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## W.Va. lost 25,000 jobs to recession, report finds

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The number of unemployed West Virginians doubled this year as the state lost 25,000 jobs amid the recession, according to a report released Monday.

"The impact on working families has been staggering," said Ted Boettner, director of the West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy, which prepared the report.

One of every six West Virginians now looking for work can't find a full-time job, the report said.

The recession hit the state's manufacturing industry particularly hard. High-wage manufacturing jobs dropped 15 percent this year.

Jackson County had the largest increase in unemployment, according to the report. The closing of the Century Aluminum plant in Ravenswood triggered the spike. The shutdown put 650 employees out of work in January.

Roane County, where many Century Aluminum workers live, had the second highest increase in unemployment.

The recession also affected West Virginia's construction industry, where jobs fell by 11 percent.

The number of low-income West Virginians climbed, and the poverty rate for children increased to nearly one in three this year, according to the report

"Low-wage workers were hit the hardest because most of them didn't qualify for unemployment benefits and had little cushion to fall back on," Boettner said.

Although economists have declared the recession over, the job crisis is not, Boettner said. Economic growth hasn't been sufficient to revive hiring, he said.

It may be late next year before employment starts to rebound, according to the report.

The federal economic stimulus package has boosted unemployment benefits, food stamps and other programs, the report says.

"This recession has been a true test of public programs that aid the unemployed," said Paul Miller, a policy analyst at the Charleston-based think tank.

The report also includes several recommendations for speeding up West Virginia's economic recovery:

| Take full advantage of stimulus funds to fill the West Virginia's budget shortfall: Sufficient federal money remains to eliminate the state's budget gap. Cutting state spending would impede economic growth and increase unemployment.

| Strengthen programs that help families make ends meet: An additional \$22 million in federal funds is available to improve West Virginia's unemployment insurance program and extend benefits. Lawmakers must approve the improvements.

| Support policies that spread taxes across income groups: Low- and middle-income workers pay a much larger portion of their paychecks in taxes than high-income workers. A state earned-income tax credit would help lessen the inequity.

| Address racial disparities: The state should create a cabinet-level Office of Minority Affairs.

"The current economic situation may be best described as 'back from the brink, but not out of the woods,' " said Rick Wilson, who helped write the report. "We have a lot of rebuilding to do, but also an opportunity to create a more diverse economy and more broadly shared prosperity."

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