May 13, 2014

We’ve all heard North Carolina is a target destination for people from far and wide. The state has enjoyed a great reputation as a destination place for recreation, good jobs and a low cost of living. All of these factors figure prominently in the decisions that various industries make about where to locate their companies. Because people see North Carolina as a good place to live, which creates an environment that draws talent, industry has traditionally viewed our state as having a high density of human capital. It’s been well established that having talent density has broad and measurable effects on regional innovation, wages, incomes and development.

Given this reality, the results from a recent Gallup poll are somewhat alarming. According to their analysis, North Carolina ranks near the bottom of all states in residents’ feelings about where they live. Survey respondents were asked, “How would you describe the state where you live?” North Carolina ranked 38th out of all 50 states with only 34 percent of respondents indicating that it’s the best or one of the best possible states to live in. North Carolina was beat out by all states in the Southeast (Virginia 21st, Tennessee 22nd, Florida 23rd, Georgia 25th, and South Carolina 30th), and by one of our other southern competitors, Texas, which ranked fifth.

Featured Contest

Thanks to the Belk Foundation, IEI is launching a Community Action Plan Grant Competition, where winning team(s) can win up to $17,500 to implement their plan to train, retain, and support world-class teachers in North Carolina’s local communities. For more details, click here.

Featured Report

Check out the full results from the Gallop survey mentioned in this month’s article.
What we know and what we don’t

What’s more alarming is the high percentage of residents who plan to leave within the next 12 months. In the same survey, North Carolina ranked 11th out of all 50 states with 16 percent of respondents reporting that they plan to leave soon. When asked about their primary reason for leaving, 37 percent of those respondents cited job related issues more than any other reason. The next closest reason given was “quality of life”, with 15 percent of respondents. Given the low sample size and other inherent qualifiers associated with surveys, we can’t draw any concrete conclusions to this data.

We don’t know if such results are a temporary phenomenon, or if they reflect a growing trend. But what we can say is that the survey gives us a glimpse into some possible underlying dynamics related to the overall economy. The survey could be tapping into some growing unease with North Carolinians’ confidence in the economy and their overall career stability. Given that the survey was taken at the end of 2013, the survey could also reflect North Carolina’s comparatively high unemployment rate and the accompanying uncertainty for those without a job.

Taking these factors into consideration, it’s still noteworthy that North Carolinians have a higher level of apprehension than residents from other states despite the fact that our economy continues to grow. What we’ve got to figure out as a state is how to match the intensity in our overall economic growth with a similar intensity in job and income growth. If we can figure that out, I suspect the unease residents feel about our state will begin to subside and we can reclaim our status as one of the best places to live in the U.S.
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