



Sponsor says law helps job outlook

Statistics show different picture of immigration law

By Dana Beyerle

Montgomery Bureau Chief

Published: Thursday, November 24, 2011 at 3:30 a.m.

House Majority Leader Micky Hammon, R-Decatur, said in a Nov. 18 statement that Alabama's strict immigration law is helping Alabamians find jobs.

MONTGOMERY | The co-sponsor of Alabama's immigration law claims it is helping Alabamians find jobs, but statistics tell a different story.

House Majority Leader Micky Hammon, R-Decatur, said in a Nov. 18 statement that Alabama's strict immigration law is helping Alabamians find jobs.

"We've heard anecdotal evidence from all corners of the state about how more Alabama citizens are being hired in jobs formerly held by illegal immigrants, but the statewide and county-specific data released today is probably the best statistical proof we've seen to indicate this is happening," Hammon said.

His statement followed news that the unemployment rate in Alabama dropped from 9.8 percent in September to 9.3 percent in October.

The unemployment rate decrease is correct, but an analysis of the state's jobless report shows that it was attributed to workers withdrawing from the labor market.

About the only gain in jobs for October were in municipal and state government, specifically education employees, and possibly seasonal hires ramping up for the holiday shopping season.

Sam Addy, director and research Economist for the Center for Business and Economic Research, said the areas of traditional immigrant labor — agriculture, construction, food preparation, restaurant food service, and hotels and motels — did not show employment gains.

And some of those jobs are "under the radar," he said. "If (a job is) not counted in the labor force, it doesn't count (statistically)."

Addy said he doubts the law has increased the number of jobs.

"It's too soon to tell," he said Tuesday. "If I hazarded a guess, I would say not at all."

The law passed earlier this year and implemented in stages may have its greatest impact as its sponsors designed it to do — urge illegal immigrants and their families, some of whom may be legal residents, to leave the state.

According to the Department of Industrial Relations, Alabama gained about 5,000 jobs in October. Most of the increase was due to 3,100 jobs in local government education and about 2,000 in state government.

Employment decreases (or no changes) from September to October were reported in construction, food manufacturing, animal slaughtering and processing, and leisure and hospitality, which includes the restaurant trades. (Limited service eating places grew by 200 jobs, however.)

Gov. Robert Bentley, who signed the anti-immigration law also co-sponsored by Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale, was cautious in addressing the job picture. “We cannot say definitively that the immigration law led to the drop in the unemployment rate,” spokeswoman Jennifer Ardis said.

Alabama Arise Citizens Policy Project, which opposes the immigration law, said the job picture also reflected seasonal hiring gearing up for the holidays.

“We’ve got a long way to go before we can accurately measure the effects on Alabama’s labor market of running off a population of low-income workers,” said Arise policy analyst Stephen Stetson. “It will be January before temporary holiday hires are let go and February at the earliest before we can get an accurate snapshot of employment.”

Efforts to reach Hammon on Wednesday were not successful. In his statement, he expressed confidence in the law’s effect.

“Despite how desperately illegal immigrant sympathizers have tried to portray this law as somehow harmful to our state’s economy, the truth is more Alabamians are working today thanks in part to our decision to crack down on illegal immigration,” Hammon’s statement said.