

The January Review

2010 appears to have been a busy year in the world of State labor legislation. As the first article this month notes, drug and alcohol testing in the workplace, equal employment opportunity, human trafficking, immigration legislation, independent contractors, time off from work, wages paid, and worker privacy were among the most active areas of legislation enacted during the individual sessions of the State legislatures in 2010. The bills that were introduced and then enacted by the States and the District of Columbia encompass all 34 categories of labor legislation tracked by the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division and, according to the authors of the article, include a number of important measures.

Our second article for this issue examines changes in Federal and State unemployment insurance legislation in 2010. There were 6 Federal legislative enactments and one rule that affected the Federal-State unemployment compensation program. The State-by-State overview included in this article indicates that enactments at the State level include provisions on extended benefits, work sharing, tax schedules and taxable wage bases.

Since the 1970s, growth in inflation-adjusted, or "real," hourly compensation has lagged behind labor productivity growth. Our first issue for 2010 concludes with a visual essay by three BLS authors examining the gap between those measures.

Volunteering in the United States in 2010

In addition to providing information on union membership, the Bureau reported this month on volunteering in the United States. As did the unionization rate discussed earlier, the volunteering rate saw a decline. Nearly 63 million people volunteered through or for an organization at least once between September 2009 and September 2010, leading to a volunteer rate of 26.3 percent, 0.5 percentage point below the year-earlier period.

Volunteers spent a median of 52 hours on volunteer activities during the September 2009–September 2010 period. Median annual hours ranged from a high of 96 for volunteers age 65 and older to a low of 40 hours for people age 16 to 34.

The volunteer rate for women has always exceeded that for men during the time in which the data on volunteering have been gathered. In 2010, a little more than 29 percent of women volunteered, as compared with about 23 percent of men.

The complete report, also based upon the CPS, is available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/volun.pdf>.

Union members in 2010

Last year the union membership rate was 11.9 percent, according to data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The rate, which is the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of a union, was down from 12.3 percent in 2009. The number of

workers belonging to unions declined by a little more than 600,000, to 14.7 million.

There were about half a million more union employees in the public sector than in the private sector, and the public sector unionization rate was substantially higher. Private sector industries with high unionization rates included transportation and utilities, telecommunications, and construction. Those with low rates were agriculture and financial activities.

In regard to demographic characteristics, the union membership rate for men was a bit higher than that for women. The gap between the two rates has narrowed considerably over the last couple of decades. Membership rates were higher among older workers and lower among younger workers.

Median usual weekly earnings among full-time wage and salary workers were substantially higher for union members (at \$917) than for those not represented by unions (\$717). In addition to coverage by a collective bargaining agreement, there are a number of reasons that may contribute to the earnings differential.

For a look at the full report on union members in 2010 published by BLS, go to <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>. □

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