Union Numbers Down

Today’s U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report showed union membership levels in Michigan are down by more than four percent.

The BLS figures show Michigan’s union membership decreased by 38,000 in 2006 — a decline of more than 4 percent from the state’s union membership levels in 2005.

Mackinac Center Labor Policy Director Thomas Washburne said the change in union membership shows that the state needs to fundamentally change its labor climate.

“Moreover,” noted Washburne, “these figures do not tell the whole story, particularly in manufacturing. Union manufacturing losses are being masked by increased union membership in traditionally nonunion sectors like childcare, where 40,000 workers were jointly organized in November by the UAW and a government employees union. This offsetting increase might bode well for union leaders, but it does not look good for Michigan’s unionized manufacturing workers.”

Washburne said a right-to-work state would help grow manufacturing employment.

“Michigan must change its labor climate to reverse this trend,” he said. “Seven of the eight states that experienced nonfarm employment growth of 3 percent or better in 2006 were states with right-to-work laws that prohibit forced union dues or fees. This advantage is consistent with Mackinac Center research showing that from 1970 to 2000, manufacturing employment grew by 1.43 million jobs in right-to-work states, but declined by 2.18 million in non-right-to-work states.”

The AFL-CIO could not be reached for comment.