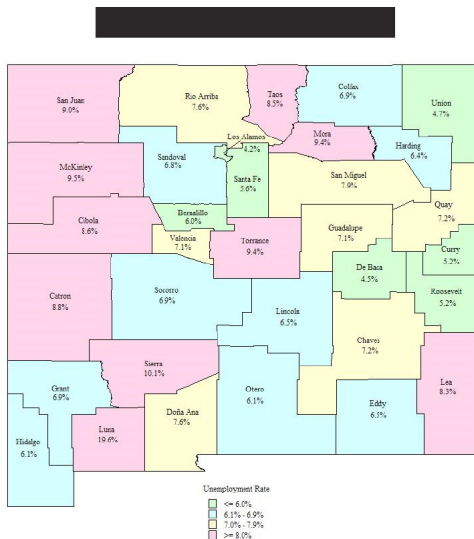


## McKinley County unemployment rate at 9.5 percent

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 31 March 2017 07:04

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### McKinley still one of NM's top jobless counties

New Mexico's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.8 percent in February 2017, up from 6.7 percent in January and 6.6 percent a year ago.

In McKinley County, the unemployment rate for February was 9.5 percent and in neighboring Cibola County, about a 55-minute drive from Gallup, the unemployment rate for February was 8.6 percent. The unemployment rates for both McKinley and Cibola counties were down a little from January, with McKinley's rate at 9.7 percent and Cibola's rate at a former 8.8 percent.

The unemployment statistics are one month behind due to the amount of time required to compile them, officials with the New Mexico Department of Work Force Solutions have said.

"What we're still seeing is seasonal jobs and some seasonal hiring still in the fold," Tracy Shaleen, an economist with the New Mexico Department of Work Force Solutions, said. "To some degree, those numbers mirror what is happening with respect to unemployment around the state. Jobs related to the construction and agriculture industries are starting to pick up at this time."

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Bill Lee, a member of the McKinley County Board of Commissioners and the executive director at the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, said there are still some employers who are hiring to get ready for the beginning of spring. He said there was some notable pick up of new hires and seasonal hires at places like the Rio West Mall and that, no doubt, figures into McKinley County's unemployment rate. There is a new restaurant coming to Gallup, and scheduled to hold a grand opening soon, and places like that cut into the lowering of McKinley County's unemployment rate, Lee said.

"There was some seasonal hiring and there will be some more seasonal hiring once spring gets into full bloom, in terms of retail," Lee said. "The other side of that is McKinley County remains one of the top counties for unemployment in New Mexico. That's not good for anybody."

Shaleen said manufacturing jobs around the state was down 900 jobs or 3.3 percent. He said unemployment losses were experienced in construction, down 100 jobs, or 0.2 percent.

McKinley County's top employment industries are connected to health care, retail and education. In Cibola County, the largest employment industries are the tourism, government and health care sectors. Parts of the Navajo and Zuni reservations are located in Cibola County, just as they are in McKinley County.

There are 33 counties in New Mexico. New Mexico's highest unemployment rates are in Luna and Sierra counties. The unemployment rates in those counties are 19.6 percent and 10.1 percent in Sierra County, which is northeast of Luna, respectfully.

The lowest unemployment rate in New Mexico is Los Alamos County with a 4.2 percent unemployment rate.

The national unemployment rate was 4.7 percent, down from 4.8 percent in January 2017 and 4.9 percent in February 2016.

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“I’m unemployed and I’m still trying to find work,” Darryl Smithson, 29, of Bread Springs, said. “I got a DWI about three months ago. But I’m still looking for a job,” Smithson said.

***By Bernie Dotson***  
***Sun Correspondent***