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The trend that has come to define Rhode Island's employment picture in 2015 (indeed, since the end of the recession) continued for the final Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report for the year. In November, Rhode Island's unemployment rate dropped to 5.2%, from 5.3% in October. That's 28 straight months of decreases in the rate of at least one-tenth of one percent. As usual, however, the positive rate resulted from two bits of negative data. Employment actually dropped by 770 people, but 1,461 Rhode Islanders stopped looking for work.

The first chart at right shows that November's results continued a downturn in Rhode Island's underlying employment results. Although the annual revision due next month may shift the picture quite a bit, the state's labor force (those employed or actively looking for work) is nearly back where it was in the middle of 2014, erasing both a sharp downturn at the end of that year and an even bigger increase for the first half of this year.

November was another month in which New England was almost unique in losing employment, with all six states bucking a national trend of increases. The columns in the second chart are consequently smaller for both Massachusetts and Connecticut, this month, but Rhode Island remains the only Southern New England state well below its January 2007 level of employment and labor force.

The third chart illustrates the fundamental problem of the official unemployment rate. The red line shows what Rhode Island's unemployment rate would have been if the labor force had not shrunk since January 2007. As of November, the unemployment rate would actually be going back up, having never dipped below 8%. For November, it would have increased to 8.3%.

