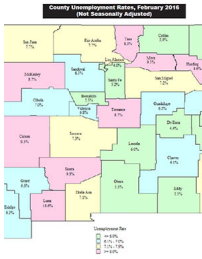


McKinley County unemployment numbers edge upward

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 01 April 2016 01:19



County consistent in 8.7 high unemployment rate

New Mexico's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.4 percent in February, down from 6.5 percent in January and down from 6.5 percent from last year, according to information distributed by the New Mexico Department of Work Force Solutions.

In McKinley County, the unemployment rate for February was 8.7 percent, down from 9.1 percent in January. And in neighboring Cibola County, about a 55-minute drive from Gallup, the unemployment rate was 7.0, which represented a drop from a 7.3 rate from January.

The unemployment statistics are typically one month behind due to the amount of time it takes to compile them.

McKinley County remains in the Top 5 around New Mexico with respect to unemployment rate.

"I think in McKinley County there are a couple of immediate factors that you have to consider when you talk about unemployment," McKinley County Manager Bill Lee said. "When you consider those factors and look at them with some depth, the high rate of unemployment sort of makes sense."

Lee noted that Gallup and McKinley County began with mining and coal as economic points. As

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those two things decreased in demand, so did the jobs that came with them. Over time, the makeup of the area changed and when you throw in the 54 percent unemployment rate on the Navajo Nation, the numbers really do make sense, Lee said.

“Just looking at the numbers and the fact that a huge part of McKinley County encompasses parts of the Navajo Nation, that impacts into the local unemployment rate,” Lee said. “You could argue that we’re witnessing years of fall off from the mining and railroad industry. That’s certainly a starting point to begin an unemployment argument.”

Lee noted that Gallup’s strong point is its tourism base, adding that if the area’s unemployment level decreases, it will mean that the area’s retail sector is experiencing good times.

The national unemployment rate for February was 4.9 percent, equal to the rate in January and down from 5.5 percent in February of last year, records show. There are 33 counties in New Mexico.

At the state level, Tracy Shaleen, an economist with the Department of Work force Solutions, said the slight decrease in McKinley County’s unemployment rate is related to the fact that people are coming off jobs from the Christmas holiday period.

“Those jobs were seasonal,” Shaleen explained. “That represents a lot of reasons as to why you see a numbers drop.”

Shaleen also said in education and health services, the largest private industry sector, was up 6,100 jobs, or 4.6 percent.

He said employment growth in January and February in New Mexico was up at levels last seen in 2002. Leisure and hospitality, which includes accommodations and food services, was up 3,200 jobs, or 3.6 percent.

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Construction around the state saw its largest gain since 2015, Shaleen said. Professional and business services employment was unchanged from February 2015, he said.

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