



OUR VIEW: Analysis shows a steep drop in the state's unemployment rate isn't because of Alabama's overreaching immigration law

Published: Thursday, December 01, 2011, 5:44 AM Updated: Thursday, December 01, 2011, 6:50 AM

By **Birmingham News editorial board**

One shouldn't blame state Rep. Micky Hammon, R-Decatur, for wishing the state's mean-spirited immigration law is responsible for Alabama's sharp decline in unemployment for October.

The rate fell from 9.8 percent in September to 9.3 percent in October, and Hammon, the House majority leader and primary co-sponsor of HB56, latched onto the immigration law as the reason for the steep drop.

With all the national and international criticism Alabama is getting for passing such a severe immigration law, Hammon no doubt is grasping for something positive about the law to tout.

"More Alabamians are working today," Hammon said, "thanks in part to our decision to crack down on illegal immigration."

Well, not so fast.

Alabama and two other states, Michigan and Minnesota, each saw a half-percent drop in their unemployment rates in October, the largest in the nation. Neither Michigan nor Minnesota have draconian immigration laws in place.

State Sen. Bryan Taylor, R-Prattville, said three of the five states with the steepest unemployment rate drops in October have passed tough immigration laws. "It's hard to draw a causal relationship conclusively, but it's certainly plausible," he said.

It is true that South Carolina and Utah, which did pass overreaching immigration laws, also had significant drops in unemployment, but their laws aren't nearly as tough as Alabama's.

But wait. Georgia and Arizona didn't make the top 12 states with significant drops in unemployment rates, and they have laws like South Carolina and Utah. Vermont did make the top 12. So did Pennsylvania. And Idaho. And Maryland. And none of those has Alabama-style immigration laws.

Something else must be going on, and the analysts say, yes, indeed, there is:

People are dropping off unemployment rolls because they've become discouraged by not being able to find a job and have stopped looking, according to an analysis by Arise Citizens' Policy Project. Alabama's labor force shrank by more than 6,000 workers in October, and the labor force has been shrinking since June. Economists say a shrinking labor force makes it easier for a state to post an unemployment rate decline, even if job growth is small.

While Alabama created fewer than 10,000 jobs in October, many of those were seasonal jobs and about half were state and local government jobs. Government jobs can't be held by undocumented workers, so those were not jobs being filled by Alabamians because undocumented workers were leaving the state.

The job sectors that do use immigrant workers -- restaurants, hotels, construction and manufacturing -- lost jobs in October. If undocumented workers are vacating those jobs, Alabama workers aren't rushing to fill them. Indeed, this week, the Associated General Contractors, based in Arlington, Va., said Alabama having the second-highest number of construction jobs lost from September to October -- 3.2 percent or 2,700 jobs -- is related to construction crews leaving the state in the wake of the immigration law.

Just because Hammon and other supporters of the harsh immigration law want to believe it has had a role in lowering the state's unemployment rate doesn't mean it has.

Most likely, considering the damage the law is doing to Alabama's reputation in the international community as a good place to do business, we'll lose many thousands more jobs the longer the law stays in place.

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