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New report paints bad state picture

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RIPLEY - Jackson County remains the poster child for the state's recession-plagued areas and unemployment, according to a new report by the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy.

The report, released prior to Christmas, states every West Virginia county has seen an increase in unemployment during the past year with the largest being Jackson County, which has jumped nine points.

Jackson County had the largest increase in its unemployment rate over the last year, as well as the second highest unemployment rate. The steep spike in unemployment was triggered by the closing of the Century Aluminum plant in Ravenswood early last year. The reports states the closure resulted in 650 layoffs and had ripple effects throughout neighboring counties.

Neighboring Roane County had the second highest increase in unemployment and the highest unemployment rate in the state.

Calhoun has also been severely affected, along with Wirt County.

According to the report, which cites a Congressional Budget Office projection, the unemployment rate will continue to rise, peaking in 2010. The budget office projects the national unemployment rate will peak at 10.2 percent in 2010 and drop to 9.1 percent in 2011.

The budget office also predicts the labor market will rebound slowly over the next few years, but full recovery may not be realized until 2014.

The center's report paints a better picture than the monthly labor market information provided by Workforce West Virginia.

According to data for November 2009, Roane County has the highest unemployment rate in the state at 13.8 percent. Calhoun (12.5), Jackson (12.1), Wirt (10.4), Pleasants (10.4) and Tyler (10.1) counties each have double-digit unemployment rates. Those rates are substantially higher than the state's 7.9 percent average.

Wood (8.5), Ritchie (8.3) and Doddridge (7.7) and Gilmer (7.3) counties' rates are average for the month according to Workforce WV data.

Except for Wirt County, which saw a three-tenths of a percent decrease in unemployment between October and November, the other local county rates grew from October.

Keith Burdette, president of the Wood County Economic Development Authority, said there's a lot of reasons to be optimistic for the coming year.

In October an economic index study from Moody's Economy and msnbc.com claimed the recession had ended in one out of every five metro areas in the United State, including the Parkersburg-Marietta area.

"I prefer that one," Burdette jokingly said. "Overall, I choose to be optimistic about it. At the end of the day the next year will be better.

I don't think it is over, but I do think we have seen the worst of it."

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