

## Austin area, state see jobless rates edge down in December

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Texas and the Austin area continued to chip away at their unemployment rates in December, according to the Texas Workforce Commission's monthly jobs report released Friday.

**Central Texas' jobless rate fell to 6.3 percent in December, from 6.6 percent the month before, while the state rate declined to 7.8 percent from 8.1 percent in November. The national unemployment rate, by comparison, is 8.5 percent.**

**Austin's 6.3 percent jobless rate is the lowest in two years.**

Last year the Austin area — and Texas as a whole — showed modest job growth at an annual rate of about 2 percent. Texas added 204,500 jobs last year, while the Austin area added 16,100 jobs over the year .

However, the rate of net job growth was negligible for December and well below the annual rates for Texas and the Austin area.

Alan Miller, executive director of the regional arm for the state workforce commission, said he doubts the survey is capturing Austin's growth accurately.

"Personally, I think our local economy is growing and adding more jobs than what is reflected," he said.

For example, he said there have been numerous news reports of software firms expanding or relocating here, but the workforce commission's report reflects zero job growth in the information sector.

"I can't explain that," Miller said.

The data are based on a survey of employers and are updated monthly as well annually. For that reason, the monthly data indicate directions for the economy, but economists tend to favor the annual, corrected numbers.

Miller said the good news is that unemployment rates are dropping and fewer people are filing for jobless benefits.

"Al together, not a bad picture," he said.

Government jobs were a big factor for Texas and the Austin area in December, although for different reasons, according to the report.

Growth in the public sector accounted for half of the 20,200 net jobs that Texas added in December. That increase ended five consecutive months of decline for that sector throughout the state.

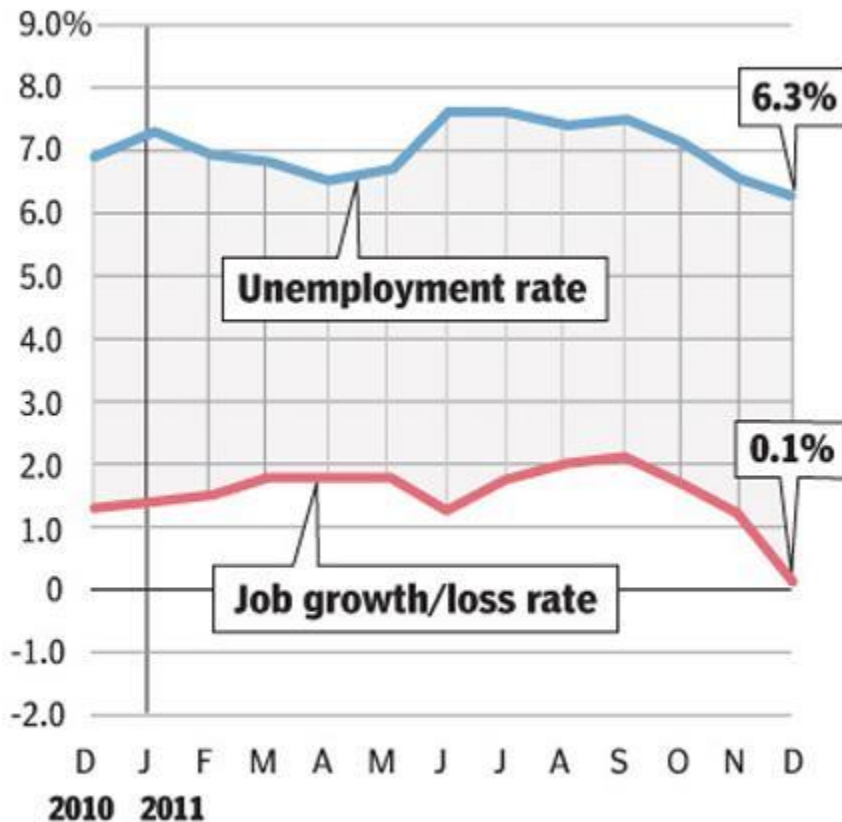
State government added 2,100 positions, while local governments around the state grew by 8,800 jobs, according to the workforce commission's data.

It was just the opposite for Austin.

State and local government jobs declined by 2,400 in December, while the leisure and hospitality sector added 2,100 jobs.

**Despite the improvement in unemployment rates, 12.6 million Americans remain unemployed.** In Texas there are 892,600 without jobs, with an estimated 57,500 Central Texans looking for work.

## Central Texas jobs report



Source: Texas Workforce Commission

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Courtesy of JB Goodwin