

Unemployment Rates Fall In 29 States Last Month

By Administrator

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Unemployment rates fell in most states in February and two-thirds of the states reported job gains, evidence that most of the country is benefiting from slow but steady improvement in the job market.

Unemployment rates dropped in 29 states, rose in 10 and were unchanged in the remaining 11, the Labor Department said Friday. Meanwhile, hiring rose in 33 states and fell in 17.

The rate declines occurred even though unemployment rose nationwide last month, to 6.7 percent from 6.6 percent in January. That increase occurred partly for a good reason: more Americans began looking for work, though most weren't immediately hired. But the fact that they started looking suggests they were optimistic about their prospects.

Employers added 175,000 jobs nationwide in February, close to the average monthly gains of the past two years. Those gains followed two meager months of hiring. Employers added only 129,000 jobs in January and just 84,000 in December. Harsh winter weather likely dragged on job gains in those months.

The biggest drop in unemployment occurred in South Carolina, where the rate fell to 5.7 percent from 6.4 percent. Ohio reported the next biggest decline, to 6.5 percent from 6.9 percent.

South Carolina actually lost jobs last month, so the big drop in its unemployment rate partly occurred because many of the unemployed stopped looking for work. The number of unemployed people in the state fell sharply. The government doesn't count those out of work as unemployed unless they are actively searching.

Another factor: The unemployment rate and job counts come from different surveys that can produce disparate results. The number of jobs in each state is calculated from a survey of employers, while the unemployment rate stems from a separate survey of households. The number of people in South Carolina who said they had jobs rose, even though the survey of employers found fewer overall positions.

Rhode Island reported the highest unemployment rate, at 9 percent, followed by Illinois at 8.7 percent and California with 8 percent.

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North Dakota had the lowest rate, 2.6 percent, followed by South Dakota and Nebraska at 3.6 percent each.