

MASS. POSTS STRONGEST YEAR FOR JOB GROWTH SINCE 2000

By Andy Metzger STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, JAN. 22, 2015..... Massachusetts hit an almost 15-year high for annual job growth in 2014 and the unemployment rate dropped to 5.5 percent as the state added 10,900 jobs in December, according to data released Thursday.

Last year was the strongest year of job growth since 2000 when 95,500 jobs were added, according to the state Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

In 2014, Massachusetts added 60,900 jobs, according to preliminary numbers. The state labor office reported 55,200 jobs were added in 2013 and in 2012 Massachusetts added 53,100 jobs.

The drop in the unemployment rate - it was 5.8 percent in November - brings the Bay State back below the national rate of 5.6 percent. The state's rate dipped to 5.5 percent last June, but has been well above that in the months and years since the 2008 market collapse.

The jobs news arrived as economists and state officials were set to gather at the State House to discuss expected revenues in the next fiscal year and during a period when Gov. Charlie Baker said a \$765 million budget hole must be plugged.

December's numbers also add a book-end to the tenure of Gov. Deval Patrick, who took office in January 2007 when the Massachusetts unemployment rate was 4.6 percent. He left office on Jan. 8.

"Gov. Baker must take note of the proven results implemented under Democratic leadership and replicate the types of investments we need to continue this positive trend," said Massachusetts Democratic Party Executive Director Matthew Fenlon in a statement.

News on December job growth follows on the heels of an Associated Industries of Massachusetts Business Confidence Index that found 2014 ended with the highest business confidence rating since July 2007.

"There is reason to believe, moreover, that this upwelling of confidence will prove more lasting than the increase of early 2012, which was undone by fiscal conflict in Washington," said AIM Board of Economic Advisors Chairman Raymond Torto in a statement in early January.

Amid the good news, there is still concern within the manufacturing field.

Steve Sawin, president of Lowell-based staffing company Operon Resource Management, said in a statement, "[W]e still have more work to do to bring more workers into the manufacturing sector, which has a long history of fueling future job growth potential."

The AIM survey found confidence was up in Greater Boston and outside the hub, and confidence was slightly lower among employers in the manufacturing sector.

AIM President Richard Lord described the rating as a "strong close" while noting 9 percent of employers, mostly in manufacturing, said business conditions in 2014 were "deteriorating."

The December unemployment rate was down 1.6 percent from the year before, when it stood at 7.1 percent.

The labor office revised downward the number of jobs added in November, from 13,500 to 11,700.

The biggest December job gains were in the leisure and hospitality sector, where 4,700 jobs were added. The financial activities, manufacturing and information sectors all saw job losses in December.

END 01/22/2015

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