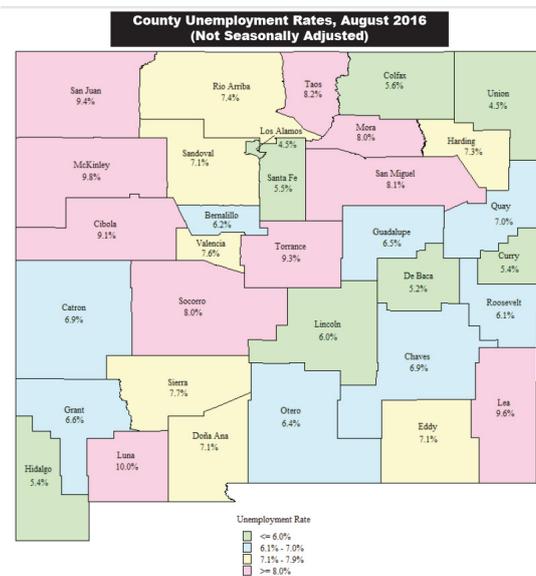


McKinley's jobless rate down, but still high at 9.8 percent

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 07 October 2016 06:05



McKinley still carries second highest jobless rate

New Mexico's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.6 percent in August, up from 6.4 percent in July and 6.5 percent a year ago, according to information from the state Department of Work Force Solutions.

In McKinley County, the unemployment rate for August was 9.8 percent, down from a 10.4 percent rate in July 2016. In neighboring Cibola County, about an hour east of McKinley County, the unemployment rate for August 2016 was 9.1 percent, a slight decrease from a 9.2 percent July rate.

At 9.8 percent, McKinley County has the second highest unemployment rate in New Mexico, and has seen a high unemployment rate for most of the summer — it never dropped below the Top 5 highest counties for unemployment in 2016.

"It's high – and it's consistently high," Bill Lee, CEO at the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, said. "I think you'll probably see it decrease, not a lot, but some over the next few

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months.”

Lee said he believes the unemployment rate in McKinley County will inch downward as employers begin to hire more employees for end-of-the-year holiday shopping. He said that's a trend across New Mexico.

Lee said while he couldn't speak to the circumstances in Cibola County, that county typically experiences trends similar to McKinley.

“There are different locales,” Lee said. “Regarding McKinley County, I do think we'll see employers, particularly in the retail sector, start to do some hiring as the year comes to an end.”

Lee also noted that jobs related to school districts figured into the lowering of the McKinley County unemployment rate — bus drivers, for instance, return to work in August.

Tracy Shaleen, an economist with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, said August is typically a time when employees working for conglomerates like Gallup-McKinley County Schools return to their jobs.

“What you see in August is bus drivers, and other school personnel, returning to the work force,” he said. “This is true in both part time and full-time school-oriented jobs.”

Everyone looking for a job has a reason why McKinley's unemployment rate is consistently so high.

“We live in a rural county and it's not really a lot of industry here,” Mervin Suarez, a chef at a Gallup restaurant, said. “That's just the way it is here.”

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Union County in the northeast sector of the state has the lowest unemployment rate for August 2016, with 4.5 percent. Luna County in southwest New Mexico has the highest, with an unemployment rate of 10.1 percent.

The national unemployment for August was 4.9 percent, unchanged from July and down from 5.1 percent in August of 2015.

There are 33 counties in New Mexico. The state's unemployment statistics are released one month behind due to the amount of time it takes to compile the data, officials have said.

***By Bernie Dotson
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