

Lawmakers on the Joint Economic Committee heard testimony Friday from the commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, following the release of figures that show the jobless rate hit 10.2 percent - the highest number in decades.

Republican Congressman John Campbell of California says there needs to be one focus now.

"These numbers are bad," he said. "I hope that this is a wakeup call to the administration and to the Congress that the number one priority in this country for all Americans, for both parties, and for the administration and this Congress should be jobs, jobs and again jobs."

Bureau of Labor Statistics Commissioner Keith Hall testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, before the Joint Economic Committee hearing on the October jobs report, 06 Nov 2009

The commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Keith Hall, says the unemployment rate is the highest since April 1983. He says that since the recession began 22 months ago, the country has lost 7.3 million jobs, about 5.3 percent of its payroll jobs.

He says the job losses for last month were significant in three industries: construction, manufacturing and retail-trade.

"In October, construction lost 62,000 jobs, manufacturing 61,000 jobs and retail-trade 40,000 jobs," said Hall.

Democrat Elijah Cummings says in his home state of Maryland there are 25,000 people ready to go to work, but the jobs aren't there.

"The continued job losses suffered this past month are a stark reminder that despite the progress we have achieved, we're still in the midst of the worst economic downturn since the

Great Depression," said Cummings. "Americans, as we say over and over again, are out of work through no fault of their own. They stand ready, willing and able to work, and yet they have no place to report to in the morning."

But Republicans say the current economic climate is due to policies of the Obama administration and actions by the Democratic-led Congress.

Texas Republican Mike Burgess says employers don't want to take risks and hire new people now, because they don't know what the next government action, restriction or cost will be.

"Because of the actions we've taken, some of the legislation that we're working on today and this weekend [health care], we're creating an environment in which employers are genuinely frightened," he said.

But Democrats on the panel were quick to praise the stimulus plan and other efforts of President Barack Obama, while noting that the country's economic woes began long before Mr. Obama took the oath of office in January.