La. jobless rate down; still highest

Capitol news bureau

About 16,000 more people were working in Louisiana last month than the month before, significantly reducing the state's jobless rate that still remains the highest in the nation.

Preliminary figures show 12 percent of the work force was unemployed in April, down from a revised rate of 13.5 percent in March, according to the state Labor Department.

In the four-parish greater Baton Rouge area, 9.5 percent of the work...
force was out of a job, down from 10.7 percent a month earlier. That translates to about 1,700 more jobs in East Baton Rouge, Ascension, West Baton Rouge and Livingston parishes.

Statewide, some 1.7 million people were working last month and 230,000 people seeking work couldn’t find it, according to Labor Secretary Gayle Truly.

The jobless rate was down from the revised April 1986 figure of 12.7 percent — the first time year-to-year monthly rates have declined since 1984.

The 12 percent rate is the lowest monthly rate since January 1986.

But it is far above the national unemployment rate of 6.2 percent.

Louisiana remained at the top of the nation’s jobless list. West Virginia was second with 11.4 percent and Mississippi recorded a 9.3 percent jobless rate.

The monthly labor report predicted that next month’s report might show a further, but slight, decrease in unemployment during May.

“The construction industry may benefit from better weather conditions. Manufacturing could also increase during the next few months,” the report said.

Louisiana has led the nation in unemployment during most months of the past year or so as the depressed oil and gas industry still has not recovered.

The hardest hit urban area remains Houma-Thibodaux, where 17.5 percent of the labor force was out of work in April, down from 20 percent in March.

Other urban areas also recorded apparent declines in unemployment: Lafayette, 13.2 percent, down from 15.1 percent; New Orleans, 9.9, down from 10.9; Alexandria, 9.8, down from 11; Lake Charles, 12.7, down from 13.5; Monroe, 9.8, down from 11.2; Shreveport, 11.1, down from 13 percent.

Among rural areas, Assumption Parish recorded the worst jobless rate — 30.9 percent. In all, 12 parishes had more than 20 percent of their workforce unemployed.