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## **[Job shortage in W.Va. factor in high unemployment \(http://timeswv.com/business/x1666057235/Job-shortage-in-W-Va-factor-in-high-unemployment\)](http://timeswv.com/business/x1666057235/Job-shortage-in-W-Va-factor-in-high-unemployment)**

**By Jessica Borders**

**[Times West Virginian \(http://timeswv.com\)](http://timeswv.com)**

FAIRMONT — According to the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, plenty of individuals in the state are ready to join the workforce, but there just aren't enough jobs.

This nonprofit budget and policy research group, located in Charleston, was started in December 2007. It concentrates on issues that mainly affect low- and moderate-income families in the state as well as tax, budget and economic development issues, said Sean O'Leary, policy analyst for the center.

He said the Center on Budget and Policy started publishing a monthly analysis called "Jobs Count" earlier this year, with the first issue released in March. Every month, the group produces a two-part report giving an update on employment in West Virginia.

One portion of the publication studies data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to determine what sectors of the economy are gaining and losing employment, the status of unemployment, and if the labor force is growing or shrinking. It provides "an overall snapshot of the economy," O'Leary said.

The second segment of "Jobs Count" always takes a closer look at a different topic of interest to people, such as labor force participation rates, he said. The November 2011 update, released Dec. 20, focuses on job openings versus the number of unemployed people.

In this most recent publication, the center found that the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased to 7.9 percent in November.

"The unemployment rate has been very high for a very long time," O'Leary said.

Even after the recession ended, the unemployment rate in West Virginia went as high as 9.7 percent. In November, the rate actually dropped below 8 percent for the first time in 2 1/2 years,

which was a good sign, he said.

O'Leary explained that there hasn't been a structural change to the economy, because that would mean the skills of workers in West Virginia and other states no longer match the jobs, and that isn't the case.

This is evident in the way that the unemployment rates have increased similarly for both college and high school graduates, he said. If the skills were mismatched, the less educated workers would be impacted much more.

The Center on Budget and Policy examined different data sources on job openings across the state and determined that there were approximately

five unemployed workers in West Virginia for each new job opening. That information explains why the unemployment rate has been consistently high — because of a job shortage, O'Leary said.

He said West Virginia of course isn't the only state that has high unemployment. But compared to other states, one area where West Virginia is lacking is the percentage of workers who have a college education, which will take a long-term effort to fix. Attracting higher paying jobs is important for the economy.

In order to improve the job shortage situation, the country needs to create more demand for jobs, which would help bring down the ratio of the number of unemployed workers for each new job opening in West Virginia, O'Leary said.

On a positive note, the state saw more than 1,000 jobs added in October and again in November, which equals two consecutive months of considerable job growth, he said. The state has only seen back-to-back improvement like this two other times in the past three years.

During both October and November, it wasn't just one sector of the economy that experienced gains in employment, but jobs were added throughout the economy. On the other hand, no sectors lost a lot of jobs either, which helped the small amounts of growth in the various sectors to add up, O'Leary said.

The state's total nonfarm employment — at 755,000 in November — is the highest its been in 2 1/2 to three years. Plus, the gap between the job count now and the number before the recession is at its smallest, he said. The amount of jobs in West Virginia in November was 5,300 less than the pre-recession numbers.

The number of jobs in the state increase by 10,500 from January to November 2011, while only 7,700 jobs were added during the same period of 2010.

The November 2011 "Jobs Count" and previous issues are available on the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy's website, [www.wvpolicy.org](http://www.wvpolicy.org), as well as [jobscount.org](http://jobscount.org), which takes people directly to the publication.

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