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Job numbers post growth

Employment continues upward swing in Sask.

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REGINA -- The job market continued to be hot in Saskatchewan last month, as the province punched up its 12th consecutive month of employment growth.

Data released Thursday by Statistics Canada indicated there were 494,700 people employed in the province in March, up by 20,300 compared to March 2006 and an increase of 2,200 from February of this year.

Doug Elliott, an independent observer who publishes the Sask Trends Monitor newsletter, said the latest statistics are positive news for the province, but perhaps a tad boring for somebody looking to detect new economic trends.

"It's kind of the same thing that we have found in January and February," Elliott said in a telephone interview.

The trend for employment to go up is continuing and the new jobs should be sustainable in the upcoming months, he said.

Industry and Resources Minister Eric Cline was enthusiastic about the employment increases.

"March came in and went out like a lion for jobs, giving Saskatchewan its 12th straight month of record job numbers," Cline said. "Our economy is red-hot -- a testament to our businesses who are seizing opportunities."

MLA Lyle Stewart, who is the industry and resources critic for the Opposition Saskatchewan Party, said the job numbers are good and "we're happy with them."

The job increases are occurring at least partly because the NDP has implemented some of the proposals (such as business tax cuts) that were originally proposed by the Saskatchewan Party, Stewart said in an interview.

The employment growth occurred in several sectors of the economy, most notably in the "trade" sector, which includes jobs in both retail and wholesale trade.

Elliott said the growth of 9,100 jobs in the trade sector might relate to the availability of workers to fill jobs that might otherwise have gone unfilled in earlier months.

Employment in agriculture-related industries dropped by 4,800 jobs last month, compared to March of last year.

The statistics released Thursday indicated the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Saskatchewan was 3.8 per cent last month, down from 5.0 per cent in March of last year and from 4.0 per cent in this February.

Across Canada, the unemployment rate was 6.1 per cent, which was unchanged from February of this year but down from 6.3 per cent in March of last year.

Saskatchewan's unemployment rate was the second-lowest in the country, with only Alberta (3.6 per cent) posting better numbers.

The unemployment rates in Saskatoon (3.6 per cent) and Regina (4.0 per cent) were well below the national average.

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