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South Carolina's encouraging economic news

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When the unemployment rate is down, politicians swoop in to take credit.

When joblessness is up, there's blame and finger-pointing.

It's up to the voters to sort through the rhetoric. And most would probably agree that no politician deserves as much credit as they'd like – or as much blame as their detractors would heap on them – for any uptick or downturn in the economy.

But while economic news can often be distorted by politics, what's clear is that the economic outlook here in our own state is good news for all of us.

Last month, we learned that South Carolina's jobless rate had dropped to 5.7 percent – well below the national rate of 6.7 percent. We've now got one of the lower unemployment rates in the nation, ranked 17th best among states.

Employment has increased for nine consecutive months. Over the past year, the number of employed South Carolinians rose by more than 28,000 to a record high 2,039,455 while the number of unemployed has dropped by almost 14,000.

"South Carolina's economy continues to grow," says Cheryl M. Stanton, director of the state's Department of Employment and Workforce. "Businesses are confident and have hired more South Carolinians than ever before."

There should be little doubt that much of the success is attributable to the hard work of the Governor's Office, which has been laser-focused on jobs, and the state's Department of Commerce. In just the past month, officials have announced:

- A new packaging facility near Chapin, which they say will mean 130 jobs
- An expansion of the Palmetto State Armory in Lexington County, which will mean about 300 jobs
- A new automotive carpet facility in Cherokee County, which is expected to mean 100 jobs
- An expansion of a Greer, SC manufacturing facility producing tools and tool systems, which will mean an additional 29 jobs
- An expansion of a packaging services facility in Spartanburg, which will mean an additional 32 jobs
- A \$1 billion expansion of the BMW plant in Spartanburg County, which will bring about 800 jobs
- A new peanut processing plant in Darlington County, which is expected to mean 55 new jobs over the next five years
- A new tire recycling plant in Anderson County, which will bring about 30 jobs;
- The expansion of an industrial valve manufacturer into Clarendon County, which will mean 12 new jobs

•The expansion of a specialty chemicals manufacturing center in York County, which is expected to bring 17 jobs

Still, in a state where the various parties can't seem to find a point of agreement on much of anything, the cause of economic rebound is no exception. In late March, when the latest unemployment figures were released, I noticed some South Carolina politicians attempting to deflect praise way from our state's officials and toward the White House.

But to my mind, South Carolina's recent economic successes have come despite Washington, not because of it.

I'm among those who believe Washington's meddling has been detrimental rather than beneficial. There was the "Stimulus," which was sold to the American public with bold promises... promises that went unfulfilled. With an \$850 billion price tag, this federal deficit spending spree squandered resources that might have been better used in the private sector.

Then there was "Obamacare," the nationalized healthcare takeover which many small business owners say is causing them to stop hiring or to reduce their full-time staffs. We don't yet know what Obamacare ultimately will cost or how it will impact our economy, but there's plenty of reason to believe it might do harm.

- Certainly, there are those who will disagree with my opinions on those two issues.

But they can't refute the fact that the Obama administration once tried to rob us of the "crown jewel" of our state's recent economic development achievements, the Boeing plant in North Charleston. It was in 2011 that the National Labor Relations Board filed a politically-charged lawsuit which sought to require the Boeing plant to relocate to Washington State. This was meant to pacify unions in Washington State. (After seven months, the Administration's lawsuit was dropped.)

So yes, our state's economic success has come despite Washington, not because of it.

While our own economic news is encouraging, Washington's ineffectiveness in producing economic growth reminds us that we can't become complacent. Let's all agree that our elected officials must work together to help bring good, new jobs, regardless of who gets the credit.

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