

A sobering Labor Day snapshot: editorial

Belatedly -- at least to the millions of Americans without work -- leaders of both parties are focusing on jobs. President Barack Obama plans to unveil his agenda to spur hiring Thursday night, and several potential Republican challengers have begun to [roll out ideas](#). Speaker John Boehner will make a [major economic speech](#) next week.

But today, as Americans mark the Labor Day holiday, the parades, the picnics, the promises from politicians all hide a terrible truth: Many workers are working harder for less, while others are caught in the vortex of long-term unemployment that has pushed them to the brink of poverty.

Consider some recent findings from the left-leaning [Policy Matters Ohio](#) think tank on employment trends in the state:

- Median hourly wages in Ohio declined 86 cents between 2000 and 2010, the biggest drop in the country.
- The percentage of those either employed or still looking for work fell in relation to those so discouraged they're no longer looking. That was the fourth straight yearly drop, now at its lowest level since the late 1980s.
- Joblessness among African-Americans is at a crisis level, at more than 16 percent.
- Last year, a heartbreaking 42.4 percent of jobless Ohioans had been out of work for more than six months, the highest level in more than 60 years.

These are harsh realities not just for the unemployed but also for the rest of us, because the stagnant labor market impedes recovery in retail sales and housing. The market alone cannot correct these trends. It is up to all Ohioans, and our political leadership, to show the imagination and forward-thinking in education, taxation and spending policies needed to bring vibrancy and hope back to the employment market.