

- The Ohio Development Department announced that qualified Ohioans threatened with losing their heating services have until March 31 to apply for assistance through the Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program. Applicants may still apply by mail for the regular portion of the Home Energy Assistance Program through May 31.

State Unemployment Rate Down as Fewer Look for Work

Ohio's unemployment rate was 5.9 percent in February, down from 6.2 percent in January, according to data released Friday by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. The U.S. unemployment rate was 5.6 percent in February, unchanged from January.

"The drop in the unemployment rate in Ohio last month was due largely to a decrease in the size of the labor force, which includes those who are seeking jobs, and not gains in employment," ODJFS Director Tom Hayes said. "Service sector employment decreased slightly during February, while employment in goods production held steady."

The number of workers unemployed in February was 347,000, down from 368,000 in January. The number of unemployed has decreased by 21,000 over the past 12 months from 368,000. The February unemployment rate for Ohio was down from 6.2 percent in February 2003.

Ohio Nonagricultural Wage and Salary Employment (Seasonally Adjusted)

Ohio's nonfarm wage and salary employment fell 10,900 over the month, from 5,378,600 in January to 5,367,700 in February 2004, according to the latest establishment survey conducted by ODJFS.

Service providers lost 10,800 jobs during the month to 4,297,000. Trade, transportation, and utilities dropped 4,600. Educational and health services declined 3,000, while professional and business services was 2,700 lower. Employment was also down in leisure and hospitality (-1,500), other services (-1,000), information (-800), and financial activities (-700). Government employment was up 3,500 over the month. Goods-producing industries declined 100 over the month to 1,070,700. A decline of 1,200 in manufacturing was mostly offset by gains in construction (+700) and natural resources and mining (+400).

Over the last 12 months, nonagricultural wage and salary employment dropped by 38,400 jobs. The goods-producing sector was down 31,900. The decline occurred in manufacturing, down 34,200. Construction added 2,000 jobs, while natural resources and mining was 300 higher. Employment in service-providing industries fell 6,500 over the year. The largest decline was in professional and business services (-9,200). Decreases also occurred in trade, transportation, and utilities (-8,300), other services (-3,500), information (-2,900), and government (-1,700). Leisure and hospitality employment advanced 9,300. Educational and health services rose 5,800, while financial activities was up 4,000.

Zach Schiller, Policy Matters Ohio, noted that Ohio lost 10,900 jobs in February compared to the month before, and even the service sector, with the exception of government, performed poorly.

"We are not seeing the sustained growth in the job market that Ohio needs," Schiller said.

February's county unemployment rates are still being calculated. County and other substate unemployment rates for February will be available April 2. Starting with the April 16 release of the March unemployment report, state and substate data will again be issued simultaneously.

Dems Hold First Tax Reform Business Roundtable

On a day when Ohioans were greeted with the headline "Ohio's Job Market Stays Sluggish," a committee of Democratic Senate and House legislators, labor union officials, university and think-tank scholars and representatives from Ohio businesses met to talk about the issue of tax reform and what the state needs to do to recover from the effects of the national recession that has resulted in the loss of 223,700 Ohio jobs since March of 2001. [\(continued\)](#)