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Local News

Ohio felt recession harder

Report says state lags behind in U.S. recovery

By William Hershey
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COLUMBUS | The national recession may have ended in November 2001 but the bad economic news continued for thousands of Ohio workers like Tony Roberts and Jay Darryl Booth who were laid off in January from Delphi Corp. plants in Moraine.

The State of Working Ohio 2003, a new report from Policy Matters Ohio of Cleveland, found that Ohio suffered more than the nation as a whole in the aftermath of the recession, which began in March 2001.

In addition, the state's economy took a bigger hit after this recession than it did after the last recession that began in July 1990 and ended in March 1991, according to the report.

Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research group that focuses on economic policy in Ohio and issues facing working people.

Major findings in the report include:

- In the two years after the recession began in March 2001, Ohio lost a net of 185,000 jobs. Only California and New York lost more jobs. Two years after the last recession, Ohio ranked 11th in jobs lost.

- Most of the job loss in Ohio and nationally was in manufacturing. The state saw a reduction of 118,500 manufacturing jobs between March 2001 and March 2003. Only Texas and California lost more

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manufacturing jobs.

- Payroll employment dipped 3.3 percent in Ohio and 1.8 percent nationally between March 2001 and March 2003. Two years after the start of the last recession, payroll employment declined by 0.9 percent both in Ohio and nationally.

Release of the report comes a day before President Bush is scheduled to make a Labor Day appearance in northeast Ohio in Richfield, speaking to members of the Ohio Operating Engineers union and their families about labor, the economy and job creation.

Gov. Bob Taft, Bush's fellow Republican, will join the president in Richfield. Ann Husted, Taft's spokeswoman, said that for nearly two years the governor has been saying Ohio's economy is in transition from one based on manufacturing to an economy based on high technology and research.

Ohio has trailed some other states in trying to make this transition, Taft has said.

That's why he has been pushing so hard for his \$1.6 billion Third Frontier Project, aimed at linking universities with industry to promote research and create high-paying jobs, Husted said. The governor is asking voters in November to approve issuing \$500 million in bonds for the Third Frontier.

The governor has said many of the lost manufacturing jobs won't be coming back, Husted said.

"We are focusing very strategically on bringing the kinds of industries and growing the kinds of industries that will take the place of the manufacturing jobs that are lost," she said.

Bryan Bucklew, vice president for economic development and public policy for the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce, said the study provides empirical data to validate what he has been hearing from the local business community.

"Our community, even Ohio, is still heavily reliant on manufacturing. Invariably, the last to recover in a recession is durable goods," Bucklew said.

Manufacturing is not the largest employment sector

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in Ohio, but it's significant. In 2001, only six states had a higher percentage of manufacturing jobs than Ohio, according to the report.

Bucklew said local business leaders recognize that the economic times are changing.

"That's one of the reasons our area is making a big effort on information technology skills. That's why we've been a big proponent, at least at the start, of the Third Frontier," Bucklew said.

The new jobs that might result from the Third Frontier provide no immediate help for Roberts and Booth, the two Delphi workers laid off in January.

Both signed on with Delphi in 1997 and had more than five years seniority when laid off. Roberts, 39, of Dayton left a job as a customer service representative with an insurance company to work for Delphi, where he said he made about \$60,000 last year.

Booth, 42, of Middletown left a job in retail sales to work in the factory. He said he earned about \$50,000 last year.

Both had family members who had worked for General Motors, the former parent company of Delphi.

"You think you have security," Roberts said. He is the sole wage earner in his family. His wife, Connie, home-schools the couple's two children.

"Having a mortgage and a car payment, I'm really concerned," Roberts said.

Booth's wife, Marti, works in the insurance department of a hospital. They have a son who's starting his second year of college.

"I'm scared to death," Booth said.

Roberts and Booth are members of Local 801 of the International Union of Electronic Workers-Communications Workers of America. The union protested after the company cut more than 500 jobs, including Roberts' and Booth's, at plants on Dryden Road and Kettering Boulevard.

An independent arbitrator in August issued a final decision that said Delphi had to abide by an agreement to keep the work force at the plants at 1,500 and pay back wages to all laid-off workers up to the 1,500 level.

A Delphi spokesman has said the company was disappointed in the ruling, and was looking at alternatives and "weighing the effect this decision will have on the long-term viability of the facility."

Roberts said he expects Delphi to continue to fight the ruling.

"Nothing would make me happier than to go back (to work)," he said.

In addition to the job losses in manufacturing, Ohio also lost significant number of jobs, 59,000, in two other employment sectors — retail trade industries and trade, transportation and utilities, the report said.

Ohio gained jobs in four sectors — education and health services, leisure and hospitality, other services, and public administration, the report said. The gains were modest, however, and not enough to overcome the heavy losses in other areas.

Amy Hanauer, co-author of the report and executive director of Policy Matters Ohio, said in an interview that while the economy appears to be picking up a little, Ohio remains in a "pretty difficult spot."

The number of people filing claims for unemployment is "very high right now," she said.

New claims for unemployment insurance were 68.8 percent higher in the third week of August 2003 than in the third week of August 1999, the report said.

Hanauer said Taft probably is correct that many of the manufacturing jobs won't be coming back to the state.

"I think manufacturers have decided they can make products more cheaply in other places," she said.

She added, however, that there is a future for manufacturing in this country.

"Not everything is going to be made elsewhere," she said. "When things are made domestically, they're going to be made by high-skilled manufacturing workers."

That could be a good thing for Ohio, if the state invests in the training these workers will need, she said.

"We want high skilled, highly educated workers. That's how we're going to have a good standard of living," Hanauer said.

Making such investments in "human capital" is one of the recommendations in the report aimed at speeding economic recovery and avoiding future slowdowns.

The report also recommends improving the state's long-term fiscal policy with proposals such as "restoring the shrinking corporate franchise tax" and extending the state sales tax to cover more services. Taft advocated both changes in this year's budget negotiations but, for the most part, was rebuffed by the legislature.

Other recommendations include stimulating the economy through projects such as Taft's school building program and demanding that the federal government provide fiscal relief to the states.

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