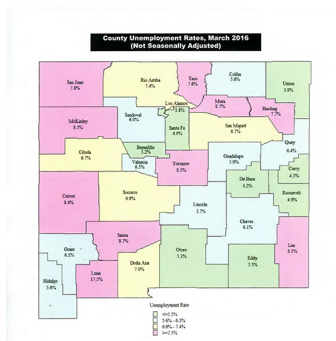


McKinley, Cibola unemployment rates inch downward

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 13 May 2016 05:11



Seasonal, retail jobs picking up, officials say

New Mexico's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.2 percent in March, down from 6.4 percent in February and down from 6.5 percent in February, according to information recently released by the state Department of Work Force Solutions.

In McKinley County, the unemployment rate was 8.5 percent in March, which was a decrease from an 8.8 percent rate in February. In nearby Cibola County, about an hour's drive from Gallup, the unemployment rate for March was 6.7 percent which represents a drop from a 7.0 rate from February.

The statistics are typically one month behind due to the amount of time needed for compilation, officials have said.

"What you see with these numbers is seasonal jobs picking up," Tracy Shaleen, an economist with Work Force Solutions, said this week. "You have to look at the construction industry where seasonal work is very relevant in this instance."

Shaleen noted that jobs within education and health services, which represent New Mexico's largest private industry sector, were up 6,800 jobs or 5.1 percent.

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"This month's gain is greater than anything seen since the series began in 1991, aside from one gain in April 2002," Shaleen said.

Outgoing McKinley County Manager Bill Lee referenced the latest gross receipts tax statement, saying McKinley's bottom line is 1.6 percentage points higher than in previous months. Lee leaves the county job May 13 to take the job of CEO at the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce.

"It's mostly seasonal jobs, but it is also people having income tax refund money coming in which allows them to spend more," Lee said. "Jobs-wise, you're looking at mostly retail and construction jobs that have made some hires. People tend to go shopping a little bit more due to the warmer weather at this time of year."

Shaleen noted that the state's government sector added 700 jobs in March, representing an increase of 0.4 percent. Most of that growth occurred in local government employment, he said. But, Shaleen said, state government employment was down 200 jobs, or 0.3 percent. The losses occurred in state government education employment, which was down 300 jobs, or 1.1 percent, Shaleen said.

Luna County, located in the southern part of New Mexico and dependent on agriculture, carried the state's highest unemployment rate at 17.5 percent. Union County in the northern sector of New Mexico had the lowest unemployment rate in March at 3.9 percent. Even with the downward edge in the unemployment rate, the mostly rural McKinley County remained one of New Mexico's highest unemployment rates.

There are 33 counties in New Mexico.

***By Bernie Dotson
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