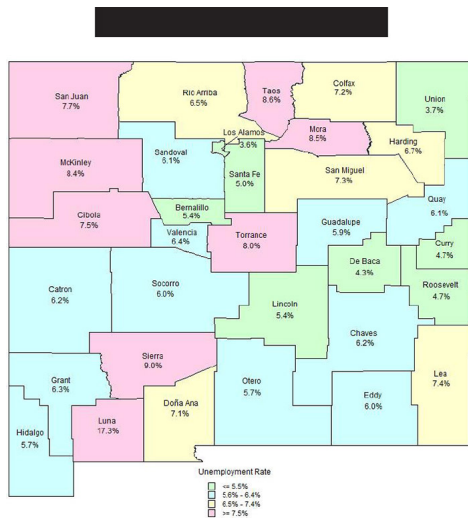


McKinley, Cibola unemployment rates edge downward

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 09 June 2017 11:13



Seasonal construction hiring kicking-in

New Mexico's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.7 percent in April 2017, the same as it was in March, but up from a 6.6 percent rate a year ago. The national unemployment rate was 4.4 percent, down from 4.5 percent in March and down from 5.0 percent in April 2016, according to information put out by the state Department of Work Force Solutions.

In McKinley County, the unemployment rate was 8.4 percent in April, which was lower than the 9.2 percent rate in March. In Cibola County, which is a 55-minute drive from McKinley County, the unemployment rate for April was 7.5 percent, compared to an 8.0 percent rate in March. The unemployment distinction is notable in McKinley County, which ranks in the Top 5 in New Mexico unemployment on a monthly basis.

The rate differences in both McKinley and Cibola counties, which are considered rural, are attributed to warm-weather hiring. The unemployment statistics are one month behind due to the amount of time required to compile them.

"In those two counties, what you see is a decreasing in the unemployment rates that is related to things like hiring within the construction industry," Tracy Shaleen, an economist with the state

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Department of Work Force Solutions, said. "It's a trend in small and rural counties. Those numbers will probably be different in a few months, particularly when it comes to the construction sector."

Shaleen noted that construction posted the largest percentage gain of jobs throughout the state in April, and the second largest numeric gain, relevant to state industries.

Bill Lee, the executive director of the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce and a member of the McKinley County Board of Commissioners, said end-of-the-school-year hiring figures into the unemployment rate in McKinley County. He said both continuing and graduating high school students, and some college students, have entered the overall county work force in one capacity or another and that's a factor in the lowered unemployment rate.

"I think you see this in counties everywhere," Lee said of the slight unemployment dip. "What we're talking about is a relatively large number of high school kids entering the work force, some in full time jobs such as retail jobs, and that impacts the slight drop in county unemployment numbers."

The highest unemployment rate in New Mexico during the month of April was in Luna County at 17.3 percent. The state's lowest unemployment rates were 3.6 percent in Los Alamos County and Union County in the northeast sector of New Mexico had an unemployment rate of 3.7 percent.

McKinley County's top unemployment sectors are health care, retail and education. The largest employers in Cibola County are tourism, government and health care. Cibola County includes parts of the Navajo and Zuni Indian reservations. There are 33 counties in New Mexico.

By Bernie Dotson
Sun Correspondent