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OHIO UNEMPLOYMENT RATE HITS 7.2% IN JULY, HIGHEST PERCENTAGE SINCE 1992

State government said Friday that unemployment in Ohio rose to 7.2% last month, climbing to its highest level in 16 years.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services pegged at 430,000 the number of workers without jobs last month. There were 394,000 unemployed in June, when the jobless rate was 6.6 percent.

Not since December 1992 has the state's unemployment rate reached 7.2 percent. A department spokesman said it was 7.3% in November 1992.

How long ago was that? Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton had just defeated President George Bush; Ohio voters approved term limits for legislators; Gov. George Voinovich and legislative leaders agreed on a package of permanent tax increases to balance the budget.

Ohio's unemployment rate for July 2008 was 1.5 percentage points above the national jobless rate of 5.7% for the month.

There was no immediate suggestion that the July report may have been an anomaly.

"We are looking to the August numbers to determine whether this is a trend, and what the trajectory may be," said Keith Dailey, Gov. Ted Strickland's press secretary.

A top Republican leader seized on the announcement.

"Gov. Strickland is providing no leadership to turn around Ohio's economy," said Ohio Republican Party Deputy Chairman Kevin DeWine. "He's offering nothing creative, nothing innovative. He spends his days doing conference calls about Barack Obama's door knocking program and fundraising for the Ohio Democratic Party. Ohioans are struggling to buy gas, pay for groceries and keep their jobs, but Ted Strickland doesn't seem to have a clue how to fix it."

ODJFS said the number of unemployed in the state has grown by 96,000 over the past 12 months from 334,000.

Director Helen Jones-Kelley said the state's labor market "continued to show weakness" last month. "Total employment decreased in both goods-producing and service-providing industries and the unemployment rate rose to 7.2 percent," she said in a news release.

The latest business establishment survey from ODJFS reflects an across-the-board decline in non-farm wage and salary employment. It fell 11,600 over the month, from 5.41 million in June to 5.40 million in July.

A categorical review:

- Service provider employment was down 9,100 during the period. The biggest declines were in leisure and hospitality (-3,000), and trade, transportation, and utilities (-2,500).
- Government employment dropped 1,300, due in part to a reduction in state government.
- Other declines included professional and business services (-1,000); financial activities (-700); educational and health services (-300).