La. jobless rate near 15 percent

Total doubles national unemployment figure

By BILL McMAHON
Capitol news bureau

Louisiana’s jobless rate turned sharply higher in January to nearly 15 percent, placing state unemployment at twice that of the nation.

Louisiana continues to have the highest unemployment rate in the United States. The state’s jobless rate was 14.7 percent in January, up from 13.4 percent the previous month and twice the nation’s 7.3 percent rate.

Secretary of Labor Gayle F. Truly said Wednesday 1,651,900 were employed and 284,100 unemployed in January. The number of unemployed was 21,600 higher than December’s 262,500 and 49,300 above the number unemployed in January 1986.

Louisiana's unemployment rate was 12 percent a year ago. Unemployment may rise slightly next month, Truly said. Manufacturing employment may increase, but trade employment is expected to fall, she said.

The jobless rate in the Baton Rouge metropolitan area — the parishes of East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Ascension and Livingston — was 11.9 percent in January, up from 10.7 percent in December and 11.1 percent in January 1986.

The national rate was 25 percent during the Great Depression of the 1930s, said Labor Department spokesman Allen Johnson.

Not included in the jobless rate figures are 4 percent to 5 percent of the work force who no longer are eligible for unemployment benefits, have given up looking for work or left the state, Johnson said.

In 16 individual parishes, the unemployment rate is more than 20 percent. At 32.6 percent, Assumption Parish (Napoleonville) has the highest rate. Lincoln Parish (Ruston) at 7.1 percent has the lowest unemployment.

Employment figures on the oil industry, upon which much of the state’s economy is based, show a continuing decline.

Louisiana oil and gas extraction, a key indicator, is down 300 jobs from December and dropped 19,900 jobs since January 1986, Truly said. Construction dropped 1,600 jobs from December and is still down 10,500 jobs from January 1986, she said.

Transportation and public utilities employment is down by 700 jobs from December and is still down 7,400 from a year ago.

Manufacturing employment dropped 2,100 jobs from December and is still down 3,700 jobs from January 1986. The unemployment rates in the metropolitan areas are as follows: Alexandria, 11.8 percent in January.
Jobless

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up from 10.4 percent in December;
Baton Rouge, 11.9, up from 10.7;
Houma-Thibodaux, 20.5, up from 18.7;
Lafayette, 16.6, up from 15.3; Lake
Charles, 15.2, up from 14.4; Monroe,
12.1, up from 10.5; New Orleans, 11.6, up
from 10.9, and Shreveport, 13.8, up from
12.5.

In area parishes, the unemployment
rates are East Feliciana, 13.7 percent,
up from 11.9 percent; Iberville, 19.0, up
from 17.2; Pointe Coupee, 24.0, up from
20.0; Tangipahoa, 16.5, up from 15.0;
Washington, 14.8, up from 13.6, and
West Feliciana, 14.3, up from 11.4.

Amidst the generally gloomy figures,
the Labor Department reported that
about 700 people have completed
training at the Boeing Co. aircraft
renovation plant in Lake Charles.

According to Steve Jones, Boeing’s
public relations manager, about 700
completed Job Training Partnership
Act training through a contract with the
Department of Labor.

“Boeing had anticipated a 20-30
percent attrition rate during the
training,” Jones said, “instead, it has
been 5 percent.”

Boeing may cap out at 1,500
permanent employees, plus 805
construction workers, the Labor
Department said, with 95 percent of the
employees Louisianians.