

LI JOBLESS RATE FALLS TO 3.3%

Post-2007 low spurs staffing crunch

BY CARRIE MASON-DRAFFEN
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Long Island's unemployment rate fell to 3.3 percent in September, the lowest level in more than a decade, state data released Tuesday show.

The low level of unemployment has left some local employers and staffing companies struggling to find enough qualified workers.

The last time the jobless rate was 3.3 percent was in 2007, before the Great Recession hit. The rate is now less than half the 8.2 percent peak, reached in 2010 and in 2012, following the recession that ended in June 2009.

Tuesday's unemployment rate was down a full percentage point from September 2017, when it stood at 4.3 percent.

"The data suggest that Long Island's labor market remains very strong," said Shital Patel, labor-market analyst in the department's Hicksville office.

The decline comes after a Labor Department report released last week showed job growth slowing on the Island. Long Island had 10,000 more jobs in September than a year earlier. That year-over-year job gain in August was 15,800.

The data in the latest report on the unemployment rate were based on a census survey of



Mahibul Roni, left, of Astoria, talks with Ryan Weaver of Chipotle Grill at a recent job fair in Hicksville.

DATABASE
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of LI jobless
numbers for Sept.
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Long Island residents, regardless of where they work. Last week's job statistics were derived from a survey of Island businesses.

The number of unemployed residents dropped by 14,800 from a year earlier, to 50,000, the lowest for the month of September since 2000. The number of employed grew by 21,400 to 1.46 million, a record

high for the month.

The numbers bode well for the holiday season, said John A. Rizzo, economics professor at Stony Brook University and chief economist for the Long Island Association trade group.

"This is a very strong labor market report that should serve to increase consumer confidence and spending as the holiday season approaches," Rizzo said.

But the low jobless rate also makes it difficult for some companies to fill open positions.

"We're hurting for everything," said Ron Axelrad, chief executive of Access Staffing, a Manhattan-based company with an office in Melville.

He said the shortages include nurses, health aides, information-technology workers and office support employees such as administrative assistants and receptionists.

He said he advises companies that "if they find a good candidate, they have to move on them quickly. Otherwise, they are going to find a job somewhere else."

He is also telling clients they need to improve their pay to attract talent.

"The one thing that really hasn't come along with all these jobs is matching pay rates," said Axelrad, whose company places permanent and temporary workers.

Nassau GOP eyes precincts' return in budget

BY SCOTT EIDLER
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Nassau County would start reopening police precincts next year in Manhasset and Levittown under budget amendments proposed by majority Republican legislators.

The GOP legislators introduced amendments this week that would markedly alter County Executive Laura Curran's budget. The measures include a proposal for \$1.6 million in funding to begin the process of reopening the Sixth Precinct in Manhasset and the Eighth in Levittown. Both were closed in 2012 during a consolidation backed by former GOP County Executive Edward Mangano.

Republicans, who control the legislature, 11-8, also would estab-

lish a \$12.4 million fund to cover costs of potential labor deals with the county's five major unions. Their contracts expired at the end of last year, and the Curran administration did not budget for new contract costs.

Curran, a Democrat, introduced her \$3.075 billion budget for 2019 on Sept. 17. Lawmakers are expected to vote on the budget proposal next Monday.

Republicans say they have found \$22 million in savings, including \$12 million in salary and fringe benefit cuts, to offset the cost of their new proposals. Legislative Presiding Officer Richard Nicoletto (R-New Hyde Park) said the decision not to include labor costs in Curran's original budget was "reckless."

"How could you have a budget that doesn't anticipate labor

costs? It doesn't make any sense," Nicoletto said.

Last week, the Nassau Interim Finance Authority report detailed a potential \$59 million deficit in next year's budget. NIFA chairman Adam Barsky said the biggest risk was "what kind of damage the county legislature can do to this budget." Barsky explained that lawmakers could hurt the budget by knocking out revenue-generating initiatives or inserting overly optimistic revenue projections.

Spokesman Michael Martino said Curran "submitted a fiscally responsible and restrained budget which, according to NIFA, presents the lowest deficit the county has faced since 2014."

A NIFA spokesman declined to comment on the majority's amendment.

Republicans on Monday also removed an \$8 million revenue projection to collect unpaid traffic tickets and other fees.

The administration had hoped to hire a law firm to collect late fees and additional charges incurred by vehicle lease holders from car dealerships and financial institutions that own the vehicles. But the contract lacked support in the legislature.

Legis. John Ferretti (R-Levittown) said reinstatement of the Eighth Precinct "was extremely important, especially in light of the fact that we're fighting the opioid epidemic" as well as MS-13 gang violence in nearby Suffolk County communities.

Residents of his district, which includes Wantagh and Levittown, "should not have to drive all the way to Woodbury

anytime they need to make a report to a detective."

North Shore residents and lawmakers had also long called for the reinstatement of the Sixth Precinct in Manhasset.

Officials from the Nassau County Detectives' Association Inc. said the police department does not have enough detectives to staff separate squads in the Sixth and Eighth. "It's impossible," said Christopher Muchow, second vice president. "They don't have enough detectives."

Only 317 of 360 budgeted detective positions are currently filled in Nassau County.

With Stefanie Dazio

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