

Growth is here; now create jobs

There's a fabric to our economic life, and everything is interwoven: You make things or perform a service, for which you receive money to buy the merchandise and services other people produce. Recently released statistics show the current economic situation is tugging at the loose threads of that fabric in Acadiana.

One set of figures, from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, was greatly encouraging: In Lafayette and St. Martin, considered together, the total value of goods and services produced in 2010 was up by an eye-popping (and inflation-adjusted) 8.3 percent from 2009. That's another couple of billion dollars generated by the labor and capital of local people. It's good news in St. Landry, Acadia, Evangeline, Iberia and Vermilion, too, because Lafayette and St. Martin account more than half the 250,000 jobs throughout the region. This growth in gross domestic product — the sixth-greatest among more than 360 metropolitan areas — occurred in a year marred by the BP oil spill, the deepwater drilling moratorium and a national economy that grows in fits and starts when it grows at all.

At the same time, total civilian nonfarm employment is down from 2010, according to figures from the Louisiana Workforce Commission. Nearly 17,000 people were unemployed across the region in August:

7,500 in Lafayette-St. Martin, 3,000 in St. Landry, 1,500 in Acadia, 1,000 in Evangeline, 2,300 in Iberia and 1,500 in Vermilion. Total employment was down nearly 5,000 from August 2009.

And the Louisiana Budget Project noted last week that the recent Census Bureau report on U.S. poverty in 2010 showed that the number of people living in Lafayette-St. Martin homes with incomes below the federal poverty line rose to 17 percent in 2010 from 13 percent in 2009. The advocacy group blames part of the rise in poverty on state government policies that rely solely on spending cuts, including cuts to important education and health care programs, to balance the budget.

But we'd also note that, whatever failures the Jindal administration is responsible for, the administration has been relentless in pursuit of new and better-paying jobs, the real solution to our predicament.

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the works, which should reduce concerns about the state of public health in Louisiana. School accountability and a greater emphasis on job-focused, two-year post-secondary education will offer employers more skilled workers. And economic development efforts have been aggressive and fruitful.

One appalling statistic says that as many as 750,000 Louisiana people may be "disengaged" from the workforce — not working and not counted as part of the workforce for some reason, including a lack of basic job-seeking and job-keeping skills. Training in those areas is becoming a condition of applying for government assistance.

We hope this sense of focus and teamwork continues regardless of the results of this year's elections and beyond the next gubernatorial term.



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