has failed to show reinvigorated job growth in the state. Ohio has gained a total of 15,000 jobs since December, which is slightly more than half of what we had gained through the first quarter of last year (28,200).

“The promise of job growth has gotten a lot of bad policy approved in this state. What we’ve seen in Ohio is economic underperformance and tax revenue giveaways that primarily support the wealthiest among us,” said Hannah Halbert, researcher with Policy Matters Ohio. “The state budget crunch shows that these policies are not working. We have sluggish growth and now we don’t have the revenue to adequately fund basic services.”

Construction again drove job growth in production work, adding 1,000 jobs in March. Mining and logging, and manufacturing also had small gains, 200 and 100 jobs respectively. This positive news could not offset losses in the service sector. The shuttering of brick-and-mortar retailers is stirring concerns about a shift in the industry. Ohio lost 2,000 retail jobs last month. That loss is eclipsed by larger declines in transportation, warehousing and utilities (2,800), information (2,800) and administrative, support, and waste services work (5,100).

March was a relatively disappointing month for national job growth as well. The U.S. added only 98,000 jobs. Even with that slowdown, Ohio didn’t measure up. The state’s 12-month growth rate is only 0.7 percent, less than half the national average (1.5 percent).

“We’ve reduced our ability to address the opioid crisis, our high rates of infant mortality and the college affordability crisis by doubling down on tax cuts for the rich. For what? Ohio must set a different course.” Halbert said.

The household survey, which generates the data for the unemployment rate, uses a different methodology from the employer survey that produces the data on job growth. The household survey showed no change in the state’s unemployment rate in March (5.0 percent). The national unemployment rate fell to 4.5 percent. The Ohio labor force increased by 28,000, which is good news. The state needs more than 200,000 more people working or actively looking for work to reach our pre-recession labor force size.

“The increase in the state’s labor force is a bright spot in today’s report,” said Halbert. “But we appear to be back on the job-growth roller coaster: one positive report, undercut by losses in the following month. We need consistent growth and an improvement in wages. The current policies of the state just won’t get us there.”