Economic woes causing out-migration pattern in Louisiana

By CARL REDMAN
Capitol news bureau

The movement of people into and out of Louisiana during the 1980s offers a textbook example of the link between the economy and where people choose to live, according to a Louisiana Tech University researcher.

When the Louisiana economy was expanding under the pressure of high oil prices, the state was a mecca for the jobless of other states. But when Louisiana's own economy hit the skids, Louisiana saw more people moving out than moving in — with the out-migration accelerating as things got progressively worse, Louisiana Tech economic research director James Michael said.

The same pattern held true in East Baton Rouge Parish where there was a net out-migration of 2,744 people over the last six years.

East Baton Rouge Parish now has 392,547 people — up from its 366,191 residents in 1980. With 2,744 more people moving out of East Baton Rouge than in, the parish's 26,356-person population increase since 1980 was the result of births outnumbering deaths, Michael said.

Louisiana's population increased from 4,299,884 in 1980 to 4,501,250 in 1986 — but the increase was due to births outnumbering deaths and had little to do with migration, according to the latest population estimates from Louisiana Tech.

The latest update of Louisiana's population shows Louisiana saw a net in-migration of 36,522 people between July 1980 and July 1981. That migration pattern held stable in 1982, when 35,583 more people moved into Louisiana than moved out, he said.

But 1982 marked the beginning of Louisiana's economic decline, and that was reflected in 1983 when net in-migration fell to 10,429, Michael said.

Since then, Louisiana has had more people move out than move in, and in 1986, Louisiana had a net out-migration of 28,063, Michael said.

The net result was that over a six-year period, only 8,232 more people moved into Louisiana than moved out, Michael said.

Michael said a similar pattern emerged inside the state, where a relative handful of parishes accounted for the bulk of the state's population change.

Eight parishes — Caddo, Lafayette, St. Tammany, Ascension, Bossier, Livingston, Tangipahoa and Vernon — accounted for 43.6 percent of the total population change in the state, Michael said.

These parishes had 24.8 percent of the natural change — births minus deaths — and 731 percent of the net in-migration. After all the numbers were tallied, those eight parishes had a net in-migration of 58,559, Michael said.

"There were 12 other big and medium-size parishes that had growth, but it was solely because of a greater number of births than deaths," Michael said. Those parishes were Calcasieu, East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Orleans, Ouachita, Rapides, Terrebonne, Acadia, Iberia, Lafourche, St. Bernard and St. Mary.

"Those 12 had a net out-migration," Michael said. "In other words, more people moved out than moved in. . . . They had 58.0 percent of the natural change, minus 698 percent of net out-migration. They had a net outward migration of 55,920."

Michael said Louisiana had three basic clusters of immigration — Lafayette, Shreveport-Bossier and the Florida Parishes.

"In some cases, like in New Orleans and in northwest Louisiana, you can match the amount of inward migration against outward migration in other parishes," Michael said.

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Migration

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"For Caddo and Bossier, you have outward migration in north Louisiana farm parishes. In the New Orleans area, you can match the losses of Jefferson, Orleans and Plaquemines with gains in St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, St. John, St. Charles and St. Bernard.

"It's not one for one. That's not direct movement between parishes, but in the aggregate, that is what the effect was.

"The fact there hasn't been a heavy out-migration from Lafayette reflects the pattern of layoffs in the oil industry," Michael said.

"Personnel reductions in the oil industry did not come in headquarters-type parishes," Michel said. "Lafayette and New Orleans have little drilling and production, yet they have a lot of offices. Roughnecks and roustabots, those are the ones that are let go. It's only in the last year or so that they've let landmen (from headquarters offices) go."

Net migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Net migration</th>
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<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>36,522</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981-82</td>
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<td>1985-86</td>
<td>-28,063</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Table shows net migration — people moving into the state minus people moving out of the state — as of the middle of each year.